

Psychotherapy Guidebook

T R A N S P E R S O N A L



P S Y C H O T H E R A P Y

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Transpersonal Psychotherapy

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Transpersonal Psychotherapy

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DEFINITION

The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology defines the domain of transpersonal psychology as “meta-needs, transpersonal process, values and states, unitive consciousness, peak experiences, ecstasy, mystical experience, being, essence, bliss, awe, wonder, transcendence of self, spirit, sacralization of everyday life, oneness, cosmic awareness, cosmic play, individual and species-wide synergy, the theories and practices of meditation, spiritual paths, compassion, transpersonal cooperation, transpersonal realization and actualization, and related concepts, experiences and activities.”

Those who practice psychotherapy within this general context are transpersonal psychotherapists. Transpersonal Psychotherapy includes the treatment of the full range of behavioral, emotional, and intellectual disorders as in traditional psychotherapies. It also includes uncovering and supporting strivings for full self-actualization. The end state of psychotherapy is not seen as the successful adjustment to the prevailing culture but rather the daily experience of that state called liberation, enlightenment, individuations, certainty or gnosis according to various traditions.

HISTORY

Transpersonal Psychotherapy can be said to have evolved, in the broadest sense, as the inner or esoteric teachings of all the great spiritual traditions. Within psychology, the major transpersonal thinkers include William James, who first systematically explored states of healthy and higher consciousness; Carl Jung, who conceived of psychotherapy as building a bridge between the real self and the personality, and Roberto Assagioli, who translated Eastern practices into workable psychotherapeutic tools.

The influx into the Western world of Eastern wisdom, in the traditions of Zen Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Yoga, and Sufism — through individuals like Aldous Huxley, Alan Watts, and Ram Dass, and through the universities and growth centers affected by the “human potential movement” — has had the general effect of enlarging the scope of psychotherapeutic practices and goals toward the realm of the transpersonal.

Another major force has been research into voluntary control of internal states from Western biofeedback laboratories, which has shed new light on ancient yogic accomplishments and on the possibilities of the human mind and body. In addition, the work on altered states of consciousness developed most extensively by psychedelic researchers has influenced the thinking of psychologists to include the transpersonal domain.

Growing public understanding and acceptance of paranormal phenomena both reflects the trend in psychology toward the transpersonal and furthers it.

TECHNIQUE

Transpersonal Psychotherapy can be conducted individually or in groups, may be brief or long term, and may, in some cases, not even be called psychotherapy. It may be characterized as a human interaction aimed toward the goals or end states given above, a Western sadhana of self-knowledge replacing or augmenting traditional religious forms. It leads past (or through) the personality to the realization described in the religious traditions. It is not limited to nor defined by any specific techniques.

APPLICATIONS

Transpersonal Psychotherapy is indicated where behavioral therapies are least likely to be helpful, where the problems are not encapsulated symptoms, and where the issues include questions of personal values, the meaning of one's life, and the desire for more than average adjustment. A sizable proportion of clients are functioning well in work and love and are striving for more inclusive world view and a clearer idea of their own orientation.

Transpersonal Psychotherapy with psychotics has been done by Laing, Silverman, and Perry, each of whom provided an environment free of stigma, restraint, and drugs, where individuals could reintegrate themselves with the support of those who saw their condition as an opportunity for higher understanding rather than shame.

Recent developments include Grof's work with the terminally ill, as well as the restructuring of business and therapeutic environments along lines first suggested by Abraham Maslow's Eupsychian Management.