SPIRITUALITY AND HOLISTIC APPROACH IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: A UNIVERSAL PANACEA

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Abstract

Human development in an all-inclusive approach needs responsiveness to all facets of growth comprising Religious development & Spirituality. The existing paper therefore aims to incorporate faith and Spirituality in human progress. It is worth to indicate that social psychologists believe that alienation from religion tends to generate “identity crisis”. A hypothesis of this kind was invoked by recent studies that explain the detrimental effects of abandoning faith. In past decades, researchers have designed a wealth of new studies documenting prospective benefits of religious involvement for health and wellbeing. Being religious or having spiritual beliefs has been associated to improved psychological health in several pragmatic studies. Based on these findings, the current paper argues, the inclusion of religious experiences in trans-personal psychology is very important. Spirituality and faith thus is considered as being one of the associated elements to human development.

Key Words: Religion, Spirituality, Archetypes

Introduction

In human development, an optimal holistic approach requires attention to all aspects of development including Religious development &

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Spirituality. The present study therefore intends to incorporate religion and Spirituality in human development. Religion in the present context refers to an institutionalized system of beliefs regarding Spiritual realms (Lunn, 2009); Spirituality refers to a faith in pure and primeval religion, relationship with divine beings which provides meaning and basis for personal and communal reflection and decisions (Friedmann, Mouch, & Racey, 2002); archetypes are translated as primordial images of unconsciousness whereas, psychological wellbeing is translated as authentic happiness (Dambrun & Richard, 2011).

Historically, a connection with a divine being has been documented as a curative factor and as a potential source of psychological wellbeing (Freeman, 2006; Moorjani, 2012). Spirituality is also gaining space particularly in social sciences. During recent years (McMinn & Dominquez, 2005) religion is placed with positive mediating role in dealing with distressful events reducing the risk of Post Traumatic Distress (Jessica, et al., 2010), Anxiety (Jacobs et al., 2011), depression (Warner, et al, 2011) and neuroticism (Moltafet, Mazidi, & Sadati, 2010). More recent studies (e.g., Walker, et al., 2011), strongly advocate bringing theistic approaches to psychotherapy.

It is transpersonal psychology that recognizes the capacity for growth and change in human psyche and views psychological health of an individual as an on-going developmental process of discovering meaningful life and realizing unique human potential (Seaward, 2012).

Theoretical Discourse on Spiritual wellbeing and holistic Human Development

Transpersonal theorists drifted the idea of becoming and transforming “normality” to healthy personality and representing that various divisions or splits may be resolved, healed, or transcended in some kind of higher-order integration. It reflects their keen interest in relationship between psychology and religion (Sperry & Shafranske, 2005). Wilber (1956) and Hill et al., (2002) are with the view that religiousness and spirituality do also develop across the life span. They argue that both are strongly connected to the other strands of human development. Lending support to their thesis Kavar (2012, p.32) also viewed spiritual integration as “natural developmental process.”

Being religious or having spiritual beliefs has been linked to improved mental health in several empirical studies (Gow, et al., 2011). Some studies propose the archetypal image of God that a religion presents has potent influence on individual’s psychological wellbeing (e.g.,
Unterrainer et al, 2010; Koening, 2010). The sacred content that provides meaning is mostly reflected in individuals’ beliefs, goals, and subjective feelings (Silberman, 2005) which ultimately gets translated into our psychological wellbeing. Grossoehme, et al. (2010) unveils that contents of the written prayers in pediatric hospital suggest that people expect some result from Divine Being or the readers of the prayers.

**Short Term and Long Term Effects of Spirituality on Human Development**

Diener, &Biswas-Diener (2008), operationalize psychological wellbeing as an evaluative reaction—either in terms of life satisfaction (Cognitive evaluations) or happiness (ongoing affective expression). Haybron (2010) argues that happiness as an affect is often situation dependent therefore, reflects the short-term affective expressions, whereas, the “life satisfaction” represents long-term and more stable cognitive evaluations. An empirical research (e.g., Steger, Kashdan, &Oishi, 2008) finds that wellbeing resulting from hedonic (situation dependent) happiness is not stable. A more recent study (e.g., Dambrun&Ricard, 2011) concludes that attainment of happiness is a linked to self in general and the structure of the self in particular. Extending their views, Dambrun&Ricard (2011) argue that happiness is not always situation dependent. They distinguish between hedonic and eudemonic happiness, both having divergent philosophic roots thus cannot operate simultaneously. The theory argues that it is hedonic happiness which is situation dependent where one seeks pleasure of all kind and avoids displeasure (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Since hedonic happiness is maximized through satisfying desires (money, power, and possessions) therefore is temporary and disappears once the desire is satisfied (Damburn&Ricard, 2011). The theory explains that such kind of happiness is derived from “self-centered” psychological functioning where self takes the central point of reference that tends to breed egotism, egoism, ego-centrism and individualism (Damburn&Ricard, 2011, p. 140).

Damburn&Ricard, (2011) postulate that authentic happiness is the outcome of “selfless” psychological functioning, where importance of self is not exaggerated. From this perspective, selflessness is associated to altruism, empathy and compassion (Neff, 2003; Sprecher& Fehr, 2005) which are central characteristics of most religious and spiritual traditions (Underwood, 2002). Since, selfless functioning is based on weak distinction between self and others (e.g., Leary, Tipsord, & Tate,
2008; Galin, 2003), as a consequence, is related to self-transcendence (Adlwin&Shiraishi, 2005), wisdom (Yang, 2010), and calm ego (Wayment et al., 2010).

Religion, Happiness and Meaning of Life

Cort (2011) points to the mediating role of religion between the happiness and meaning of life. Confirming this paradigm, Krause and Hayward (2012) have found some aspects of religion associated to meaning in life. Brenda &Bergeman (2011) argue that religious associations tend to develop a closer relationship with God that is consistently linked with positive indicators of subjective wellbeing. Unfortunately, this aspect of human development is less evident in the new paradigms. This inevitably is producing a fragmented and incomplete vision of human growth. To take it further holism has a number of other important implications and recommendations too. Religious and/or spiritual experiences have become central transpersonal agenda. Religion and spirituality seems important in psychology as it provides people with wisdom (Cort, 2011) to discover ultimate meaning in life (Emmons, 1999), focusing on what the individual perceives to be sacred (Silberman, 2005).

Ample empirical evidence is available to support that sacred has powerful implications for human behavior (Ginges&Atran, 2011). Theory and research suggest that there is a basic and irreducible human yearning for a relationship with something sacred that transcends humans (Berns et al., 2012) to improve quality of life (Shah, et al., 2011). Miller &Thoresen (2003) believe that both religion and spirituality have the same goal that is the search for sacredness. While, what is sacred to human being is the concept of God (Miller &Thoresen, 2003). Reliance on God is one of the spiritual virtues and an essential stage of spiritual development (Bonab&Koohsar, 2011).

Empirical Data Support in Spirituality as source of Human Development

Some empirical studies on college students confirmed the significance of reliance on God for their spiritual maturation, meaning in life, and psychological wellbeing (Bonab&Koohsar, 2011; Mohammad, et al., 2011). Mohammad, et al., (2011) make clear that only close relationship with God and serving His purpose help Muslim students to perceive life
As delineated in several sources (Hood, 2003; Miller & Thompson, 2003; Koenig, 2010), spirituality has emerged as distinct construct and focus of research in past decades. Scott as quoted in Hill et al., (2000) identified 31 different definitions of religiousness and 40 of spirituality. It is ironic that despite such a broad research interest in the spirituality, little attention has been devoted to understanding these constructs empirically. Such broad conceptual diversity undermines efforts at summarizing the current research literature and prevents the field from integrating religious and spiritual constructs with mainstream. Although transpersonal psychologists have taken important steps in exploring the differences, complementarities, and possible integration of these theoretical orientations (e.g., Daniels, 2005, 2009; Washburn, 2003), further work is necessary in order to achieve a fuller and more cohesive understanding of transpersonal phenomena of spirituality and religion.

A substantial body of research has investigated the link between religion and spirituality yet postulated as complementary opposites (Wulff, 1997; Schneiders, 2000) that work together towards the same goal of wholeness and enlightenment. Following the Platonic philosophy of unified reality, Schneiders (2000) attests similar views and posits that religion and Spirituality represent “two dimensions of a single enterprise” (p.3). Zinnbauer and Pargament (2005) doubt the usefulness of polarizing these two constructs. They argue that constructs do evolve in professional usage overtime but the narrow definition of the terms or polarizations of constructs as incompatible opposites are problematic in research. As in case of religion, Pragament, (1997) argues that limiting religiousness to impersonal construct has frozen religion in time. On the other side, conceptualizing spirituality in social vacuum has weakened its boundaries by removing the substantive sacred core while making it secular experience, existential quest, and personal value. Transcendent function, therefore, can be the useful mean through which this reconciliation is accomplished.

Today the psychology of religion has moved far beyond simple models, instead, complex and integrative conceptual models have evolved that allow to tie together threads of research from different areas and to test hypothesis that were until recently unimaginable (Paloutzian, 2005). Secular holistic model to human existence equate integration to realization of human potential, purpose, meaning, and self as components of health and maturity (Kavar, 2012; Seaward, 2012). Perhaps the most popular version of this type of holism is the belief in the integration of body, mind and spirit (Yang, 2010). Ideologically, this
is often taken to mean the basic indivisibility of the person’s physical, mental and spiritual being. Therapeutically, it refers to the importance of treating the “whole” person as well as to the healing that results from the personal integration of physical, mental and spiritual aspects (Jessica, et al., 2010; Kohls, et al., 2011). Early (2011) also affirms healing potential of inner integration to transform problematic parts of the psyche into wisdom, spontaneity, self-support, and openness.

**Religion as Therapy-A Holistic Human Development Approach**

For others like Jung’s (1956) holistic approach incorporates both sociological and paleontological perspectives. A Jungian approach, based on a depth psychology and psycho-analytical perspective, would also help to support historical continuity as being based in the realm of deeply embedded archetypes, which although taking different concrete manifestations in different cultural contexts, nevertheless express universal forms. Conceived and explored quite early in the development of Jung’s psychology, the transcendent function is associated to collective unconscious, contents of which are known as archetypes- the primordial transpersonal factors exist independently of Ego. Through these transpersonal factors, psyche makes available to consciousness as transpersonal solution to transpersonal problems to deal with the Ego issues.

What makes the activity of archetypes idiosyncratic in human affairs is the sense of profundity and luminosity that commonly escort their appearance into consciousness (Jung, 1969, 1956). Their luminosity is derived from the fact that they store up and are conduits for affective and libidinous energies from lower levels of the psyche (Jung, 1956). So numinous and transpersonal are the symbolic eruptions of archetypal processes that the experience of them may lead to faith and sometimes even to states of possession and over identification with the imagery (Jung, 1968; Edinger, 1972).

Jungian theory could not legitimately accommodate the Eternal God, as Creator, and His implications on human behavior. A significant knowledgeable disagreement exists over Jung’s interpretation of religion and the existence of God. An Episcopal Priest, Wallace (1982) interprets that archetypes do not make each person a ‘God’ but on the contrary, realizing that within each person the potentiality of responding to God by bringing that encounter into consciousness. Later, Jean and Wallace (1996) conclude that in the Jungian sense there also exists a new archetype of ‘Pilgrimage.’ A well-known Jewish theologian and
philosopher, Buber (1999) criticized Jung on the same ground and concluded that Jung was mystically worshiping the instinct instead of Eternal God. Pointing to the same notion, Aziz (2007) disapproves Jungian theoretical model as being completely Self-oriented to which he called “solipsistic-type split” with Reality itself (p. 12).

A part from the fact that Jung’s theory needed to present the parallel growth model of psycho-spiritual functioning for a well-ordered harmony, it has important implications like validating religious symbolism and ritual in a manner that no other theory to date did (Aziz, 2007). Authors (e.g. Aziz, 2007) does acknowledge Jung’s contribution of recognizing self-regulatory psyche and very closely related to this the establishment of the compensatory value of the transpersonal meanings found within it as his outstanding contribution.

Biogenetic structural model presents archetypes as structures within the nervous system. Hankle (2009) and Aaen-Stockdale, (2012) hold that human beings are biologically programmed for the concept of God for adaptive reasons. Neurologists through brain scanning found that great deal of brain activity related to religious experience occurs when the temporal lobes of the brain are stimulated (Wilfried, 2009; Trimble, 2007). Theologians explain this phenomenon as the act of the God, who created the physical and metaphysical world. For them it is not surprising that God created a neurological system that seeks Spiritual union with Him. Some recent studies support this theistic paradigm (Berns, et al., 2012; Sheikh, 2012).

Psychologists have recently acknowledged the importance of both embedded and un-embedded constructs of God in their integral models of spirituality (Wilber, 2000; Daniels, 2009). Wilber’s (2000) integral psychology provides a similar synthetic frame work. Hardy (1996) and Daniels (2001) strongly criticized Wilber’s psycho-synthesis as his model is tilted more towards Eastern individualistic spirituality. Daniels (2005) argues that pure vertical (“other worldly”) or horizontal (“this worldly”) approach to spirituality unfortunately reinforce polarized view of spirituality. Since horizontal view is an alternate to the vertical view, for this reason, Daniels (2005) suggest integration of these can provide a truly holistic vision.

Partially dissatisfied by Wilber’s model of spirituality Daniel (2009) proposes a third victor of “extending spirituality” in addition to ascending and descending spirituality. Daniels (2009) stresses to incorporate and balance the three soteriologies to overcome the element egocentrism. He explains that development of the spiritual virtues of wisdom and faith (through ascending), psychological integration and
hope (through descending), and compassion and charity (through extending) are important victors to cultivate in an integrated wellbeing. St Paul in Walach (2008) acknowledges Denial’s “extending” victor model by acknowledging it as an effective antidote to the common and insidious poison of mere transpersonal path-spiritual narcissism. From this perspective, the true meaning of transpersonal is not beyond personal/Ego but beyond self-centeredness/Egocentrism.

Almost a decade early in response to the Wilberian-integral and astro-archetypal models of spirituality, Ferrer’s (2002) introduced Revisioning Transpersonal Theory, that sought to bridge Jung’s analytical, Assagioli’s psycho-synthesis, Grof’s holographic, Washburn’s spiral-dynamic, Wilber’s Structural-hierarchical, Sri Aurobindo’s integral and Wright’s feminist models. Moreover, his participatory spirituality is much aligned to Daniels’s third victor (which he calls “extending”) in transpersonal development (Daniels, 2009). The in-depth analysis of Ferrer’s work reveals the possibility of synergistic (integrated) relationships between personal and transpersonal, horizontal and vertical, ascending and descending, interior and exterior, individual and collective, this world and that world to accommodate secular and sacred perspectives.

It is worthy to mention that social psychologists believe that alienation from religion tends to generate “identity crisis”. A thesis of this kind was invoked by recent studies that explain the detrimental effects of abandoning faith (Brenda & Bergeman, 2011; Jenkins, 2008). Mochon, Norton, and Ariely (2011) elucidate that when faith disappears commitment wanes too whereas, religious involvement without commitment is detrimental to wellbeing, and individuals may be better off seeking new affiliations. Similarly, when social ethics are dealt at individual level, then one man’s good can be another man’s bad, and what worst there is no judge between them. Such societies follow the law of jungle in the name of democracy. In essence, such democracy creates instability in society.

Unlimited freedom can be a potential source of destruction since human beings have a strong knack of choosing the worst things for themselves. Similarly, Dostoyevsky sited by Baker (2000) clarifies that, “if God does not exist, then everything is permitted.” Such arguments demonstrate theism is normative and natural conclusion.

Even Skinner (1991), an atheist as quoted in Greenway (2000) “We cannot hope to realize our fullest human potentialities in the absence of God”. One recent study support religion and Spirituality for a peaceful and healthy world (Allmon, 2011). As Atheism tends to pull people apart
and can breed selfishness by rejecting the common beliefs that serves as adhesive bond between the people. On the other hand, a real danger also presents itself when religion just aims to worship a Divine Power and might in the face of which humans are encouraged to remain passive and grovel. This approach also exerts harmful effect on the health of an individual and a society. Without synergetic relationship of individual with God, religion’s role is mere regulatory.

Conclusion

Researches are rare to criticize transpersonal movement or psychedelic revolution that led the hybridization of spirituality and transcendence but they failed to gain attention in the transpersonal psychology and counseling literature (Cashwell, Glosoff, and Cheree, 2010). Early in 1984 John Welwood coined the term “spiritual bypassing” to describe the tendency of using spiritual practices and beliefs to side step or avoid facing unresolved emotional issues, psychological wounds, and unfinished developmental tasks. He argues that spiritual bypassing lead to one-sided kind of spirituality where one pole of life is elevated at the expense of its opposite. Moreover, Masters (2010) extends that spirituality keeps people stuck at a “higher” level that is really only higher in a conceptual sense (p. 11).

Even so, many scholars(e.g., Moltafet, Mazidi, &Sadati, 2010; Seaward, 2012) call upon psychologists to join religious scholars to develop methods and theories to explain this psycho-spiritual development. Moreover, Shah, et al., (2011) consider it vital for clinicians to understand the importance of religion and spirituality in psychotherapy. Based on these findings, the inclusion of religious experiences in transpersonal psychology is strongly recommended, being one of the associated elements to human development.

References


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