

British Psychological Society

Transpersonal Section Annual Conference

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This year's conference, again held at the Beeches Management Centre in Bourneville, was attended by fifty people - which represents approximately 17 per cent of the Section's membership, a very encouraging and supportive percentage. The programme proved particularly exciting and stimulating, and full participation from the floor throughout the three days meant that all who came were closely involved in the proceedings.

Keynote Presentations

The one disappointment was that Professor CHARLES TART, of the University of California at Davis and one of the founders of transpersonal psychology, was prevented by sudden illness from travelling to the UK to deliver his scheduled keynote address. Charley's visit was eagerly anticipated, and we missed not only his talk but his warm personality, his enthusiasm, and the pleasure of interacting with him and learning from his wisdom and long experience. However, in spite of his poor health, Charley made an hour-long video of the whole of his intended talk, and rushed it to us in time for a double showing on the Saturday evening. Nothing could compensate for not having Charley with us, but the video went some way towards it. In it he outlined his own involvement in transpersonal psychology, linked it with other events in his distinguished career, and gave advice and guidance on how the subject can be further developed. Charley the man as well as Charley the scientist came across strongly, and even those who have never met him felt the depth of his friendship for our Section, and of his commitment to transpersonal psychology. Happily, news of his improving health reached us in the days following the conference.

In Charley's absence, JOHN ROWAN filled the Saturday keynote slot - a happy substitution of one founding father of transpersonal psychology for another. John looked at the levels of transpersonal experience identified by Ken Wilber and by his own research. The theory of 'levels' always raises certain problems. How do we move from one level to another, and how do we recognise when we have done so? Is the transition between levels gradual or abrupt? What is the scientific basis for the existence of these levels? Does knowing about the higher levels before experiencing them lead to expectations and self-delusions? John dealt with these and other questions with his inimitable blend of scholarship and good humour, succeeding in making even the most difficult concepts accessible without losing sight of their inner complexity.

The keynote address on Friday was given by Professor MICHAEL WEST, of the Institute of Work Psychology at Sheffield University. Mike was one of the first UK scientists to attempt serious research into meditation, and he began his presentation by looking at the way in which the abilities of concentration and reflection developed through meditation can be put to effective use in the workplace. He then explained how the transpersonal approach can be applied to the hard realities of business and commerce and of over-stretched public services such as the NHS. His research shows that such an approach, by valuing the individual and inner frames of mind, leads not only to opportunities among workers for personal growth and self-reflection, but also produces significant dividends in economic terms. If we care about the whole person rather than just their behaviour, individuals are empowered to be more productive, effective and self-fulfilled. One of the most compelling features of what

was a highly informative and stimulating presentation was the clear evidence that Mike lives what he believes. If transpersonal understanding was given a higher priority in industry and the public services, we might just open the way to an economic as well as to a social and personal transformation of the national consciousness.

I gave the third keynote talk, and tried to look at the way in which transpersonal states reflect themselves in outer behaviour, and thus present us with clear data for scientific scrutiny.

Other Areas of the Programme

The programme contained eight further presentations, seven workshops (some of three hours and some of an hour and a half), poster sessions, and informal interest groups at which ideas and views were exchanged on a number of topics, and guidelines suggested for further research and development. Unable disappointingly to be in two places at once, I missed some of these events, but learned of them from others.

The Presentations

The presentations covered a wide range of concerns, demonstrating once again the scope and potential of transpersonal psychology as the psychology of inner experiences such as meditation, creativity, peak experiences, emotional states, intuition, mystical transformations, psychotherapeutic and spiritual insights, and responses to music and the other arts.

BRIAN LANCASTER covered psychological approaches to the experience of light as reported in spiritual and mystical contexts, and emphasised the universality of light as a religious symbol representing variously insight, knowledge, expansiveness, healing, love and goodness. ANTHONY EDWARDS reported research suggesting that, contrary to received wisdom, men may not produce lower scores than women on measures of religious involvement, and outlined ways in which further investigation of gender differences in the area can be conducted. MIKE LOWIS also presented research data, this time within the context of musical experience. Taking his starting point from Maslow's contention that peak experiences can be triggered by music, he showed correlations between the points at which subjects, when listening to music, registered their entry into ostensible altered states.

Four presentations explored important aspects of the psychotherapeutic process. HAZEL GUEST explained the development and use of The Scale of Responses, a measure drawing upon the clinical experience of herself and psychiatrist Ian Marshall, and allowing the therapist to map the client's emotional and other responses to situations. She explained how the scale also allows the therapist to observe the client's shifts between various levels, and to facilitate those shifts that enhance personal, interpersonal and transpersonal growth and understanding. BILL WAHL also looked at aspects of transpersonal psychotherapy, and showed how they can be integrated with other therapies. The main thrust of his thesis was that behavioural, psychodynamic, cognitive, humanistic, existential and transpersonal techniques each address a different area of client concern, and thus are compatible rather than at variance with each other. KEVIN KINGSLAND focused upon the transcendental state which sometimes arises during counselling and in which the felt distinction between counsellor and client disappears. He emphasised that such a state can lead to collusion and a loss of therapeutic insight, and outlined systematic ways in which this danger can be avoided and the state used to enhance client-counsellor interaction. PETER LEATHERDALE addressed

other aspects of the transformation process, and drawing upon his experiences of working with health professionals and with suicidal and violent clients outlined ways of stimulating transformatory processes in the individual, thus enhancing not only personal but social and cultural development.

MALCOLM WALLEY, from his extensive experience of Eastern meditative techniques, explained the Brahma Viharas, a set of meditation practices which together enhance respectively loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. He made clear the ease with which these techniques can be put into practice with a view to enhancing acceptance of self as well as of others. Mike Daniels opened up yet another area of interest with his examination of the links between so-called paranormal experiences and transpersonal states. Central to his theme was the need to understand the differences and complementarities between the findings of parapsychological research and those of transpersonal psychology.

The Workshops

In Charley Tart's absence, his three-hour workshop was taken over by John Rowan, who gave experiential opportunities to participants to identify within themselves some of the levels of transpersonal development discussed in his keynote address, and to explore yet others. ROSALIND PEARMAIN presented a range of practical exercises for heightening the therapist's ability to be present to him/herself - and thus to increase sensitivity to clients - when working with transpersonal strategies in counselling and psychotherapy. LINUS DIGNAM explored the hypnotic state, taught participants how to induce a light trance in themselves and how to use sub-modalities to change internal imaging of events, and provided comparisons between hypnosis and techniques of guided relaxation.

The focus of MARIA ANGELO'S workshop was a series of slides taken from the breathtakingly beautiful *Splendor Solis*, a series of alchemical images which Carl Jung saw as providing a map of the transpersonal journey towards inner development. Together with her own commentary, the slides initiated participants into direct experience of the psychological power of such symbolic representations. MALCOLM WALLEY and NORA DOCHERTY took on the task of providing opportunities for participants to explore their attitudes towards key areas of sexuality and intimacy within the context of spiritual growth and transpersonal experience, and TONY MURPHY and SIMON CLARIDGE called on their experience as schools psychologists to demonstrate how transpersonal issues can be addressed in the course of stress management workshops with teachers. Ingrid Slack conducted an experiential workshop designed to develop participants' compassionate and insightful understanding of self and of other, while I contributed a short session on tranquillity meditation.

Poster Sessions

An important innovation this year was the timetabling of poster sessions, and TRICIA WHITEHOUSE and John Rowan both mounted stimulating presentations. Tricia outlined a protocol for qualitative research aimed at exploring therapists' experiences of those transpersonal moments that enable the client-therapist relationship to go beyond the limiting sense of separateness prevailing in many therapeutic encounters, and invited those employing transpersonal strategies to contact her and participate in this important area of research. John gave us a comprehensive set of descriptions characterising on the one hand people who experience self-actualisation, and on the other those who attain subtle and

causal inner levels. The main purpose of the presentation was to demonstrate that it is possible to characterise the latter two levels with the same kind of descriptions provided by Maslow for self-actualisation - another very significant pointer for future research investigation. We would like to encourage more people to consider offering poster presentations at the next annual conference.

General

Many participants remarked that an enjoyable aspect of the conference was the spirit of friendship and co-operation that prevailed throughout the three days. Research initiatives and possibilities, psychotherapeutic and occupational concerns, personal experiences, problems of description and categorisation, and links between transpersonal psychology and other specialist areas were all discussed freely and informally. Ideas were exchanged, support and encouragement were given and received, and there was an overriding sense that all participants were respected and valued for their contributions and for their presence. Speaking personally (and I hope without too much bias), I have rarely enjoyed a conference more, and my grateful thanks go to everyone who took part, and in particular to INGRID SLACK and MARTIN TREACY, who organised the whole thing and saw to its smooth running. And a final work of thanks to the friendliness and efficiency of the management and staff at the Beeches Centre who hosted us. Nothing was too much trouble for them.

Professor David Fontana is chair of the Transpersonal Section of the British Psychological Society and President of the Society for Psychological Research.