

2019

Is Diversity Possible In an Integrative Psychology-Transpersonal as a Whole Person-All Person Approach

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Recommended Citation

Hartelius, G. (2019). Is diversity possible in an integrative psychology-Transpersonal as a whole person-all person approach. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 38 (2). <http://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2019.38.2.iii>



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Cover Page Footnote

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Is Diversity Possible in an Integrative Psychology? Transpersonal as a Whole Person / All Person Approach

Editor's Introduction

The vision of an integrative psychology that encompasses the whole person is an inspiring one—holistic views on mental and emotional wellbeing working in collaboration with conventional methods, and topics of human presence and consciousness taking their place alongside cognition and behavior. In an integrative psychology the rigorous field of parapsychology would no longer be set apart, since psychology would be truly inclusive of all aspects of human being as they are expressed in cultures across the world. Yet sketching the broad and uplifting strokes of such an enterprise is much easier than discerning how such an integration might be implemented effectively.

If an integrative psychology is to be more than a crudely sewn patchwork of scientific and popular ideas, it needs to be able to embrace diverse cultural frames of reference in ways that create a degree of cohesion. This cohesion cannot be one achieved by imposing a uniform framework on the riotous variety of human societies. For example, assuming that all spiritual traditions are attempting to achieve nondual consciousness imposes an ill-fitting frame that exalts some paths and denigrates others based on a construct that is likely foreign to many of the associated communities (Ferrer, 2002). Nor can inclusiveness be accomplished by naïvely substituting traditional beliefs for the tenets of science. For example, the Buddhist notion of *emptiness* is a spiritual or philosophical concept that

can be studied by science, but cannot be adopted as part of science (e.g., Van Gordon et al., 2016).

Before going further, it may be useful to consider what kind of integration will best serve an integrative psychology. Integration can be the mere *incorporation* of different elements whether or not they form a congruent whole—as in, adding pennies to pancake batter—or in the unequal inclusion of societal groups—as in slavery or ethnic underclasses. Much of integrative medicine seems to take this approach by simply including alternative health care treatments such as acupuncture or other traditional methods along with scientific medicine, even though there is no shared framework to guide these combinations (cf. Gavura, 2013).

Integration can also be a coordination of different elements that attempts to bring them into some harmony. Earlier pursuits of this form of integration in psychology include efforts to organize the discipline on the basis of behavioral units (Marston et al., 1931), integrated psychological states (Thorne, 1967), self-knowledge (Welwood, 1979), or visions of a unifying spiritual ultimate (Wilber, 1999). The first three of these have not taken root, and the last, though moderately influential, is more of a spiritual philosophy than a psychology (Hartelius, 2017). While there have been calls for a set of psychological principles that can account harmoniously for the entire range of culturally situated human experience (Kozlov, 2009; Rongshuang, 2002; Walsh & Vaughan, 1983), this goal has not been achieved.

Applications of participatory thought (Ferrer, 2002, 2017; Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013) within transpersonal psychology may open the way for a middle ground between simple incorporation and forced efforts at harmonization: an integrative approach that is congruent enough to remain a scientific discipline yet inclusive of a much broader range of human experience and approaches to healing and post-conventional development. What this requires is not *less science*—not some diminished, diluted, or compromised version of science—but *more science*. When scientific researchers encounter, say, an indigenous culture, they are careful to distinguish between the beliefs of that community and the empirical facts. But those same researchers may at times be less critical about the filters and assumptions of their own culture, and may allow some of the latter to become absorbed into scientific culture. It is by developing a more critical stance toward the common-sense reality assumptions of Western culture that *more science* can open the way for *more inclusion* in psychology (Hartelius et al., 2017).

A step in the right direction is illustrated by Bakow and Low's (2018) study of South African individuals who experienced *ukuthwasa*—the calling to become a *sangoma*, or indigenous healer. This calling involves symptoms in the *thwasa*—the called individual—that in Western terms are diagnosed as “a brief psychotic disorder, schizophrenia, or a depression with psychotic features” (p. 448); psychiatric treatment is reported to be ineffective, but traditional healers appear to obtain resolutions. One *thwasa* who worked as a Western-trained professional had the experience of understanding her symptoms as psychotic, but simultaneously as representing communication from her ancestors. The authors wisely called for a “culture-specific, pluralistic understanding” (p. 436) of such conditions—appreciating that “underlying biological phenomena are manifested in culture-specific ways” (p. 449). This proposal represents a strong step forward toward an approach that incorporates both cultural contextuality and scientific views.

One limitation of Bakow and Low's (2018) universalistic/relativistic model is that in a scholarly setting neurobiological findings will be considered

empirical and primary, while those related to culture will be understood as culturally constructed and secondary. While this South African study is a thoughtful and valuable pluristically informed inquiry, the resulting model is not cross-cultural. By assuming that the biological phenomena associated with *ukuthwasa* are universal and “underlying” (p. 449), and that culture merely shapes their manifestation, the study ultimately situates its cross-cultural findings in a monocultural frame.

What is lacking here is scientific maintenance of a skeptical stance toward the reality assumptions of Western culture just as is done with indigenous or other cultures. Reality assumptions within worldviews are both more pervasive and more tenuously grounded than many of the more pragmatic expectations within societies. For example, traditional Zulu culture holds that ancestors can communicate with the living (Bakow & Low, 2018), but White Western Christian cultures usually assume this is impossible; there is no definitive evidence either way. Yet psychologists will routinely describe positions such as the Zulu understanding of ancestor communication as a belief, while neglecting to observe that the contrary stance—that such phenomena cannot occur—is also a belief.

I got my first glimpse of this fact at the age of 16 when, newly graduated from high school, I made my first trip to Israel to participate in the archaeological excavation of Caesarea Maritima—a city founded by Herod the Great on the shores of the Mediterranean. On weekends, dig volunteers like myself were transported to Jerusalem where we rested, partied, or explored the sites. I was prone to the latter, wandering through the Old City on my own and taking in the feeling of an ancient walled city as if it might transport me to a direct experience of long-distant eras. While on one of these jaunts I observed that here I was part of a world with quite different languages, customs, and views—one that was but a ripple in a river that already stretched back for thousands of years when Suleiman the Magnificent built its current battlements in the 16th century. This world was bustling and thriving before English was created—before cars or steam engines or science or even “the West”—and yet this very different world worked perfectly well. My world then—archaeology

and universities and eight-track tape players—was just one of many viable human worlds.

In the psychology of the world that I live in today, the notion that a Zulu person in South Africa can be called by their dead ancestors is no more than a cultural superstition. Yet this is not so much a scientific skepticism as it is a Western skepticism; it is not so much a neutral empiricism as a firm cultural belief that ancestor communication—along with similar exceptional human experiences—is impossible. Were that same skepticism also directed towards these adamant Western disbeliefs, it might be possible to arrive instead at a warmly interested agnosticism towards such experiences that holds many things as possible while it looks for better evidence (cf. Maslow, 1970).

Behind this firm disbelief of certain widely-reported human phenomena is something beyond a concern about the inclusion of metaphysical ideas in scientific discussion. Metaphysical ideas are, of course, ones that can never be experimentally tested. Physicists routinely assume that space is infinite, or that there may be multiple universes, despite the fact that it is unlikely either idea could ever be experimentally verified—and this raises few eyebrows. At the same time, a paper was retracted after presenting evidence that certain individuals were able to detect whether or not a person in a photograph was currently alive, at statistically verified levels above chance (Delorme et al., 2016). Despite being experimentally verified in at least a preliminary way, the phenomenon under study was apparently deemed impossible. Yet any number of non-Western cultures more familiar with such kinds of human experiences might find such an ability quite credible. Given that physics has also offered many odd and counterintuitive ideas that have been received tentatively and later proven to be measurable, it seems likely that the rejection of research on some exceptional human capacities rests not so much on sound scientific reasoning as on unacknowledged cultural biases within scientific culture.

A limitation of scientific psychology, then, is not its skepticism of other cultural beliefs, but its credulousness towards beliefs and disbeliefs rooted in mainstream Western culture. While it is true that extraordinary claims require extraordinary

evidence, what is considered extraordinary in one culture may be quite mundane in another; for example, communication with ancestors is apparently not extraordinary in Zulu culture. If one imagines science in the center of a circle, with various cultural perspectives arranged around the periphery, the critique here is that one culture—in the form of mainstream Western thought—has been given a privileged chair in the center of the circle, next to science, where it co-directs its skepticism outward towards other cultural locations (Figure 1).

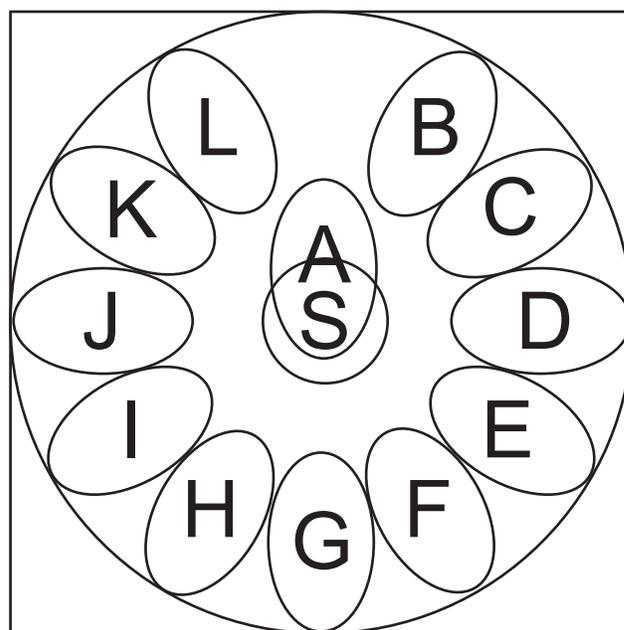


Figure 1. While science routinely brackets the reality assumptions of non-Western cultures (B-L), there appears to be some degree of conflation between scientific culture (S) and Western culture (A), so that some Western assumptions about reality have become implicit in the practice of science.

A first step toward more effective pluralism would then be to shift Western thought and culture out of its privileged location relative to science and return it to the periphery along with the rest of the world's societies (Figure 2). This approach contrasts with scattered efforts to create greater inclusiveness by placing some other culture in the position of privilege—for example, Buddhist psychology, Christian psychology, or Indigenous psychology. Substituting one set of cultural biases for another is not likely to result in better science (Figure 3), but making every effort to discern between science and

embedded Western beliefs posturing as scientific realities, will improve the field.

Such a change would be less about principles of systematic rigor and experimental design, and more about which research questions can be asked without *a priori* elimination based on unexamined assumptions implicit within a Western worldview. Its impact would be felt disproportionately in areas such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology, where cultural assumptions about the nature of human persons and communities may covertly inform trajectories of research in ways that reinforce those same initial biases in a form of circularity. Such a shift would be particularly relevant to types of mystical, spiritual, and exceptional human experiences that are commonly reported in various cultures but marginalized in Western societies.

A simple example comes from a study of the impact of tea blessed by Buddhist monks (Shiah & Radin, 2013). In this study, adults unknowingly drinking tea treated with good intentions reported greater improvements in mood than those who believed they were drinking blessed tea, but were drinking untreated tea. That is, the reported impact of the treated tea on mood, when partaken without knowledge, was greater than the placebo effect

of drinking untreated tea believed to be blessed. If replicable, this should be acceptable as direct scientific evidence despite its unfamiliarity to a Western reader. While there are any number of cultures that consider blessing to be a transmission that carries real world impact, Western culture views it as merely a social symbol—and holds as superstition the belief that it is anything more. It should be empirical evidence that helps to determine which of these positions is a cultural preconception.

One might validly ask whether subjecting experiential phenomena to a scientific lens reduces them to a materialistic view. This is problematic mainly if materialism is taken in its Western form. Western materialism, following superficial understandings of Descartes, divides reality into the material and the non-dimensional mental, with the latter also encompassing the spiritual; it seems likely that Descartes himself may not have held fully with the mind/body dualism that is ascribed to him (Urban, 2018). In this Cartesian frame, mental and spiritual phenomena have no substantive reality. Yet materialism as a philosophical stance that assumes everything is physical, is different than a Cartesian or Western materialism that specifically excludes mental and spiritual phenomena from the material

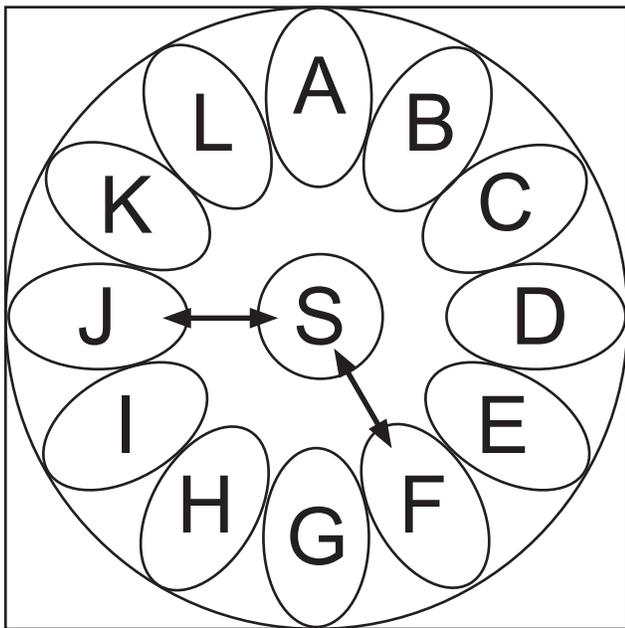


Figure 2. As scientific culture (S) is decentered from Western culture (A), it becomes more feasible to establish dialogical relations between science and diverse cultures.

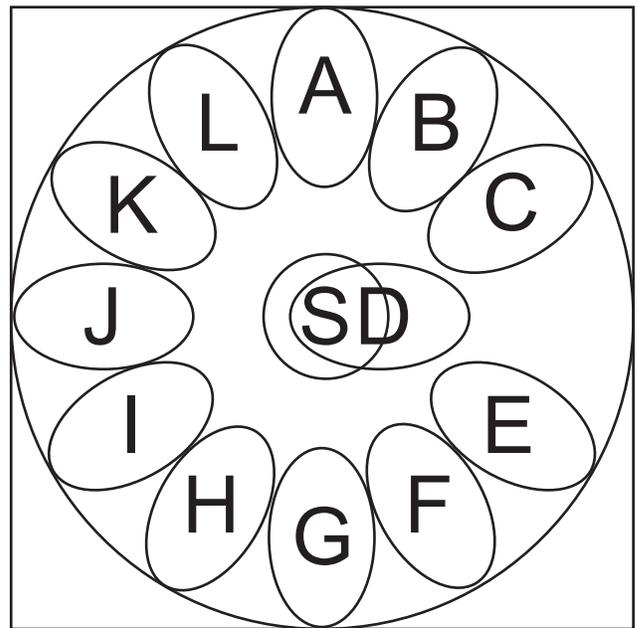


Figure 3. Decentering science from Western culture appears to be a more effective approach to inclusion of diversity than attempting to center scientific culture (S) on a given non-Western culture (D).

domain. A thoroughgoing materialism would necessarily extend the definition of materiality to include these (cf. Strawson, 2006a, 2006b), rather than reducing them to a Western materiality or ascribing them to a transcendent dimension and excluding them from scientific reality. A more expansive materialism would result in an *open naturalism* (Ferrer, 2014) that eschews Western metaphysical preconceptions of materiality.

The primary effect of applying a more expansive materialism to mental and spiritual phenomena is not that these are in any way reduced, but that the *what it is like* to be a living form (Nagel, 1974) is made indelibly real, and the realm of the spiritual is situated firmly in *this world*, implicit and accessible within everyday life. An open naturalism will assume that qualitative mental experience and spiritual phenomena will be *in some way measurable* because they are real, even if first efforts can only rely on qualitative accounts (Hartelius, 2014). A science decentered from Western attitudes will remain rigorously empirical, but will not exclude exceptional human experiences as "paranormal" or marginalize their study as "parapsychological" on the basis of cultural assumptions (Hartelius, 2016).

Yet one might ask whether such an approach still elevates science—itsself a sort of culture—above other forms of human culture. In participatory thought (Ferrer, 2002; Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013), various cultural locations—that is, worldviews and associated schemas—are held in an egalitarian manner, with no one location ascribed more "reality"—or *ontological priority*—than any other. No culture is more "correct" than another, or closer to "truth" than another (cf. Rorty, 1979). Science would be one such location, with no more ontological priority than others (Hartelius, 2019).

This is not to throw the towel into a relativistic soup pot where different schemas and viewpoints all float about to be ladled out at random. A particular schema can and should have *functional priority* in certain contexts, even if this does not confer ontological priority. If the context is a romantic evening, it would likely be unwise to undertake an extended blunt appraisal of a partner's shortcomings and choices of clothing. In this sense, some schemas will have effective priority based on

context and purpose, even if this does not make them "more real." In the context of the Bakow and Low (2018) study, the two cultures that would have functional priority would be those of science and Zulu society; the priorities and assumptions of Western culture, pointedly, would have no particular relevance. In a summary of the results, pluralism would be deepened if the perspectives from both the scientific and the Zulu communities were expressed as findings.

Likely it is not possible to create a full separation between science and the assumptions of Western society—or between any scientist and the views of the community in which they were raised. This is no reason to evade the pragmatic and promising task of adopting a more skeptical stance toward notions that are common in Western culture but foreign to many other societies. Psychology cannot and must not be a discipline shaped to the minds of White Europeans and Americans, that then enacts a subtle racism or colonialism (cf. Ferrer, 2002) under the guise of science as it spreads through the world (Hartelius, 2018).

Transpersonal psychology, with its aspiration to be a whole person / all person psychology (term credit to Anna King, personal communication, June, 2020), has maintained a commitment to science alongside a critique of scientism as an ideology (Friedman, 2002, 2015). It is this double commitment to rigorous empirical inquiry and authentic human experience (Hartelius et al., 2018), along with the development of participatory thought (Ferrer, 2002, 2008, 2017), that offers a potential contribution to the development of an effective integrative psychology.

A way to characterize transpersonal psychology that reflects this wider aspiration is as a transformative and integrative psychology of the whole person in intimate relationship with a diverse, interconnected, and evolving world, with special emphasis on exceptional states of consciousness. Such an approach would require collaboration between numerous areas of psychology, bringing together humanistic and positive psychology notions of cultivating human virtues, strengths, and potentials (*transformative*; Starcher & Allen, 2016; Linley et al., 2006), integral psychology's aspirations for a more inclusive and cohesive field (*integrative*; Wilber, 2000),

a scientific emphasis on critical rigor and empirical evidence (*psychology*), transpersonal psychology's emphasis on inclusion of all aspects of the human person in their social and ecological contexts (*whole person in intimate relationship with world, with special emphasis on exceptional states of consciousness*; Hartelius et al., 2007)—which would necessarily also imply inclusion of cognitive, behavioral, neuroscientific, and other conventional approaches to psychology—participatory thought's emancipatory approaches to social justice (*diverse*; Ferrer, 2002), phenomenology's engagement with lived experience as a unified whole (*interconnected*; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007), and process philosophy understandings of human beings and their contexts as inseparable aspects of a dynamic self-organizing system (*evolving world*; Gendlin, 1997; Varela et al., 1974; von Bertalanffy, 1950).

While these integrative aspirations of transpersonal psychology are rather outsized in comparison with its own current capacities, it can offer this vision—rooted in its own historical self-definitions (Hartelius et al., 2007)—along with the outlines of what may be a way to achieve a psychology that is at once more widely inclusive of human diversity and structured in a way that integrates this diversity more effectively.

In This Issue

This issue has three general section papers, spanning spiritual emergence and emergency, psychedelic-assisted therapy, and Islamic spirituality. The first of these, by Kylie P. Harris, Adam J. Rock, and Gavin I. Clark, entitled, *Spiritual Emergenc(y), Psychosis and Personality: Investigating the Role of Schizotypy*, considers the role of psychotic-like personality traits in spiritual emergence and emergency. It is well known that the markers of spiritual emergence and spiritual emergency are virtually identical with those of psychosis, with the difference perhaps being more in how the person's condition is held than in its symptomology.

The paper reports on a study with 250 participants that demonstrates measurable differences between individuals with a spiritual emergency and those with clinical psychosis whose prognosis is likely to be poor. This is an invaluable study for clinicians dealing with clients who might

be viewed as either psychotic or in the grip of a spiritual emergency.

The next paper, by Kevin O. St. Arnaud, considers *Psychedelic-Assisted Psychotherapy for Existential Suffering at the End-of-Life*. Drawing on historical and recent studies of the impact of psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy on the potentially devastating distress of existential suffering at the end of life, and from this weaves a theoretical rationale for the use of such interventions for terminal patients. Included are considerations related to the safety and ethical use of psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy for end-of-life treatment.

The final general section paper, by Nikos Yiangou, addresses *Transpersonal Dimensions in Islamic Spirituality*—Islam being a spiritual tradition as yet poorly represented in transpersonal literature. The author covers a broad sweep of Sufi tradition's models of the spiritual journey and offers a view that these provide a holistic approach to the realization of complete humanity.

After the Special Topic Section on *Transpersonal Participatory Action Research*, edited and introduced by Olga Sohmer, we offer a paper on *Assessing the Effectiveness of Core-Shamanism on a Group of Westerners: A Brief Research Report*, by Joannic Masson, Yannick Gounden, Charlemagne Simplicite Moukouta, Amal Bernoussi, and Antoine Saurat. This qualitative report on the experiences of 27 individuals initiated into therapeutic shamanism suggests that the experience resulted in improvements in the practitioners' lives, increased belief in spirits, the disappearance of allergies, among other beneficial results.

The issue continues with a paper by Stanley Krippner entitled, *The Meso-American Goddess Coatlicue: Too Terrifying for the Spaniards*, which recounts the story of Spanish invaders who uncovered a buried statue of the goddess Coatlicue and found it so disturbing that they immediately re-interred it. The basalt statue was re-excavated in 1803, and now stands in a museum in Mexico City, and may carry meaningful symbolism about the nature of the archetypal feminine.

**Glenn Hartelius, Main Editor
California Institute of Integral Studies**

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About the Journal

The *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* is a peer-reviewed academic journal in print since 1981. It is sponsored by the California Institute of Integral Studies, published by Floragrades Foundation, and serves as the official publication of the International Transpersonal Association. The journal is available online at www.transpersonalstudies.org, and in print through www.lulu.com (search for IJTS).