

## What is “Transpersonal” Anyway?

Transpersonal means to expand or go beyond the personal or individual. The term, “Transpersonal” has been used by different schools of psychology and philosophy in an effort to refer to experiences and perspectives that extend further than the limited level of the individual psyche, and outside the narrow experience of our senses. The earliest reference we have for the term "transpersonal" was found in lecture notes prepared by William James, philosopher and psychologist, at Harvard University in 1905-6.

Most of modern philosophy, being heavily influenced by Logical Positivism, tends to consider reality as limited to a relationship between the objective world and the rational/logical mind. Within this schema or point of view, the spiritual and non-ordinary states of consciousness that are a crucial component of any transpersonal approach are quickly dismissed. Transpersonal experiences are viewed as distortions of normal consciousness. For modern philosophy these “altered states” are understood as being induced by drugs, meditation, or fasting. Taking this mechanistic view of “mind” much of modern psychiatry often views these non-ordinary states as biological or chemical imbalances. To limit the "insights" of the world's spiritual teachers and great mystics to pathological conditions is in direct contrast to what the author; Aldous Huxley refers to as “The Perennial Philosophy”. Aristotle coined the term, “Metaphysics” for those experiences and observations that were “outside the observable realm of the natural sciences”. Transpersonal theories accept the wisdom of spiritual traditions as evidence for the universality of these psycho-spiritual experiences. Other influences on the early development of transpersonal psychology included the psychological study of religion, parapsychology, the psychedelic movement, and interest in Eastern spiritual systems and practices.

The psychologists and theorists who have supported the relevance of transpersonal studies include William James, Carl Jung, Roberto Assagioli and Abraham Maslow. Eventually, the term "transpersonal" was associated with a distinct school of psychology within the humanistic psychology movement. In 1969, Abraham Maslow, Stanislav Grof and Anthony Sutich helped instigate the publication of the first issue of the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, now considered the leading academic journal in the field.

Now, half a century later, modern neuroscience research supports much of the transpersonal thesis producing evidence for this idea that human and other life forms are connected through our shared DNA and biology. We’ve recently identified one of the mechanisms for this phenomenon of “connection at a distance” and the rapport established. A mirror neuron is a structure in primate brains that fire both when an animal acts and when the animal observes that same action performed by another primate. This brain structure "mirrors" the behavior of the other, as if; the observer was itself, acting. This discovery has led to a new way of thinking about how we generate our own actions and how we monitor and interpret the actions of others. We’re coming to understand that action, execution, and observation are closely-related processes. More importantly, for us to understand the actions of others, we must connect and involve our own motor system, by definition, a transpersonal experience.

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Through this and other mediums of Interpersonal Neurobiology we begin to co-regulate each other. When beauty, peace, and compassion are shared we exude happiness personally and as a culture. When anger, hate, and criticism pervade our minds and culture, we become agitated, more aggressive, and usually, unhappy. A great deal of contemporary research can literally measure human emotional and social contagion. This “transpersonal sharing” may be the underlying reason for the effectiveness of group healing rituals in indigenous societies and the collective “consciousness” or mindset of some modern mass movements.

What other factors help sustain a transpersonal relationship?

Transpersonal caring relationships may be considered a union of spirit. K. Sitzman, in one of her books, describes this relationship as “connection that embraces the spirit or soul of the other through the process of full, authentic, caring/healing attention in the moment”.

Jean Watson’s work in nursing identified this in some of her Caritas Processes:  
Developing and sustaining loving, trusting-caring relationships

Allowing for the expression of both positive and negative feelings while authentically listening to another person’s story

Creating a healing environment at all levels; subtle environment for energetic authentic caring presence

Opening to spiritual, mystery, unknowns, thus allowing for miracles

Finally, the art of transpersonal hypnosis could be defined as any method of applying this profound, interpersonal connection through a shared altered state of deep relaxation and heightened suggestibility where the operator/hypnotist facilitates an experience of growth and healing for the client.

While writing this I was reminded of the original motto of the United States, E Pluribus Unum – “out of many, One” We are connected, after all!