
WHAT IS HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY?

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by

Anthony Crouch

From Human Potential to Holistic Health

The central theme of Humanistic Psychology is the development of "human potential". Today this movement has become directly associated with the call for "holism", for the ending of Cartesian dualism and the reintegration of mind with body - reason with feeling. There is thus an implicit assumption that "humanistic" and "holistic" are synonymous terms. In one sense - that of their common usage - perhaps they are, but their origins are somewhat different. The term "humanistic" derives from the European Renaissance of Greek art and thought and holds as its central tenet the "Greatness Of Man" and the belief in the rightness of appropriating nature to the ends of Man. Out of this vision Cartesian body-mind duality, scientific reductionism and the industrial revolution developed.

The word "holism", based on the Greek word for wholeness, was coined by Jan Smuts in 1926 with the publication of his book "Holism and Evolution". His concept elaborates the notion of a sequence of "increasingly complex integrations" through which evolution progresses.

Since the twenties the idea of holism has been expanded - initially through ecology, cybernetics, systems theory and philosophical holism and more recently and dramatically through the "holistic health" movement. It is through the latter that Humanistic Psychology has come to be directly associated with holism.

The holistic health movement today has many diverse roots and strands but its central theme is the integration of mind, body, emotions and spirit. This new vision of "health" exploded into prominence in the USA during the middle 70's (in Britain we are experiencing the same phenomenon a decade later). The American Holistic Medical Association described this new vision as,

"A state of well being in which an individual's body, mind, emotions and spirit are in tune with the natural, cosmic and social environment"

In so doing it shifted the criteria for "health" into the realm of study and practice originated by Maslow as Humanistic (and later "Transpersonal") Psychology. The idea of "holistic integration and attune-

ment" has always been a major theme of the human potential movement and was implicit within Maslow's concept of "self-actualised creativeness" and Rogers' "fully functioning person" both of which Maslow explicitly discusses in relation to "health" well before the rise of the holistic health movement (Maslow, A.H. "Toward a Psychology of Being" Penguin 1968). In fact, the above definition of holistic health could well be a description of the goal of Humanistic Psychology.

Whole health practitioners have drawn heavily on ideas and practices that originated in Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology. John Travis, for example, founder of the "Wellness" movement, utilises 85% Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology and 15% basic exercises and nutrition. Few, however, within the holistic health movement are aware of this debt and may even be unaware of Humanistic Psychology at all. Travis, in contrast, acknowledges the fundamental importance of the Humanistic tradition (see Travis, J.W. and Ryan, R.S. "Wellness Workbook" Ten Speed Press 1981).

Is Humanistic Psychology Holistic?

The question I wish to pose, however, is this - "Can Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology be described as holistic?" Has the H.P. movement implemented its advocacy of holism - for the reintegration of mind with body, emotions with spirit, rational with intuitive, masculine with feminine (etc.) in any fundamental sense? My argument is that the movement has quite a distance to go and that two basic criteria must be reached

before the tradition deserves the term "holistic".

Firstly, there is a need to expand the areas of study and interest that reside within the remit of what could now be termed "Health Psychology". Secondly, practitioners must develop the art of "balanced practice". In the latter half of this essay I shall present a simple sketch of what such a Health Psychology might look like but firstly let us examine the question of why holism has not yet been achieved, in any real sense, by the Humanistic and Transpersonal movement.

One of the problems that arises with advocates of holism is simply that it is all too easy to shout "Devil!" and use the word "holistic" as a means for attacking "Reason", "Science", "Masculinity", "Materialism" or the "Left Brain". Unfortunately, such an approach only serves to maintain and exacerbate the imbalances that exist - creating a personal enantiodrama (conversion into its opposite) rather than an "artful balance".

At root, the problem with the quest for holism is simply that we are all fragmented - that we are all part of the "sickness of the Wasteland" (as in the Grail myths). Facing this fact is much more difficult than creating a scapegoat. However, blaming the "sickness" serves only to maintain our imbalance, our Wasteland and our own fragmentation. Even if we succeed in this difficult act of self-awareness (the realisation that "I too am sick"), the problem still remains - if we are all a part of the Wasteland, how can we know what is "Health"?

Contemplate, for a moment or two, what would a balanced, healthy, holistic homo sapiens ("wise" being) look like? Even more difficult - what would an holistic way of knowing BE like?

I have no simple answers to these questions up my sleeve. I do have, however, certain memories of feeling much healthier (in the holistic sense) - of feeling organically whole and unfragmented - and I am confident that many readers have theirs. These memories feed my longing and my search for "holistic health", "self-actualised creativeness", "human potential" or "Grail". Like Perceval in the Grail myths, however, I believe my experiences were chanced upon in the beautiful "foolishness" of youth, before I digested the fragmenting fruits of everyday Western life. My memories remain, however, as a source of inspiration.

Our culture cannot return, however, to the state of organic wholeness that existed in societies enveloped by Mother Nature. We have digested the fragmenting fruits of our analytic consciousness and cannot go back in time. We can, however, continue the development of our consciousness and seek to develop a conscious holism - an awareness and use of the varied capacities of our whole being. To do so will also necessitate the development of an ability to live in balance with our fellow humans and our natural environment. In fact there is, I suggest, little choice in the matter - conscious development or unconscious destruction?

But how can we create, within the contemporary world, practical means for the development of holistic ways of knowing, being and creating - practical means for the development of holistic health? I have come to a very simple conclusion. We need to consciously develop "balance" between necessary complementary elements, between the composites of the integrated whole that human beings need to become if they are to be "healthy".

Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology has been missing this central holistic theme. The situation continues to arise therefore, where a practitioner is advocating integration of mind-and-body but within her/his actual practice concern is specialised into one or two regions of human being (e.g. emotional tension). Unfortunately, such an emphasis is simply not holism but reductionism (the reduction of an integrated whole to one element of the whole). A practitioner of Health Psychology could not, by his or her nature, be a specialist of any area of human being. The only "specialism" could be in the ability to nurture balance itself. Favouring certain aspects of human wholeness is to neglect others with the result that energy and attention develop imbalances within the practitioner and his/her practice. The practitioner of Health Psychology must therefore be versed in the variety of human "being". This would encompass not only the wide variety of mind, emotion and spirit that is traditionally within the remit of Humanistic and Transpersonal

Psychology but also "body". Patterns of eating, the care of internal organs, movement patterns, muscular-postural activity and

muscular tension - realms traditionally within the remit of medicine - are now to be included within "Health Psychology".

The Circle of Health

Energy (spirals):

- 1. Energy of awareness
- 5. Creative energy
- 9. Energy flow

Mind (triangles):

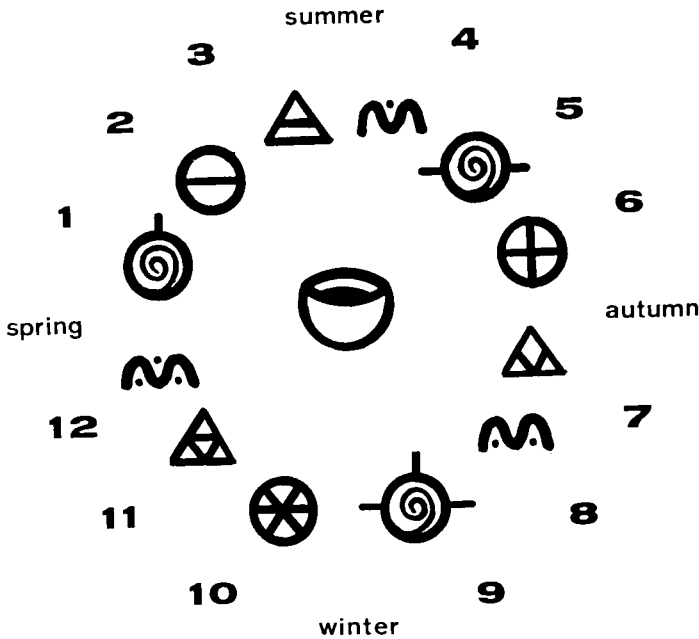
- 3. Learning mind
- 7. Organising mind
- 11 Talking mind

Body (circles):

- 2. External body
- 6. Internal body
- 10 Moving body

Emotions (waves):

- 4. Emotions of relationships
- 8. Emotions of life
- 12. Emotional imagination



The Art and Practice of Health Psychology is summarised here in the form of a mandala - twelve areas which, taken together, constitute a "Circle of Health". Each area of Practice is related to the four elements - energy (or "spirit"), body, mind and emotions. The mandala progresses in a clockwise direction

beginning at 9 o'clock. This follows the Chinese psychological/medical system beginning with East (Spring) in the Western position for "West" and carrying on through the seasons. Each of the four elements develop in the following manner - 1. outer, 2. inner and 3. synthesis (or flow). Thus "Body" starts with activities to

develop sensing, perceiving and environmental awareness (area 2) continues with awareness of diet and internal organs (area 6) and completes with muscular-postural movement development (area 10). Similarly outer emotions of relationships are explored in area 4 then developed in terms of life values and meanings (area 8) before the circle completes with explorations of the emotions of "cultural mythology" and the symbolic imagination (area 12).

As a point of interest the circle also embodies the Chinese Yang and Yin (the "universal" complementary processes of "expansion" and "contraction" respectively) and their development within the 64 Chinese hexagrams. To see this imagine the cycle of growth from winter to summer solstice (6 o'clock to 12 o'clock) and back to winter as a rising and falling circle of expansion and contraction (Yang and Yin). Readers with an interest in the western zodiac will also note a complementary (reversed) progression of fire, earth, air and water. This form of the circle has, I believe, a certain universality in the application and in particular it is a framework of thinking that embodies "attunement" to the natural cycle of birth, growth, fruition, decay and rebirth. It is thus a foundation for the development of truly holistic, ecological ways of knowing and creating.

The theme of each of the twelve areas is fourfold - increasing awareness, exploring alternatives, implementing new patterns in everyday life and nurturing balance and wholeness. The following

example of Practice is entitled "walk in beauty!" (an Amerindian term similar to "god-be-we-ye" - goodbye) and comes from the first area. I invite you to try this Practice out for yourself:

"While walking in a variety of progressively more stimulating environs take your attention to your physical centre (a point two inches below your navel) and observe changes in awareness. Develop this exercise by taking your attention, as you walk, to each of the four cardinal directions (east, south, west, north), the sky and the earth of the environ surrounding you. Hold your attention at these regions before returning it to your centre. Observe changes in your awareness, movement etc. Continue the development by expanding your attention from your centre to the peripheral parts of your body and then contracting your attention back to centre. Practice this at least four times and then allow your attention to expand to the environ surrounding you and contract once again. Throughout the exercises notice any changes in your awareness etc. Explore different activities such as running, or sitting at a desk, with a different focus of attention. Keep a simple log of this Art and Practice and implement any new patterns that help you in your work or play".

This simple exercise is based on Eastern meditation, but unlike the original monastic practices, the emphasis is on applying and developing the practice within everyday Western life.

The Art and Practice of Health Psychology and the everyday creation of the Circle of Health rests upon the creation of balance:

"Through the balanced attunement to the Practice areas, as a whole, the circle comes into existence and with it a new property - CENTER!"

The ultimate goal of the Art and Practice of Health Psychology is the creation of this centre - "holistic health", "Grail", "human potential", "self-actualisation", "tao" are a few names that have been used to describe this experience of wholeness. By aiming directly at this goal, however, the centre will never arise. On the contrary, by concentrating on developing the perimeter of the circle, the center will emerge OF ITSELF as a new property of the integrated whole.

The context for the development of holistic health is that of a social, natural and designed environ - a whole "lifespace". It is suggested, therefore, that Health Psychology be applied within the traditional human contexts of medical care, community care, education and environment (i.e. architecture, design, planning, agriculture etc.). These applications of Health Psychology might be termed the "Holistic Arts".

Further Information:

Details of introductory lectures, courses, publications, cassettes and a proposed "Certificate in Health Psychology" can be obtained from Health Psychology Research, Court Lodge, Station Rd, Cullompton, Devon, EX15 1BE. Tel 0884 12565.

C Dr. Anthony Crouch (Oct. 1986)

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