

## Editorial

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## The Evolution of Psychology

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Today the discipline of psychology is branching out to embrace research into more esoteric areas that can provide the means and techniques that will empower people to assume greater self-responsibility for their mental and physical health while simultaneously empowering each person with powerful tools for health and well-being. I refer to the increased interest and research in the contemplative practices (e.g., how meditation affects brain structure,<sup>1</sup> physiology,<sup>2</sup> and well-being),<sup>1</sup> energy medicine, and alternative holistic therapies as well as renewed interest in research that examines the efficacy of psychedelics, such as MDMA<sup>3,4,5</sup> or psilocybin,<sup>5,6</sup> on mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, addiction, or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Reliance on the medical model and the subsequent over-prescription of pharmaceutical drugs has taken a tremendous toll on the pocketbooks and psyche's of patients who seek psychological relief. Many now seek alternative solutions and holistic prevention strategies for both physical and psychological ailments, thus research that focuses on the efficacy of alternative treatments is greatly needed. Simultaneously, new methodologies will need to be identified that can accurately measure changes produced through the manipulation of *subtle energies*.

William Tiller, Stanford Professor Emeritus of Materials Science and Engineering believes that these *subtle energies* are the energies produced by what we refer to as spiritual, mental, emotional and other similar energies and that "(h)umans are potential sources and conscious detectors of *subtle energies*."<sup>7</sup> He also proposed methodologies for measuring these energies.<sup>7</sup>

According to Eastern medicine, this energy is called *chi*. *Chi* is everywhere, but it's presence and effects on the body and mind are what are of interest to psychologists. The *chi* that flows throughout the body cannot be seen. According to Chinese medicine (e.g., acupuncture), there are twelve primary meridians that are associated with major organs of the body and that join together at certain junctures. Although *chi* cannot yet be measured directly, evidence is gathering that supports its presence. Similar to the concept of *dark matter*, the effects of its presence are what we can detect. Kirlian photography, galvanic skin response, heart rate and blood pressure<sup>8</sup> are used to observe changes due to *subtle energy* manipulation.

Alternative approaches to healing, such as acupuncture, acupressure, Emotional Freedom Technique, meditation, yoga, tai chi, and chi kung all incorporate the idea that health is the result of free flowing and balanced *chi* and that disease arises when one's *chi* is either blocked or stagnant or unbalanced. When changes occur in the brain, nervous system, visceral organs and physiological systems that result in greater well-being and health, this is news. When it happens due to the manipulation of our intention, this is historical.

Is this expansion of research investigating the *subtle energies* a deviation from the original intent of the discipline of Psychology? Let's travel back to 1879 when psychology first became a science. It was the advent of Wilhelm Wundt's first psychological laboratory in Leipzig, Germany where he studied consciousness that started psychology down the road

of scientific investigation. Wundt believed that, “The exact description of consciousness is the aim of experimental psychology.”<sup>9</sup> Since that time, psychological research has grown into a discipline with many branches that extend beyond its original intent to study consciousness. With over 135 years since its inception as a science, psychology has provided us with valuable information about the human condition. The major forces defining the discipline as it evolved--psychodynamics, behaviorism, humanism and most recently, the transpersonal--have guided psychological research. Other branches of the discipline include neuroscience, developmental, and cognitive research. As we learned more from this growing body of knowledge, we found that our former assumptions about human behavior needed revision as we progressed. For example, it was not until after the technologies of Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), Positron Emission Tomography (PET), or laser technology were developed did our understanding of brain structure and physiology advance significantly. With these advancements, psychology unearthed much of what was formerly hidden and in doing so, catalyzed changes to former theories and therapies.

We therefore understand that our concepts of reality and truth change as we advance scientifically. The truths discovered in one era must withstand revision in subsequent eras when new discoveries force us to shift away from old paradigms. The great thinkers of our time--Galileo, Kepler, Copernicus, Schroedinger, Newton, Einstein, Bohm, and Bohr--all demonstrated that it was necessary to change some of our concepts of “truth” and reality. Their discoveries added to the pool of human knowledge forcing a revision to those *truths* formerly held. Thus, *truth* must be seen as a “tentative truth,” or a *good enough* explanation for now. They are the best explanations that can be provided at the time until new discoveries force us to revise or discard the older guiding assumptions. As new information and technologies emerge, human understanding expands, often with great disruption to what has been “known” before.

The medical model has dominated what psychology investigates and how treatment is developed. Treatment is not cure, however. Without an inquiring eye towards prevention and healing, we will stagnate as a discipline. As more disorders are identified with corresponding prescription medicines being developed, it is time for us to step back and examine the wisdom and effectiveness of limiting our approaches to this paradigm.<sup>10</sup> While the medical model has provided us with the biological knowledge necessary to understand the mechanisms of behavior, using the biological model as the primary approach to treatment neglects important aspects of being human. The human organic system is interrelated--what we do to our bodies affects our minds and *vice versa*. The whole is more than the sum of its parts.

This is nowhere more evident than in the discipline of psychology today. As we advance our knowledge in the biological and neurosciences we need to remember that the roots of the discipline were steeped in an attempt to understand the whole human being. The problem has been that the scientific method is reductionism--we attempt to break down the human being as a whole into its component parts so that we can learn more about the various structures and processes that make up our bodies and experience. This reductionism must be seen for what it is, however. We are reminded to not view each person as simply a compilation of symptoms and structures, but we are called to understand the being as a whole living organism. This may be difficult because even with over 130 years as a scientific discipline, psychology is still in its infancy. Much has been uncovered that increases our basic understanding of what it means to be a healthy, well-adjusted human being--both physically and psychologically--but our journey is not yet over.

Although traditional psychological research has steered away from such issues as the spirit and soul, it may simply be that as scientists we are just uncomfortable with that which we do not yet understand, cannot see or touch. The importance of evolving the discipline to return to its roots is evident if we examine the etymological roots of the term, *psychology*. It consists of two parts: *psyche* and *-ology*. *Ology* refers to *the study of* while *psyche* is literally translated from Greek to mean *soul*. The term *therapist* is translated into an *attendant or servant*, and therefore, a *psychotherapist* would be an *attendant of the soul*. The discipline appears to be evolving and coming full circle back to its original roots. *Transpersonal* research focusing on the *subtle energies* of consciousness is expanding and causing us to rethink our ideas about prevention, treatment and healing.

The term, *transpersonal*, is defined as *that which is beyond the personal or individual*. Research that stems from the *transpersonal* investigates the *subtle energies* of consciousness and their relationship to brain structure and function. We could say that it investigates questions that do not fit neatly into any of the former paradigms that have guided psychological research.

*Transpersonal* research provides us with greater understanding of how different consciousness states relate to health and well-being. Knowledge is empowering and raises consciousness, allowing for more information to be synthesized that we hope will result in better understanding and development of practices that augment and further enhance our natural human capacities. This type of research allows us to develop techniques that address the discovery and development of consciousness faculties that extend beyond our five senses, tapping into our natural abilities that allow us to see and know the world in a more interconnected fashion.<sup>11</sup>

The tools to evolve consciousness are within our grasp and do not have to be bought through prescription drugs. It is the ultimate self-empowerment! What if we could all learn self-healing tools that would help us prevent or overcome depression, anger, pain, trauma, frustration, and anxiety? Current research in the contemplative practices<sup>1,2</sup> (i.e., various methods of meditation, corresponding changes in structure and function in the brain and their relationship to well-being) as well as investigations into the therapeutic use of hallucinogens<sup>1-4,6,12</sup> (e.g., LSD, MDMA, psilocybin) and other non-drug means of treatment, (e.g., *Holotropic Breathwork*, Transcendental Meditation, EFT) are being conducted at major universities in the United States--Johns Hopkins, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Duke University, the University of Arizona, UCLA, and the Salk Institute in California--in hopes of finding effective, alternative and long-lasting relief for those suffering from terminal illness anxiety, addictions, depression or post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>5</sup>

Radin<sup>13</sup> outlined numerous studies establishing that *psi* phenomena are real and can be measured. We find our consciousness is interconnected to others, validated by these studies. Our interconnection is evident in the fact that our DNA crosses racial and ethnic lines. We are discovering how the elements that make up the known universe are the same as that which is within our own cells. We are made of cosmic dust. From particle physics we know that when a particle is split into two parts, even though those two parts may be long distances apart, there is an instant communication between the two when changes are made to one of the pair. We are challenged to explain how this happens, but the fact that it happens is what is intriguing (and therefore, significant to people on a soul level when that type of communication is a psychic connection between two people). Could our ability to scientifically explain this phenomenon in quantum physics provide us with an explanation for how extrasensory perception (ESP) works? We shall see. In the meantime, psychology is advancing and evolving research that can provide meaningful information to help us understand our interconnectedness and to discover and refine practices that result in greater well-being and happiness.

As psychological research advances into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we will be challenged on many fronts. What was once considered to be *false* may turn into a *truth* but that *truth* may not be revealed to science until we advance in our technologies, techniques, and understanding. Truth is relative to what we know at any given time. As we evolve in our knowledge, we may need to revise or discard current theories or therapies as we discover and uncover more about the mysteries of the mind.

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