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Mystic Medium?

**An investigation into the relationship
between mediumistic and mystical experience
in the context of transpersonal psychology**

**A Research Thesis Submitted
by Kendall Wrightson**

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In passages dealing with mediation, [Edgar Cayce] employed the language of kundalini yoga from India and Tibet, right alongside material from the Psalms about meditating on God's law. For the entranced Cayce, the concept of chakras, or spiritual centres, at seven key points in the body was helpful to understand being 'filled with the Spirit', since all creativity used the same circuits in the body. What had to be emptied to allow the fiery life force to rise secretly within the person and be met with invisible tongues of flame from Beyond was self-will and self-aggrandisement - not self-identity. Here Cayce departed from some forms of Hindu thought and practice that emphasised dissolution of the ego and individuality into the larger whole. In his view, identity was precious to the Creator; else why the creation? (Bro, 1990, 81).

Contents

Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgements & Declaration.....	8
Word Count.....	8
Preface.....	9
1.0 Introduction.....	10
1.1 Definitions & Contexts:.....	10
1.1.1 Definitions - Religious and Spiritual.....	10
1.1.2 The Parascientific Context.....	11
1.1.3 The Transpersonal Context.....	16
1.1.4 The Mystical Context.....	22
1.2 Research Questions.....	30
2.0 Methodology.....	32
2.1 Sample Size & Selection Criteria.....	32
2.1.1 Selection of Mediums.....	32
2.1.2 Selection of Meditators.....	33
2.1.3 Selection of Controls.....	33
2.2 Research Instrument.....	33
2.2.1 M-Scale Dimensions & Factors.....	34
2.3 Procedure.....	35
2.3.1 Additional Questions.....	35
2.4 Data Analysis.....	35
2.5 Follow-up Interviews: Design & Procedure.....	36
3.0 Results & Analysis.....	39
3.1 M-Scale: Results & Data Analysis.....	39
3.1.1 Characteristics of the Sample.....	39
3.1.2 Characteristics of the Groups - Mediums.....	40
3.1.3 Characteristics of the Groups - Meditators.....	41
3.1.4 Characteristics of the Groups - Controls.....	43
3.1.5 Sample M-Scale Means.....	44
3.1.6 Factor and Dimension Means.....	44
3.1.7 Factor Analysis.....	47
3.1.8 Reliability Analysis & Correlations.....	49
3.1.9 M-Scale Means: Comparison with Other Studies.....	49
3.2 M-Scale: Observations Relevant to the Research Questions.....	50
3.3 M-Scale: Other Observations.....	50
3.4 Follow-up Interviews: Analysis.....	52

Opening Pages

3.4.1	Item 12.....	54
3.4.2	Item 31.....	56
3.4.3	Follow-up Interviews: Summary.....	57
4.0	Discussion.....	59
4.1	Summary of Findings Relevant to Research Questions.....	59
4.2	Critique of the Study and Interpretation of Findings.....	59
4.2.1	Methodology.....	59
4.2.2	Main Research Instrument.....	62
4.3	Other Findings.....	64
4.4	Assessment of study and suggestions for Future Research.....	65
4.5	Concluding Remarks.....	66
	References.....	68

Appendices

I	Personal Context.....	75
II	M-Scale Items, Factors & Dimensions.....	77
a	M-Scale Items.....	78
b	M-Scale Eight Dimensions.....	79
c	M-Scale Two Factor Solution.....	81
d	M-Scale Three Factor Solution.....	82
III	Questionnaires.....	84
a	Questionnaire Mediators.....	85
b	Questionnaire Meditators.....	88
c	Questionnaire Controls.....	91

Annexes (A4 Box File)

A Completed M-Scale Questionnaires

- A1 Completed M-Scale Questionnaires - Mediums
- A2 Completed M-Scale Questionnaires - Meditators
- A3 Completed M-Scale Questionnaires - Controls

B SPSS Data Analysis Reports

C Semistructured Interview Transcripts

- C1 Mediums
- C2 Meditators
- C3 Controls

D CD-ROM containing the following files:

- M-Scale+EXCEL+Data.xls
- M-Scale+SPSS+DATA.sav
- Audio Interviews Folder (.wav files)
- Questionnaire Forms for completion with Microsoft Word (.doc files)

Figures

1	Wilber’s holarchical model of Prepersonal, Personal and Transpersonal stages	19
2	Grof’s transpersonal experiences of a paranormal kind.....	20
3	Stace’s (1960) nine phenomenological criteria for mystical experience.....	23
4	Modes and Contexts of Mystical Experience.....	28
5	Daniels’ ‘5 x 5’ model of mystical experience.....	29
6	Likert scale response format for Hood M-Scale.....	34

Tables

1	Basic data for the sample and the three Groups	39
2	Additional information for the Sample & the three Groups	40
3	Mediums: Engagement in Contemplative/Meditative Practice.....	40
4	Mediums and Meditative Practice.....	41
5	Mediums: Affiliation to Organised Religion/Church.....	41
6	Meditators : Name/School/Tradition of Meditation.....	42
7	Meditators: Experience of non-physical presence.....	42
8	Meditators: Experience of non-physical presence, detail.....	43
9	Controls: Religion, Spiritual Practice, Spiritual and Paranormal Experience.....	43
10	M-Scale results for the Sample and Groups.....	44
11	M-Scale Total Score Significance.....	44
12	Mean Totals per Group for Two- and Three Factor Solutions and the Eight Dimensions of the M-Scale.....	45
13	T-Test [2 tailed] comparing Mean Scores for Mediums/Controls, Meditators/Controls and Mediums/Meditators for Two- and Three-Factor Solutions and for the Eight Dimensions of the M-Scale.....	46
14	M-Scale item numbers produced by a Principal Components Factor Analysis (using a Varimax Rotation) and the M-Scale items per component.....	47
15	M-Scale item numbers produced by a Principal Components Factor Analysis (using a Varimax Rotation) forced into eight components and the M-Scale items per component.....	48
16	M-Scale item numbers produced by a Principal Components Factor Analysis (using a Varimax Rotation) forced into two components and the M-Scale items per component.....	48
17	M-Scale item numbers produced by a Principal Components Factor Analysis (using a Varimax Rotation) forced into two components and the M-Scale items per component.....	49
18	M-Scale Means in a number of studies	49
19	Summary of semistructured interviews.....	53

Abstract

A literature review examines three key contexts in which mediumistic experience has been explored - paranormal, transpersonal and mystical - and notes the tendency by scholars of the latter two disciplines to view mediumistic experience as being outside - or a lower order - of mystical/transpersonal experience. Based on these views, two hypotheses are developed which predict that a group of individuals who are experienced in a spiritual practice designed specifically to produce 'higher' levels of mystical experience (such as meditation), should achieve higher mean scores in the Hood Mysticism Scale (Hood, 1975) than a group of experienced mediums. The hypotheses are tested by administering the Hood Mysticism Scale to three groups: Mediums, Meditators and a Control group (where n = 20 per group).

The results of the study contradict the outcomes predicted by the research hypotheses. This finding is discussed in the context of a critique of the main research instrument and the methodology employed, and utilises additional input from a number of follow-up interviews conducted with study respondents. Suggestions for further investigations into mediumistic experience in the context of spiritual development are described, and the thesis concludes by noting that transpersonal psychology is the discipline most suited to tackle this research.

Acknowledgements

The structure of the thesis is based around guidance published in the PSYCTM006 Module Handbook. For this document, and for his invaluable guidance, wisdom and understanding, I thank Professor Brian L. Lancaster. For a wide variety of reasons I also acknowledge the following individuals:

Declaration

I acknowledge the support of Dr. Patrick Barmby in leading me through the maze of menus in the statistical analysis application *SPSS* and for correcting my occasionally novel understanding of statistical techniques. I should also like to note that Dr. Barmby carried out a statistical technique called 'power analysis' on the data created in this thesis using a specialist application called *GPOWER*. The result of Dr. Barmby's power analysis is mentioned in Section 4.0 (Discussion). Apart from this item of data, I declare that this thesis is my own work.

Word Count

The word count for this thesis excluding the Opening Pages, Bibliography, Appendices and Annexes is 23,000.

Preface

This thesis explores the relationship between 'mystical' and 'mediumistic' experience within the context of transpersonal psychology. (The words 'mystical', 'mediumistic' and other key terms receive formal definition in the introduction section.)

The motivation for this investigation arises, initially, from personal experience involving spiritual practices, spiritual teachings and mediumistic activity. The contradictions and paradoxes I have found in these experiences have created a number of personal challenges; one of the most significant is characterised in the quotation at the front of the thesis which refers to trance-channel, Edgar Cayce. The experience most relevant to main theme explored in this thesis is described briefly, with context, in Appendix A.

In the context of the heated debates we will encounter in this study, Daniels' (2001) call for transpersonal researchers to be '. . . more cautious and explicit in [their] metaphysical assumptions' is understandable. Daniels is, in effect, asking researchers to address the possibility of bias. In so doing he is also concerned about the validity of transpersonal research in the wider academic community. If a writer's metaphysical beliefs are known, and preferably bracketed, this will help, he suggests, in '. . . convincing sceptics both within and outside the psychological profession that the transpersonal represents a valid area of scientific concern' (ibid.). While I am not immediately concerned here with the validity of transpersonal research in the scientific community, I believe Daniels makes a fair point and so I will now take a paragraph or so to make my position clear.

My birth religion is Church of England. Though I am not a practising Christian, I see Christ's teachings - and the teaching of many other spiritual traditions - as inspirational (when I take the trouble to focus upon them). I believe (at least for most of the time) in the 'existence' of unseen domains that seem to be concerned with the 'higher' aspirations of humanity. In this thesis I am not assuming that these domains have any ontological reality; my primary purpose is to explore some of the experiences that lead people (and me) to believe they may.

With respect to mediumistic experience, I acknowledge that I ascribe great personal value and significance to my own experiences, but I am not assuming here that these experiences are anything more than *psychologically* real, though I acknowledge that I suspect otherwise. Finally, at the outset of this research I had no preconceptions of how mediumistic experience may fit into the various transpersonal models and theories that are discussed here - this research has been my attempt to form an opinion.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This introduction serves several purposes: firstly it offers a literature review that examines the key contexts - parascience, transpersonal studies and mysticism - in which mediumistic experience has been explored. It also offers definitions of the key terms used in these disciplines. Finally, it attempts to establish a rationale for the key questions to be addressed here, making a case for their value over and above their relevance to the author's personal journey.

1.1 Definitions & Contexts

At the outset, it is important to examine, briefly, the terms *religious* and *spiritual*.

1.1.2 Religious and Spiritual

With so many religious traditions - ancient and modern, exoteric and esoteric, popular and minority - a strict definition of the term *religious* is impossible. However, philosophers of religion have attempted to outline some of the main characteristics, though no particular religion would necessarily include them all. Pailin (1986, 12-20) identifies nine aspects in his characterisation of theistic, non-theistic and polytheistic religions. He describes these as concern with: the 'ultimate'; the holy, the sacred or with 'otherness'; feelings of absolute dependence; morals, salvation and ideals.

Nielsen *et al* (1988, in Fontana, 2003, 6-13) list twelve factors which include the characteristics outlined by Pailin, and add several others including: a desire to proselytise; corporate worship, observance or ritual; a belief in a supernatural or other reality beyond, yet basic to existence or experience; a striving to attain a level of consciousness beyond normal experience; and a belief in an afterlife of some kind.

Many of these characteristics could apply to the word *spiritual* and thus in many academic disciplines, particularly those appertaining to religion, the words religious and spiritual are often used synonymously. However, the term spiritual is also used in a secular context (not inappropriate since the word derives from the latin word *spiritus* meaning *breath*), where the range of possible meanings is even broader and more idiosyncratic. On the level of personal meaning, many individuals may consider themselves to be spiritual, but would not describe themselves as religious. Fontana (2003, 12-13) points to the fact that in contemporary usage, spiritual is often used to suggest an openness to spiritual teachings from a range of sources, rather than a dogmatic rejection of everything outside of an individual's preferred tradition - a position that characterises the transpersonal movement.

Therefore in this thesis, the terms religious and spiritual (and their derivatives) are not used synonymously. Instead, the latter term is used to refer to events and experiences that are typical of those described in religious traditions (as characterised above), but where the context or meaning is not necessarily religious.

1.1.2 The Parascientific Context

As Daniels notes (2005, 40), paranormal experience has been an important feature of the human journey throughout history and across cultures. The range of such experiences is vast, but in parapsychology - the scientific study of paranormal events and experiences - three main categories have been identified: extrasensory perception (ESP); mind-matter interaction or psychokinesis (PK); and phenomena suggestive of post-mortem survival, including Near Death Experiences (NDEs), apparitions and poltergeist (Radin, 1997, 14).

The common feature of these experiences, at least for western culture, is their inexplicability in terms of current scientific understanding - hence *para-*, meaning *beyond* or *beside*. The word paranormal is also used as a noun - 'the paranormal' referring to a collection of events, experiences and abilities that are also known as 'psi' in parapsychology. Psi refers to the greek letter of the alphabet (Ψ) and has no other significance (ibid., 15).

Parapsychology was first established as an area of academic study by William McDougal and J.B. Rhine in 1927 at Duke University, North Carolina. Since then a number of studies have provided startling results; but promising research has consistently attracted criticism by the scientific mainstream, above-chance outcomes being attributed to fraud, poor scientific method, naivety (being duped by subjects claiming paranormal ability) or experimenter effects; for example, where the experimenter's conceptual framework biases the results (Fontana, 2003, 200; Radin, 1997, 43).

In recent years the increasing use of statistical methods and meta-studies (combing the data from a large number of similar studies) has produced quantitative results that are harder to dismiss (ibid.). However, for mainstream science this data is still seen as unconvincing and the methodologies utilised as flawed (Blackmore, 1986).

For many parapsychologists, the third category of paranormal activity has been off the menu since 1960 when Rhine called for the abandonment of research into survival phenomena because of the difficulty in distinguishing mediumship from ESP (Radin, 1997). Therefore much of the scientific (parapsychological) study of mediumship has been carried out by psychologists with a special interest in the subject, such as Gary Schwartz (based at the University of Arizona), and a number of researchers publishing in the journal of the New York-based *Parapsychology Foundation* (e.g. Carlos Alvarado). The UK-based *Society for Psychical Research* (SPR) and its American namesake (ASPR) were formed in 1882 and 1885 respectively with the specific aim of investigating the rash of survival phenomena that appeared following the birth in 1848 of modern Spiritualism. These institutions predate modern parapsychology by some forty-five years (Charet, 1993, 35; Haynes, 1982). Both organisations have maintained a focus upon survival research, notable researchers contributing to the SPR include Robertson & Roy (e.g. 2004) and Keen, Ellison & Fontana (e.g. 1999). The latter's book - *Is There An Afterlife?* - summarises the latest research into survival phenomena (Fontana, 2006).

Introduction

Fontana's book is evidence of an upsurge of interest in survival research in recent years, as is the devotion of the entire proceedings of the 2005 *Parapsychology Foundation* International Conference to the study of mediumship (Alvarado, 2005). Another indication is Stanley Krippner's recent call for research into survival phenomena *not* to be excluded from parapsychological research as Rhine had demanded (Klimo, 1998, 298).

Parapsychologists could be forgiven for ignoring Krippner's advice: professional sceptics of parapsychological research seem to reserve their most visceral criticism for research involving mediums. A flavour of the relationship between sceptics and survival researchers can be glimpsed in the critical drubbing of Schwartz (2003a) by Hyman (2003) in the *Sceptical Inquirer*. The latter's article was entitled *How Not to Test Mediums*. Among Hyman's criticisms was a long list of syndromes that he believed were not adequately controlled by Schwartz. The list included: fallacy of personal validation, subjective validation, confirmation bias, belief perseverance and the illusion of invulnerability. Schwartz responded with an article in a subsequent edition of the same publication with a piece headed: *How Not to Review Mediumship Research* (Schwartz, 2003b).

The best know 'debunker' of research into the paranormal is James Randi who offers to pay one million dollars for any individual who can prove, in controlled conditions, that they have paranormal abilities (Randi, 2006). Part of Randi's confidence in offering such a prize is that much paranormal phenomena fails the key scientific test of repeatability. This is certainly true of survival research where, as Fontana puts it ' . . . whenever we have been on the brink of getting the final piece of the jigsaw, things stop happening, the phenomena cease' (Robinson, 2006).

At this point it is important to offer some formal definitions relating to mediumistic activity. According to Klimo (1998) mediumship is best described as a form of 'channelling', which he defines as 'the act of receiving information from paranormal sources'. These sources include: the channel's 'higher self', discarnate human spirits, gods & God, the 'universal mind', group beings, 'ascended masters', non-humans, angels, devas, elementals, plants, animals, and extraterrestrials (ibid., 193-295).

Channels detect the information they receive through a number of activities including clairvoyance (referring to visual imagery 'seen' internally), clairaudience (voices or sounds 'heard' in the channel's mind) and automatisms (such as automatic writing). Most mediums use the first two of these methods and so their ability is usually called 'mental mediumship'. 'Physical mediumship' and 'physical channelling' refer to the manifestation or movement of material objects and to transfiguration (a change in the physical appearance of the channel) (ibid.; Fontana, 2006).

Some channels need to enter an altered state of consciousness (ASC) in order to receive receive information paranormally. Techniques include partial trance, full trance or even a dream state, while others communicate whilst fully conscious (Klimo, 1998).

Introduction

Another distinction between channels and mediums is the nature of the information received and its target audience. Channelled information tends to refer to metaphysics, ageless wisdom, descriptions of non-physical realms, the past and future, subject matter for creative expression, science and technology (ibid.). With this broad remit, some channelled information has been published and received wide distribution. Some of the more popular examples include: Austen, 1938/1993; Bernard, 1985; Carey, 1982; Dowling & Dowling, 1907/2003; Kardec, 1856/2005; Rodergast, 1995; Schuman, 1975 and Swedenborg, 1766/2001.¹

As noted earlier, the sources claimed for channelled communication range from the spirits of animals to those of ascended masters (e.g. Knight, 2001) or even God (e.g. Walsch, 1995). By contrast, the messages conveyed by mediums are nearly always from discarnate relatives, friends, or 'spirit guides' of the medium's 'sitter'. As such, a medium's message - a 'reading' - will usually contain evidence of the identity of the channelled personality with the remainder of the reading offering guidance relating to physical, psychological and spiritual well-being (Klimo, 1998, 173-192). The distinction between mediumship and channelling becomes less clear for mediums who enter a trance state in order to 'connect with spirit'. However, the entities channelled by 'trance mediums' tend not to be 'advanced souls' but spirit guides, relatives and in some cases the spirits of famous people or other well known historical figures.

In popular culture mediums are often described as 'psychics' or 'psychic mediums'. The Spiritualist National Union (SNU) - the largest UK spiritualist organisation - makes a useful distinction between a 'psychic reading' and a 'mediumistic reading' (Kipling, 2005).² The former variety is where a medium 'reads' a sitter's 'mind', 'aura', and/or 'energies' while the latter involves communication with a discarnate entity. While a medium may use both faculties during any specific reading, the distinction is important, since as noted earlier, failure adequately to distinguish between ESP and communication with deceased entities has been an issue in parapsychological research.

Communication with deceased entities is the best known mediumistic practice. However, for many mediums, such communication is often preceded - or accompanied - by another experience known variously as 'spirit drawing close' or 'overshadowing'.³ The state is usually achieved by the medium entering a relaxed state of mind and asking spirit to draw near. Mediums report a sense of physical and/or mental expansion - or merging - with a *presence* which is usually described as loving or warm (Flint, 1971/2000; Kipling, 2005; Pirie, 2002;) Smith's (2004, 165-166) description is typical:

¹ This selection represents some of the more popular channelled literature; a comprehensive database of channelled literature is available at: <http://www.spiritwritings.com/library.html>.

² Vi Kipling is a former Head of Education for the Spiritualist National Union (SNU).

³ The author's experience of overshadowing is described in Appendix I.

Introduction

'I would feel a sense of lightness of mind which would expand, as if I were the aura or light which surrounded my body. My physical limitations no longer applied and I could open my mind to the idea of making a connection with the higher spirit who was waiting to link with me.'

For trance mediums, the overshadowing experience moves beyond a merging to the point where the medium's personal awareness disappears (as in the sleep state) and the entity uses the medium's body to communicate directly. Since the medium is in a sleep-like state, trance mediums are usually unaware of what has been said through them (Kipling, 2005; Pirie, 2002; Walsh, 2006).

Due to the personal nature of their messages, mediums usually work with individuals or couples in private readings, or with small congregations in 'services' at Spiritualist churches. In recent years, an increasing number of 'star mediums' have appeared in the media, attracting audiences numbering in the hundreds (e.g.: in the UK, Gordon Smith and Stephen Holbrook). Similar events, though often featuring physical mediumship - and with more theatricality - were common at the height of Spiritualism's influence (Charet, 1993; Taylor, 1999). Such events characterise two issues that have ensured that mediumship is almost off the radar in transpersonal psychology.

The first is a combination of *authenticity* and *respectability*. The history of modern Spiritualism is littered with incidents of fraudulence (Haynes, 1982) including the events that are generally recognised as leading to the birth of the movement itself in 1848 - the mysterious noises at the home of the Fox sisters in Hydesville, USA. The three sisters claimed that they could communicate with a spirit by tapping out messages. They - and others - witnessed audible responses through which it was established that the spirit was a man who had been murdered in the Fox's house some years before. The case created incredible media interest, attracting the attention of show-business impresario P.T. Barnum who represented and promoted the sisters and their claims. However, the fame and notoriety this created (and the strain of several high profile investigations) drove the sisters into alcoholism. In 1888, Margaret Fox admitted fraud and denounced spiritualism (Fontana, 2006, 94-95).

The second issue is a *lack of a spiritual context or value*. Both William James and Carl Jung - who are regarded as pioneers of transpersonal psychology - focussed upon the *source* of mediumistic communication rather than any personal or spiritual developmental value the phenomenon may offer. James was convinced that post-mortem survival was the least convoluted explanation for the mediumistic experience he witnessed, his studies with Leona Piper leading him to his famous 'white crow' pronouncement: 'If you wish to upset the law that all crows are black . . . it is enough if you prove that one crow is white. My white crow is Mrs. Piper' (Taylor, 1999). Jung was more equivocal, eventually settling on the view that the source of mediumistic communication was the medium's own *unconscious*, though he fully accepted that the nature of some of information communicated could only be explained in paranormal terms. Charet (1993) argues that this issue was crucial in the development of Jung's concept of the *collective unconscious*.

Introduction

The source of mediumistic communication also contributes to the perception that mediumship has no spiritual context or value. As noted earlier, mediums tend not to communicate with 'spiritually evolved souls', but instead with deceased relatives. This 'low' spiritual status is compounded by the apparent triviality of the messages received and their focus on providing evidence of survival (Fontana, 2006). Another factor is that mediums do not connect *directly* with a higher domain, but *indirectly*, via an intermediary.

While some of the messages that mediums communicate are trivial (ibid.), some are not, at least not for the individuals receiving them. Critics who judge mediumistic communication as trivial on the grounds that it is not a direct communication with the divine or that it does not contain 'higher' spiritual truths, risk being accused of spiritual snobbery. It is conceivable that a message from a deceased relative declaring, for example, that death is an illusion and passing on a piece of loving advice could be a spiritually developmental experience for some individuals. It is also worth noting that spiritual entities could be involved in mediating 'higher' or 'direct' experiences.

The emphasis in mediumistic readings upon 'proof of survival', has been evident from the very beginnings of the modern Spiritualist movement (Beard, 1879) which still describes itself as a 'Philosophy, Science and Religion' - religion being, by this definition, the least important aspect. Despite many of the founding members of the SPR investigating mediumship as a way to demonstrate a religious belief in post-mortem survival (Daniels, 2005, 41), the Spiritualist's own conviction that mediums could provide *scientifically* verifiable evidence for post-mortem survival helped to set a *scientific* context for survival research that has gained in strength ever since (Alvarado, 2005; Charet, 1993; Haynes, 1982).

Thus, all parascientific research ignores, completely, any spiritual or religious context despite the fact that such a context is integral to much paranormal experience. This context is evident in the paranormal experiences of many mystics (Daniels, 2005, 40), in the siddhis of Yogis (Grof, 1993, 193) and also in mainstream religions where supernatural events play such an important role (Fontana, 2003, 35).⁴

More evidence can be found in Murphy's (1992) study of 'metanormal human functioning' which reveals a significant spiritual context for most of the abilities he describes, a fact that leads him to propose that metanormal ability is evidence of an evolution of human consciousness to a 'higher', more refined level. Contributors to Grof & Grof's (1989) study of 'spiritual emergencies' note that paranormal activity is frequently associated with crises in spiritual development.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence is found in studies of religious experience. For example, in Alister Hardy's accounts of specifically 'religious experiences' solicited from the general public, the

⁴ Belief in a supernatural reality is one the twelve characteristics of religion as defined by Nielsen *et al* (as noted by Fontana, 2003, 12).

Introduction

majority of reports feature a paranormal element (Hardy, 1979).⁵ The best known and most influential study of religious experience in a psychological context is William James' classic *Varieties of Religious Experiences* (1902/2002), a study in which James famously remarks that:

'Our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question, for they are so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness'. (388)

James is frequently quoted by parapsychologists. There are four examples in Radin (1987) all of which (and the quotation above), are notable for their lack of reference to religion and spirituality, a context which is so evident in James' book and its title. According to Daniels (2005, 41), in stripping out the spiritual and religious context to paranormal experiences, parapsychology offers essentially the same context to paranormal events and experience as mainstream science: the only difference between science and parascience being that the latter believes in the existence of a range of inexplicable experiences that will eventually turn out to be explicable using naturalistic explanations that involve mechanisms that are currently unknown.⁶

1.1.3 The Transpersonal Context

By contrast, a spiritual or religious context is a key focus in transpersonal studies and, as noted earlier, this fact is one of the reasons for its lack of interest in mediumistic activity. In the transpersonal context, the paranormal is accepted as a common feature of spiritual experience and unlike the parasciences, there is no specific attempt to *prove* (in scientific terms) the ontological reality of particular supernatural events, experiences or domains.⁷

Transpersonal studies - including anthropology, art, ecology, etc. (Walsh & Vaughan, 2005, 53) - emerged from transpersonal psychology, which itself grew from the Depth and Humanistic schools of psychology in the 1960s (Fox, 1996, 289-299). Whereas mainstream psychology (and psychiatry) tend to be dismissive of spiritual and paranormal experience, diminishing the meaning and significance of any episodes or even pathologising them (Lukoff, 1998; 2005), the depth and humanistic schools pursue a less clinical, more developmental agenda.

⁵ Hardy (1979, 46-47) notes that '... we are not including in our collection of experiences supposed evidence of human survival of death obtained by messages purporting to come through a spiritualist medium *unless* such a message was a means of giving rise to some significant religious feeling'. Hardy then notes that 239 experiences from the first 3,000 his team received were accepted on the basis that they featured evidence of human survival with religious context but without the involvement of mediums.

⁶ Daniels' characterisation is broadly applicable to the parasciences, but there are some significant exceptions, most notably Fontana (e.g. Fontana & Slack, 2005) Charles Tart (e.g. 2005) both of whom are active in both parapsychology and transpersonal psychology.

⁷ However, there is a significant debate within the transpersonal movement as to whether the existence of some kind of transcendent reality should be *assumed* by transpersonal researchers. Contrasting views are aired in Daniels (2001) and Lancaster (2002). This issue is also part of a broader debate about transpersonal psychology's relationship to mainstream psychology.

Introduction

While acknowledging the possibility that a pathological explanation may be an accurate diagnosis in some instances, Depth and Humanistic psychology are open to the possibility that paranormal and spiritual experiences - which the client may initially interpret as good or bad - could lead to *personal growth*.

Transpersonal psychology sees spiritual experiences (which may or may not feature a paranormal element) as episodes that can engender *personal transformation* specifically a transformation that results in spiritual awakening or spiritual development. In addition to studying transforming experiences in others, many transpersonal psychologists include their own experiences in their research. In fact, personal transformation of the researcher (as well as the subject) is an openly stated goal in transpersonal research (Braud & Anderson, 1998, 5).

In terms of research methodology, transpersonal psychology utilises a pluralistic, multi-perspectival approach that extends the scientific method explicitly to 'honour' first person experience. In terms of acceptability in the wider academic community, this 'extended science' (ibid., 1998), the assumption (by some researchers) of a transcendent reality and the goal of transformation of the researcher are issues that have kept transpersonal psychology out of the American Psychological Association (APA), though the British Psychological Society (BPS) approved a Transpersonal Psychology Section in 1997 (Daniels, 2005, 25).

But what, exactly, does *transpersonal* mean? This is a key question in this study and, as we will see, for transpersonal theory. In literal terms the word *transpersonal* is an adjective that means, beyond (or through) the personal (ibid., 11). The word is also used as a noun - as in 'the transpersonal' - to denote a realm of experience that may or may not be ontologically real.

Over the years the definition of transpersonal has been discussed many times in the literature, most recently in a special (Winter 2005) edition of the *Transpersonal Psychology Review*. According to Ferrer (2002, 16), the most widely used definition of transpersonal is that of Walsh & Vaughan (1993, 203) who suggest that transpersonal experiences are those in which '... the *sense of identity* or self extends beyond (trans) the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche or cosmos' [italics in original].⁸

One of the advantages of Walsh & Vaughan's definition is its metaphysical neutrality. The same applies to the term transpersonal itself. This neutrality - the lack of religious baggage - is for some transpersonalists⁹ like Daniels (2005, 11), a factor in making transpersonal psychology more acceptable to the secular world and to mainstream psychology.¹⁰

⁸ The fact that Walsh & Vaughan define 'transpersonal experience', not 'transpersonal' is for Ferrer (2002, 15-16) evidence of a bias towards what he terms an 'experiential vision' in transpersonal theory.

⁹ This is Ferrer's (2002) rather unattractive, but usefully concise term referring to writers and researchers in the broad range of transpersonally orientated disciplines.

¹⁰ For some in the transpersonal movement, mainstream psychology's acceptability of transpersonal psychology is not important.

Introduction

However, the word transpersonal carries the significant disadvantage that it is relatively unknown outside of the transpersonal disciplines. For this reason the term spiritual is often used as a 'short way' to define the term transpersonal to those outside of the transpersonal community; the 'lengthy way' is to give many examples of transpersonal experiences, processes and events (ibid., 11-12).

An issue that can significantly increase the duration of any attempt at a 'lengthy' description is the level of disagreement within the transpersonal community as to what 'counts' as a transpersonal experience. Experiences of love, empathy, creativity, inspiration, channelling, mediumship, mind-body relationship, psychedelic experience, and the archetypes - are all experiences that are, for some researchers, not necessarily transpersonal. The particular aspect of transpersonal studies in which these disagreements are most apparent is *transpersonal theory*.

Broadly speaking there are two schools of transpersonal theory - the structuralists and those whose models do not feature any structural element. Up until 1980, structure was not a significant element of transpersonal theory; the consensus view being, essentially, the Jungian idea of spiritual growth being a return to a condition lost in the process of growing up (Visser, 2006).

However, in 1980 Ken Wilber published *The Atman Project* (1980/1996) in which he described the *pre/trans fallacy*. Dividing consciousness into three broad categories - *prepersonal*, *personal* and *transpersonal* - Wilber suggested that the unity experienced by the child in the womb is not a state to which the individual returns in transpersonal experiences, but a *prepersonal* stage - a stage lower even than the *personal* where ego structures are developed (Wilber 2000a, 103-120).

Thus for Wilber, the development of consciousness is not circular; it is not a 'romantic' return to the prepersonal (Washburn, 1996), but a progression from prepersonal to personal to transpersonal, where each successive 'higher' stage integrates the previous level (Wilber, 1996/2001, 17-19). Thus, for example, a profound experience of love or openheartedness in which an individual feels another to be part of themselves is, for Wilber not a transpersonal experience but a return to the prepersonal stage of non-differentiation (Wilber, 2000a, 120).

There have been many critiques of this particular view, notably Peggy Wright who suggests that Wilber is caught in a *pre/perm* fallacy - a failure to distinguish between the prepersonal lack of boundaries and the mature permeable boundaries of the connected self (Fisher, 1997, 20). Of more significance here is Wilber's division of the transpersonal into four main levels - the *psychic*, *subtle*, *causal* and *nondual* - a 'holarchy' (as opposed to a hierarchy) with each stage transcending and including the previous level (1995/2000, 635). Figure 1 (below) offers a diagrammatic representation of Wilber's holarchical model.

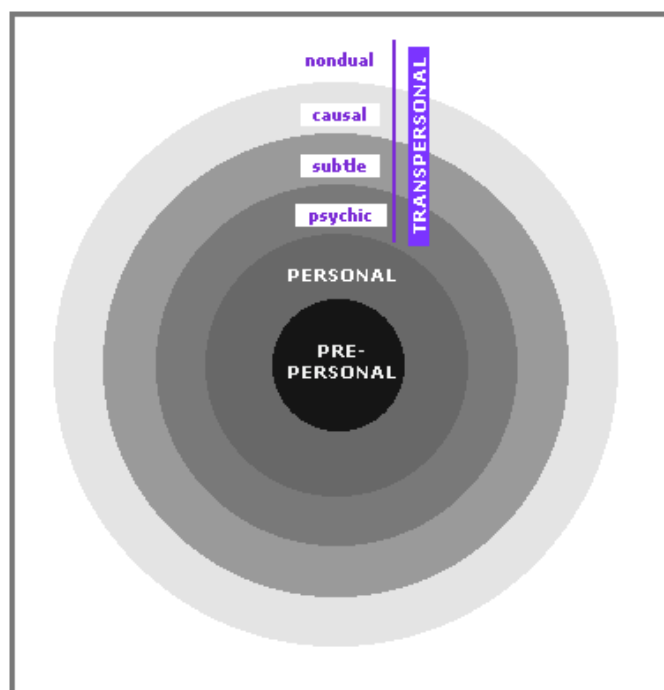


Figure 1 - Wilber's holarchical model of Prepersonal, Personal, and Transpersonal stages

The lowest of the transpersonal stages - the *psychic* (also known as the *low subtle*) is, for Wilber, where paranormal experiences reside. It is:

' . . . the realm of initial transpersonal and mystical awareness' and '. . . often involves a great number of seemingly unrelated phenomena, from paranormal cognitions (e.g. 'astral travel', out-of-the-body experiences) to numerous preliminary meditative states, kundalini awakenings . . . reliving of birth and pre-birth states . . . and temporary identification with nature.' (1995/2000, 635)

Wilber's justification for grouping this seemingly diverse range of experiences is that despite that fact that they move beyond the 'gross/waking realm', they refer, in whole or part to elements of the physical realm - to the 'physiosphere' (ibid.).

The next 'higher' level - the *subtle* (also known as the *high subtle* and which includes and transcends the psychic level) - makes 'few if any referents to the gross realm'. Typical experiences - Wilber tells us - include interior luminocities, sounds, archetypal forms and patterns, extremely subtle blissful currents and cognitions (ibid.)

Continuing his definitions in terms of their *predominant* referent (ibid., 636) [Wilber's emphasis], Wilber notes that the *causal* level '. . . has no gross or subtle level references; it has no references at all except its own self-existing Emptiness.' He continues: '. . . the *nondual* is the identity of Emptiness and of all Form so its referents are whatever is arising at the moment' [italics added]. We will return to the causal and nondual levels in the following subsection (which focus upon

Introduction

mediumship in the context of mysticism). For now it is important to focus upon the *psychic* level into which Wilber places 'paranormal cognitions'.

Wilber does not offer much in the way of detail about exactly which paranormal experiences may or may not be included. This is in contrast to Grof (1993, 1998), a non-structuralist who, in addition to arguing that perinatal experiences are part of the transpersonal (not the prepersonal), is very specific about the types of paranormal experiences that are relevant to the transpersonal. Grof's list of 'transpersonal experiences of a paranormal kind' is included here as Figure 2. Interestingly, Grof's list includes mediumistic experience but excludes the two paranormal experiences that Wilber includes in the latter's psychic level of the transpersonal - out-of-the-body experiences (OBE) and astral travelling.

Past incarnation experiences
Psychic phenomena involving the transcendence of time
Spiritistic and mediumistic experiences
Energetic phenomena of the subtle body (chakras)
Experiences of animal spirits
Encounters with spirit guides and suprahuman beings
Visits to other universes and meetings with their inhabitants
Synchronistic links between consciousness and matter
Supranormal physical feats
Spiritistic phenomena and physical mediumship
Recurrent spontaneous psychokinesis (poltergeist)
Unidentified flying objects (UFO phenomena)
Ceremonial magic
Healing and hexing
Siddhis
Laboratory psychokinesis

**Figure 2 - Grof's transpersonal experiences of a paranormal kind (Grof, 1988, cited in Daniels, 2005, 48).
No hierarchy or ordering is implied by list position.**

Wilber does not make an explicit reference to mediumistic experience in his description of paranormal experience at the psychic level. However, using Wilber's own criteria - that the psychic level contains experiences that refer, in whole or part, to elements of the 'physiosphere' - it is reasonable to suggest that since discarnate beings lack, by definition, physical substance, mediumistic activity should be placed above the psychic (low subtle) level, in the (high) subtle. However, it is likely that Wilber would argue that since discarnate entities communicating through mediums focus upon the progress of the medium (or the sitter) in the physical world, the predominant referent *is* the physiosphere and therefore the correct placement is the psychic level.

Introduction

An interesting issue that emerges at this point is the fact that most spiritistic traditions (such as Shamanism) - and much channelled communications - talk of the existence of 'lower' entities in the spirit world, some of which are actively malign and working against 'higher' purposes.¹¹ Wilber has not written about this issue specifically, so it is unclear whether he would concede that transpersonal levels are home to entities harbouring malign intent. However, Wilber (1997/2001) does state that: 'All the good and all the evil, the very best and the very worst, the upright and the degenerate - each and all are radically perfect manifestations of Spirit precisely as they are'. Thus it is reasonable to suggest that Wilber may take the view that malign entities may exist within transpersonal structures (as he defines them). The issue of unsavoury spirit entities is important in the consideration of mediumship and spiritistic phenomena, however, for reasons of space and to maintain the focus of the investigation, it will receive no further attention here.

Another writer with views on the relationship between the paranormal and the transpersonal is John Rowan, who makes a distinction between transpersonal and *extrapersonal* experiences (1996, 10-11, 210). Into this latter category Rowan places *all* 'paranormal' capabilities. Thus Wilber's first truly transpersonal stage - the psychic level - is for Rowan extrapersonal, not transpersonal. This statement was put to John in an e-mail, to which he responded:

'I am afraid I have been a bit unclear about this. The extrapersonal is not NECESSARILY part of the transpersonal. Many of the gifts involved can be wild talents which have not been earned in any way. In such cases they are not part of the transpersonal, but something else. However, some of them can be earned through spiritual development, in which case they are called siddhis and are part of the transpersonal, usually at the Psychic level.' (Rowan, 2005)

Thus Rowan makes a distinction between paranormal experiences that are earned through spiritual development (which he believes are therefore genuinely transpersonal) and those that were not earned in this way and are, therefore, extrapersonal. It is unclear whether Rowan would accept that 'gifts' could be 'earned' in a previous life (which many spiritistic traditions would contend). The view taken here is that Rowan's position is somewhat arbitrary.

Daniels (2002, 55) makes a distinction between *transformative* and *transportative* paranormal experiences (the latter term borrowed from Richard Schechner with respect to performers and audiences being temporarily transported to another world by a dramatic performance). For Daniels, *all* paranormal experiences - which would include mediumship - are only transportative, no matter how extraordinary or ecstatic. However, should these experiences result in transformation, they achieve transpersonal status.

Though transformation is a key aim of the transpersonal movement, Walsh & Vaughan's (1993, 203) definition for transpersonal experience does not explicitly require that an experience be transformational. It is also possible that some transpersonal experiences about which there is no

¹¹ It is worth noting that for some religions, particularly evangelical Christianity, *all* mediumistic and spiritistic activity is inherently malign and working against God's purpose.

Introduction

contention - such as an experience of unity with nature or God - might not necessarily be transformative.

This complexity is one of several examples discussed in this section in an attempt to demonstrate the level of dispute about the place of paranormal - and particularly mediumistic experience - within transpersonal theory. The following subsection examines the place of mediumistic experience within the context of mysticism.

1.1.4 The Mystical Context

The word mysticism can be traced to the Greek word *mystikos* meaning an 'an initiate' of the Eleusinian Mysteries of ancient Greece. However, since the word *mystery* emerges from the same source, it is perhaps unsurprising that in popular usage *mysticism* (and its derivatives) have come to refer to a range of 'mysterious' beliefs and phenomena including the experiences of saints, hallucinations, drug-induced or schizophrenic visions, the paranormal, Eastern & New Age philosophies and Spiritualism. Since some items in this list are judged by many as 'flaky', *mystical* has also come to be used pejoratively, for example to point out confused metaphysical speculation (Forman, 1990, 5; Daniels, 2005, 234).

For the disciplines that take a scholarly approach to mysticism, the attitude adopted is far more reverent and the experiences studied more narrowly defined. However, as we will see, the issue of which experiences are truly mystical is as controversial for scholars of mysticism, as is the question of what constitutes a transpersonal experience for transpersonal theorists. In the discipline of the Psychology of Religion (e.g. Hood, 1996), mysticism is a niche area of study where the word *mystical* refers almost exclusively to the sublime experiences of saints and spiritual geniuses, particularly those associated with the Judaeo-Christian religious traditions, since, unlike transpersonal psychology, the Psychology of Religion emerges from an essentially Western perspective.¹²

James (1902/2000) was also interested in mystical experience from a psychological perspective, but his focus was broader than the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and the experiences he accepted as mystical went beyond those of well know Saints and other spiritual figures to include mediumistic and other paranormal experiences.

For Underhill (1911/2006) - author of a classic text on *Mysticism* from a broadly Christian perspective - James made a category error:

¹² The same is true of the discipline Philosophy of Religion, a largely Anglo-American grouping which concerns itself with philosophical analyses of concepts or tenets central to the monotheistic Western religions and especially to Christianity (Jordan, 1995, 759). John Hick is the notable exception to this rule; he has attempted to encourage religious pluralism within the Philosophy of Religion community noting that the focus on Christianity means that they '... are really doing philosophical theology rather than philosophy of religion' (Hick, 2001, 7). This orientation is one of the reasons why mysticism receives little attention in the literature of the Philosophy of Religion (Hick excluded). By contrast, Transpersonal Psychology is accused of a bias towards Eastern traditions, for which Ferrer (2002) offers convincing evidence.

Introduction

'What then do we really mean by mysticism? A word which is impartially applied to the performances of mediums and the ecstasies of the saints, to menticulture and sorcery, dreamy poetry and mediaeval art, to prayer and palmistry, the doctrinal excesses of Gnosticism, and the tepid speculations of the Cambridge Platonists even, according to William James, to the higher branches of intoxication, soon ceases to have any useful meaning. Its employment merely confuses the inexperienced student, who ends with a vague idea that every kind of supersensual theory and practice is somehow mystical.' (1911/2006, 72)

For Underhill, mediumship is not a mystical experience and it is clear from her use of the word 'performance', that she considers mediumistic experience to be fraudulent. Her own formulation for genuine mysticism is offered in the proceeding paragraph, where she continues:

'Hence the need of fixing, if possible, its true characteristics: and restating the fact that Mysticism, in its pure form, is the science of ultimates, the science of union with the Absolute, and nothing else, and that the mystic is the person who attains to this union, not the person who talks about it. Not to *know about* but to *Be*, is the mark of the real initiate.' (ibid.)

There are several features of interest in Underhill's characterisation, but the one about which there is most scholarly agreement is that of *union* - the *unitive* experience. For Stace (1960/1987), unity is the central experience of mysticism (Burris, 1999). Stace also makes a phenomenological distinction between *introvertive* and *extravertive* mysticism, the latter being an experience of unity with nature that is similar to Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness* (1901/1998). By introvertive mysticism, Stace is referring to experiences of finding unity with the self/Self, or with God.

In addition to unity, Stace notes another eight phenomenological characteristics for mystical experience. Since Stace's characterisations have proven to be popular (and are used as the basis of a research instrument that is utilised in this thesis), all nine criteria are listed and described in Figure 3.

Category	Brief Description
Unity	Unity, the most important characteristic of the mystical experience, is divided into internal and external types, which are different ways of experiencing an undifferentiated unity. The major difference is that the internal type finds unity through an 'inner world' <i>within</i> the experiencer while the external type finds unity through the external world outside the experiencer.
Transcendence of Time and Space	This category refers to loss of the usual sense of time and space. This means clock time but may also be one's personal sense of his past, present, and future.
Deeply Felt Positive Mood	The most universal elements (and, therefore, the ones that are most essential to the definition of this category) are joy, blessedness, and peace. The unique character of these feelings in relation to the mystical experience is the intensity .

Introduction

Sense of Sacredness	This category refers to the sense of sacredness that is evoked by the mystical experience. The sacred is here broadly defined as that which a person feels to be of special value and capable of being profaned.
Objectivity and Reality	This category has two interrelated elements: (1) insightful knowledge or illumination felt at an intuitive, non-rational level and gained by direct experience; and (2) the authoritative nature of the experience, or the certainty that such knowledge is truly real, in contrast to the feeling that the experience is a subjective delusion.
Persisting Positive Changes in Attitude and Behaviour	the positive, lasting effects of the experience and the resulting changes in attitude. These changes are divided into four groups: (1) toward self, (2) toward others, (3) toward life, and (4) toward the mystical experience itself.
Alleged Ineffability	In spite of attempts to relate or write about the mystical experience, mystics insist either that words fail to describe it adequately or that the experience is beyond words.
Transiency	Transiency refers to duration, and means the temporary nature of the mystical experience in contrast to the relative permanence of the level of usual experience.
Paradoxicality	Accurate descriptions and even rational interpretations of the mystical experience tend to be logically contradictory when strictly analysed.

Figure 3 - Stace's (1960) nine phenomenological criteria for mystical experience (Summaries modified from Burris, 1999).

Of Stace's nine characteristics, *ineffability* and *transience* were also identified by James (1902/2000). The latter's *noetic quality* is broadly equivalent to Stace's *objectivity & reality*. James' fourth characteristic - *passivity* (meaning an individual's will is latent during the experience) - was not identified by Stace. On the other hand, James' list is notable for the absence of the 'key' experience of unity.

By contrast scholars Happold (1970/1990) and Zaehner (1961/1969) agree with Stace that unity is the defining characteristic of mystical experience and offer their own phenomenological distinctions. Zaehner identifies *nature mysticism* (unity with nature, comparable to Stace's extravertive mysticism), *monastic mysticism* (experiences of unity with the individual's own self or spirit and comparable with Stace's introvertive mysticism) and *theistic mysticism* (a loving communion with God). These are broadly equivalent to Happold's *nature-mysticism*, *soul-mysticism* and *God-mysticism* respectively. However, Zaehner creates a hierarchy for his categories which he bases on moral value and significance. As a Roman Catholic, it is perhaps unsurprising that *theistic mysticism* is his 'highest' mystical experience, followed by *monastic* and *nature mysticism* respectively (Daniels, 2005, 241-242).

Though Wilber's *psychic*, *subtle*, *causal* and *nondual* were described earlier as *transpersonal* levels or stages of consciousness, Wilber (e.g. 1995/2000, 635) also refers to these stages as *psychic*, *subtle*, *causal* and *nondual* stages of *mysticism*; in other words Wilber makes no distinction

Introduction

between transpersonal and mystical.¹³ Thus, since mediumistic activity and paranormal experiences are part of Wilber's concept of the transpersonal, these experiences must also be, for Wilber, mystical, albeit at his 'lowest' mystical level.

As noted earlier, Wilber's model is hierarchical (or, to be fair to Wilber, it is *holarchical*) and Wilber's justification for the ordering of his mystical stages is not moral value, but the fact that each higher level is more inclusive and encompassing than the last, since each level transcends and includes its predecessor (Ferrer, 2002, 104). Whereas Zaehner places theistic mystical experience as the 'highest', Wilber places an experience of the Godhead at the *subtle* level, the *causal* (equivalent to Zaehner's monastic mysticism/Happold's soul-mysticism) and *nondual* being the next two higher stages.¹⁴ For his critics, Wilber's placement of theistic mysticism at the *subtle* level and his view that the nondual is the 'highest' stage are a function of his preference for the spiritual practices of Buddhism and certain forms of Hinduism, particularly the Dzogchen, Zen and Advaita (Daniels, 2005, 223).

This accusation of bias and many other objections are aired by the contributors to Rothberg & Kelly (1998)¹⁵ with some (e.g. Kelly, Grof, McDonald-Smith, Rothberg and Washburn) focussing upon Wilber's insistence that the *sequence* in which individuals evolve through the mystical/transpersonal levels in his structural model is *invariant*. By this Wilber means that an individual's consciousness becomes fully established at each mystical level - psychic, subtle, causal, nondual - in that precise and unvarying sequence, though a peak (or 'peek') experience of the higher stages is possible at any time (Wilber, 2000a, 15; 1996, 183).

As Rothberg (Rothberg & Kelly, 1998) and Ferrer (2002, 106-107) point out, Wilber offers no evidence to support his theory of sequence invariance; an odd omission considering the significance of the idea to Wilber's model.

Related to this point is the fact that Wilber has also not provided much detail about the experiences typical of the *psychic* stage.¹⁶ As Wilber claims to be 'permanently established' at the nondual level, the highest stage in his model (Wilber, 2000b)¹⁷ and since the developmental path to the nondual is sequence invariant, it is reasonable to argue that Wilber must have experienced *all* the mystical/transpersonal stages in his model. He is, it could be argued, ideally placed to offer full descriptions of any of the various stages, including the psychic. Wilber's answer is that ' . . .

¹³ By so doing, Wilber's model becomes relevant to - and must be considered by - scholars of mysticism.

¹⁴ Wilber believes that higher stages may yet be disclosed as humanity evolves (Wilber, 2000a).

¹⁵ The dedication of an entire book to Wilber's structuralist model of the transpersonal is an indication of his impact and influence in transpersonal psychology. The importance of Wilber's model explains its central role in this research.

¹⁶ Wilber has written far more about the higher stages, particularly the causal and the nondual.

¹⁷ At this nondual state of consciousness, Wilber claims that his awareness is continuous even in dreaming and deep sleep. He notes that drinking alcohol can lead to interruptions in this continual awareness (Wilber, 2000b).

Introduction

somebody passing through the psychic (or any other level, for that matter) would not be expected to experience *all* of the phenomena that are potentially disclosed at that level' (Wilber, 1995/2000, 636). This statement makes Wilber's case even more difficult to justify and his critics' call to offer more corroboration is fully justified.

Having had both mediumistic experience and an episode that fits into the category of *nature mysticism*, Medium Gordon Smith (2004, 218-219) offers evidence that seems to corroborate a hierarchy of experience. At a low point in his life, Smith went out into the countryside:

'I sat alone at the side of a large waterfall, my head slumped, and asked out loud: "What am I all about?" . . . then, . . . without looking I could describe every stone that the water was rippling over. I was seeing every blade of grass around me individually, yet without looking at any of them. A sense of calm ran through me like nothing I had ever felt before in my life. Suddenly I was alive - awake to the life around me and the life that was in me. I felt connected to everything that was alive. Everything was a part of me and I was a part of it. . . . I was conscious of life not phenomena. I *felt* alive, as if this was the real me - a me that had always existed, but had never been able to come to the surface.' [italics in original].

He continues:

'This was one of the most amazing feelings that I had ever experienced greater than seeing spirits or watching inanimate objects fly around a room. . . . All of the times when I had tried to meditate and thought that I had achieved a state of spiritual ecstasy simply paled by comparison'. (ibid.)

Smith judges his experience of nature mysticism to be a spiritually 'higher' experience than mediumship, a fact that would not surprise Happold, Rowan, Underhill or Zaehner, all of whom would not count mediumistic experience as genuinely transpersonal. While Smith's experience seems to support a hierarchical structure, it argues against the hierarchical *sequence* of Wilber's model, since Wilber places mediumistic experience and nature mysticism at the same mystical/transpersonal stage - the *psychic*.

From the perspective of social constructionism, the disagreements about the ordering of hierarchical structures in transpersonal/mystical experience is evidence in support of their thesis. As Blackmore (1993) has argued with respect to studies of religious and spiritual encounters in Near Death Experiences (NDEs), Christians will tend to see Christ and Buddhists will see Buddha. This constructivist view is one of three positions identified by Daniels (2005, 238-239) in the context of mystical experience.

The *constructivist* argues that mystical experiences are all interpreted through personal, social and cultural contexts and that there is no common core to mystical experiences; into this category Daniels places Stace and Underhill. The second and opposing view is the *essentialist* position which states that mystical experiences are interpretations of what is essentially the same type (or group) of experiences - a view with which Katz (e.g. 1992) would agree. A third, unnamed view argues for a middle position that acknowledges that interpretation is a strong influence, but that there commonalities at the core of mystical experiences.

Introduction

Daniels favours the third position, adapting Hick's phrase *fundamental Reality* to define the commonality at the core of mystical experiences to his preferred formulation - the *Real* - which, for Daniels, '. . . encompasses various religious and non-religious interpretations and allows for experiences that may be of a 'fundamental' but not necessarily 'ultimate' Reality.' (2005, 235-236).

Daniels goes on to define mystical experience as 'the individual's direct experience of a relationship to a fundamental reality' (ibid., 235.) and notes that mystical experience is not 'precisely coterminous with transpersonal experience although there is much experiential overlap between them' (ibid., 237). With this broader view of what constitutes mystical experience - a view as broad as the most inclusive of the models of transpersonal experience, Daniels creates his own model of mystical experience.

Called the '5 x 5' model, Daniels includes the ideas of most of the scholars mentioned here and several others. These include Otto (1917/1950 in Daniels, 2005, 245-250) who coined the term *numinous* - from the Latin for God (numen) - to characterise a direct experience of the holy or sacred without ethical or rational aspects. Otto's definition allows for mediumistic and other paranormal phenomena though Otto was not focussed on these in his writing. Daniels also incorporates Rawlinson's (1997 in Daniels 2005, 246) two 'forms' of mysticism. These are defined as *hot* (that which is other than oneself and has a life of its own, including experiences such as revelation and grace) and *cool* (experiences of the self that are quiet and still). Hot forms of mysticism are therefore similar to Otto's idea of *numinous* experience and cool is broadly comparable to Zaehner's monastic and Stace's introvertive mysticism.

Finally, the 5 x 5 model also incorporates *social mysticism* such as that described by Welwood (1991, in Daniels, 2005, 252) in which the most profound state of person-to-person intimacy is a state called *Union* in which an individual experiences a longing to overcome separateness and experience a total union with another human being. Welwood notes this impulse is more appropriately directed towards the absolute, therefore the experience is likely to be psychologically unhealthy.

The '5 x 5' in the title of Daniels model refers to five *Contexts* and five *Modes* of mystical experience, the former relating to what is experienced as Real or *where* the Real is to be found, and the latter being the individual's relationship to the Real. Figure 4 (blow) summarises the five Modes and Contexts.

CONTEXTS (What is experienced as <i>Real</i> ; where the <i>Real</i> is to be found)	MODES (An individual's relationship to the <i>Real</i>)
Gods(s) or Divine Being(s) A transcendental, theistic, supernatural or 'hot' view of the Real.	Numinous The Real is encountered as a 'wholly Other' presence. The main characteristics of such numinous mystical experience are feelings of awe, fear, wonderment or fascination . In focusing only on the experience of <i>presence</i> , Daniels uses the term 'numinous' in a much more precise and limited sense than Otto, for whom the numinous extends to all forms of mystical experience, including the unitive.
Nature or Cosmos The Real as manifest in the physical and living world.	Dialogic The Real is no longer the 'wholly other' of numinous experience (i.e., simply <i>there</i> as an object of awe, fear or worship). Instead, a channel of direct contact and communication between the Other and the self is experienced, so that dialogue becomes possible. Such communication generally uses the distant senses (sight and hearing) - hence mystical experiences in this mode tend to take the form of visions or voices.
Social Being or Community The Real in the 'warm' realm of human relationships, society or inter-being.	Synergic The Other is experienced as very close to the self, so that it can be known using the near senses (touch and taste). There is also a basic similarity between self and Other, a shared nature, that brings a sense of co-operation, mutual understanding and emotional support. Fundamentally the relationship is experienced as warm, friendly and familial.
Psyche or Mind The monistic experience of Self or Soul, but to the experience of the Real in the realm of mental phenomena (archetypes, images, thoughts, feelings, etc.).	Unitive In unitive experience the self and Other become <i>One together</i> , resulting in the experience of a mystical communion or total intimate knowledge of and participation in each Other's Being. This is different from nondual experience because, in unitive experience, the Reality of the Other (as Other) is implicitly recognised - indeed it is honoured and celebrated. The imagery of sexual union is an often-used and helpful analogy or metaphor for the unitive relationship (e.g., the 'spiritual marriage' of St Teresa of Avila).
Self / Soul or Monad The Real is at the centre or core of one's own self (Soul or Spirit) or the seat of consciousness.	Nondual This is based on the experience of <i>identity</i> rather than of communion or union (cf. Stace, 1960; Wainwright, 1981). Here the distinction between subject and object breaks down totally, so that there is no experience of anything 'Other' from the self. Instead, everything arises as the self, resulting in a simple but powerful awareness of Being, or the experience of just This. In Rawlinson's (1997) model, this corresponds to 'cool'.

Figure 4 - Daniels' Modes and Contexts of Mystical Experience (2005, 256-258).

Introduction

When Contexts and Modes are arranged as a 5 by 5 matrix (as in Figure 5 below), each intersection defines a distinct variety of mystical experience, with twenty-five in total. These range from the coolest Context - *I (Self/Soul)* - in the hottest Mode: *Numinous* [bottom left hand box], to the hottest Context - *Thou (God)* - in the coolest mode: *Nondual* [upper right]. Daniels is keen to point out that his arrangement of hot to cool in both Mode and Context should not be taken to signify any hierarchical ordering of experience.

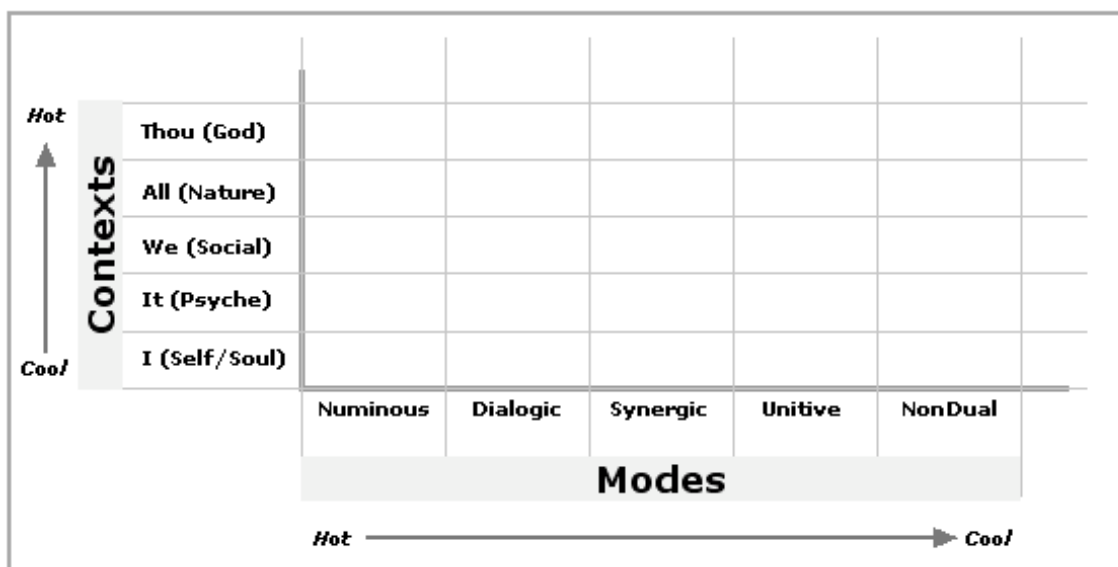


Figure 5 - Daniels' '5 x 5' model of mystical experience (Modified from Daniels, 2005, 254-255).

As the most inclusive model of mystical experience, Daniels' '5 x 5' system should be able to accommodate the characterisation of mediumistic experience, in which case, which Contexts and Modes are most appropriate?

Since mediums communicate with 'spirits', it would be reasonable to assume that mediumistic experience could be characterised as being *We (Social)* in Context. Since mediums engage in a dialogue with spirit entities, a *dialogical* Mode seems appropriate. However, as noted earlier, mediumistic experience can involve 'overshadowing' in which the characterisation of Context and Mode is not as straightforward. From the personal experience of overshadowing (described in Appendix One), a *Numinous* Mode certainly fits. Mediums often describe a *merging* with spirit during overshadowing which suggests the possibility of a Unitive Mode. In my experience of overshadowing, my sense of *presence* and *awareness* seemed to be expanding; the limitations of my awareness seemed to transcend both my physical body and my mind. However, I would not, with total confidence, be able to assign to this experience a Unitive Mode.

Since unity is for most scholars, the key mystical experience, and since the overshadowing experience seems to have been overlooked by scholars of mysticism, the view taken here is that research into overshadowing experiences is worthy of further investigation.

1.2 Research Hypothesis & Questions

In the previous subsections we have seen that both transpersonal psychologists and scholars of mysticism seem to be concerned with similar experiences and therefore for some researchers (on the transpersonal side at least) there is little or no distinction between the two - e.g. Daniels (2005) and Wilber (1995/2000) respectively.

Secondly, we have seen that there is considerable debate about what constitutes a transpersonal or mystical experience, particularly with respect to the broad (and often ill-defined) category of paranormal experience used by these disciplines. There are also differences of opinion about the existence of structures in both transpersonal theory (Wilber, *ibid.*) and in mystical experience (Zaehner, 1961/1969) and where these structures are posited, disagreements about their hierarchical sequence. We have also seen that in order to accommodate a diversity of opinion, the most popular definition of transpersonal is very broad while definitions of mysticism vary according to the major discipline or background of the scholar utilising the term.

With respect to mediumship, it has been noted that a significant mediumistic experience of 'overshadowing' has not been considered in transpersonal psychology or by scholars of mysticism. It has also been demonstrated that key players in transpersonal theory and in studies of mysticism take the view that mediumistic experience is either not genuinely transpersonal/mystical, or it is a *lower level* of transpersonal/mystical experience.

If either of the latter two hypotheses are valid, they should, in theory at least, be testable. However, as both hypotheses refers to subjective evaluations of subjective experience, there is no possibility of any definitive 'scientific' proof in such an endeavour. A psychological approach to the testing of subjective experience is to analyse collections of subjective evaluations, look for similarities and from these posit a list of characteristics that seem to contribute towards a particular 'construct'. The list of characteristics is then 'operationalised' into an assessment instrument, typically a questionnaire. Since the answers to questionnaires can be coded numerically, it is then possible to apply a range of statistical operations and test for patterns and correlations that are statistically valid within a given confidence level.

While acknowledging that quantitative methods are '. . . not suitable for accessing and understanding transpersonal experience directly', MacDonald *et al* (1995, 172) believe they should be viewed as tools that '. . . can be used to explore the "expressions" of such experiences.' In a deliberate attempt to seed such explorations, MacDonald *et al* (1995, 1999a, 1999b) produced an exhaustive survey of thirty measures of transpersonal constructs.

One of these thirty measures - Hood (1975) - describes an attempt to measure a construct called *mystical experience* which is based on eight of Stace's (1960) nine phenomenological criteria for mystical experience described in Figure 3. Hood refers to these eight criteria as *Dimensions*. (Paradoxicality is the criteria that is excluded).

Introduction

Respondents achieve an M-Scale score of between 32 and 160, higher scores suggesting a greater level of mystical experience. Scores can also be calculated for two 'Factors' - General Mysticism and Religious Interpretation (the 'Two Factor Solution') - and for each of the eight Dimensions.

Reflecting upon the M-Scale in relation to models of transpersonal and mystical experience that posit a hierarchical sequence, the following two hypotheses are proposed:

1. If structuralists are correct, it is reasonable to hypothesise that a group of individuals who are experienced in a spiritual practice designed specifically to produce 'higher' levels of mystical experience (such as meditation) should achieve higher mean M-Scale scores than a group that are not.
2. If mediumistic experience is *not* a mystical experience, or if it is a *lower order* of mystical experience; and if *unity* is the key mystical experience, it is reasonable to hypothesise that a group of experienced mediums would achieve a lower mean M-scale score and a lower mean score for Dimension 2 (*Unifying Quality*) than a group of experienced meditators.

Assuming that these hypothesis can be operationalised by administering the M-Scale to groups of experienced Mediums and Meditators, the two research questions that arise from these two hypotheses are:

1. Will a group of experienced meditators achieve a higher mean M-Scale score (at a statistically significant level) than a group of experienced mediums?
2. Will a group of experienced mediums achieve a lower mean M-Scale score (at a statistically significant level) than a group of meditators in Dimension 2 (Unifying Quality) of the M-Scale?

Underlying these research questions are a number of assumptions, not least the issue of whether the M-Scale is measuring a valid construct and if the construct it measures relates in a meaningful way to hierarchical models of mystical and transpersonal experience. A full discussion of justifications for - and objections against - the validity of the research hypothesis and research questions is included here in Section 4.0. This discussion is informed by a number of semi-structured interviews that were carried out with a selection of eleven respondents. The following section describes the methodology utilised to operationalise the research questions and the criteria used for selecting respondents for follow-up interviews.

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