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# Transpersonal Relations: Counseling for the “We” Decade

This article proposes to review elements of Abraham Maslow’s work and to show how Erich Fromm’s distinction between a having mode of experience and a being mode of experience corresponds with the work of Maslow. In both cases, the emphasis is on *being* as an essential aspect of personal growth. This emphasis is a central theme that is recurrent throughout the whole existential–phenomenological–humanistic psychology tradition. Instead of studying the individual as an object, this tradition studies the individual as someone who exists within a lived world, who is an integral part of that lived world, and who is capable of self-transcendence and encounter. The works of Maslow and Fromm complement each other and offer some possible alternative designs for an emergent cultural value system and the satisfaction of higher needs in ways congruent with that value system.

For such alternatives to be successful, we must go beyond the arbitrary dualistic split between subject and object. The interpersonal consequences of such a split became evident during the 1970s—the Me Decade. When we transcend this split between ourselves and our lived worlds, encounter people with whom we come into contact, and substitute pure spontaneous experience for the use of techniques, we realize that we need not strive to satisfy our higher needs. With no conscious effort, the higher needs satisfy themselves through our relationships in the world. This can be the basis for a more transpersonal culture and a less selfish 1980s—the “We Decade.”

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## THE HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

**Maslow's conceptualization of a need hierarchy seems to have been among his most popular contributions to psychology. We do not intend to recapitulate the hierarchy except to clarify our definitions of each class of need.**

**The basic or physiological needs refer to such things as air, food, shelter, and sex. Safety needs refer to the importance of values such as security, stability, dependency, protection, order, laws, and freedom from fear or anxiety. Belongingness and love needs are needs that require relationships with other people. These require for their satisfaction another person or persons who join with the individual to form a family, community, or culture. Esteem needs require a feeling of self-confidence and self-regard. Self-actualization needs refer to the need for self-fulfillment, purpose, or meaning.**

**There are synergistic (cooperative) ways of meeting our needs as well as nonsynergistic (competitive) ones. Highly synergistic cultures are ones whose members, by being selfish about meeting their needs, also meet the needs of others. Because of the structure of a synergistic culture, selfish behavior is also altruistic behavior, and the distinction between selfish and unselfish behavior does not exist.**

**In nonsynergistic cultures there exists a distinct difference between selfish and unselfish behavior. When people work to satisfy their needs, they simultaneously prevent other people from satisfying theirs. In such a culture there is competition for everything that could gratify needs; everyone attempts to get what they want before other people get it. This eventually leads to people hoarding more than they need for fear they may not have enough at a later date.**

**The eventual situation that develops in nonsynergistic or low-synergy cultures has been termed by Garrett Hardin "The Tragedy of the Commons" (1968). The British had developed a tradition of having commonly owned land, called the Commons, as an area available for citizens to use for the grazing of their herds. At first the Commons provided ample resources for the grazing of everyone's herds, but as the size of the herds increased, it was overgrazed and eventually became barren. The level of consumption was such that it overran the available resources and the Commons was destroyed. Ironically, it was abused the worst by the people who benefited the most from its use. These people increased the size of their herds to the extent that they were directly responsible for the overgrazing. When the Commons was denuded, the people who had been most abusive were financially the most able to withstand the loss of it. Those who were careful not to overgraze the Commons were the least able to survive its loss.**



Had the citizens been able to act synergistically, the grazing of the Commons would have been regulated so that optimal consumption maintained the area without overgrazing. Such a cooperative action is difficult, however, in a low-synergy culture. Julian Edney (1979) reports that:

The irony is that the tragedies actually develop from logical or justifiable thinking. Game theorists have developed the "Commons Dilemma Game," an intriguing exercise that shows there is no apparent rational solution to the phenomenon.... So it seems that many of our worst environmental dilemmas, as well as our common problems, do not lend themselves to purely scientific solutions. (p. 83)

For some people, the "Tragedy of the Commons" has come to be the symbol of our age. Our current approach to using our resources leads inexorably to the result anticipated by the failure of the Commons. Edney has developed a simulation to study this point. His simulation, the "Nuts Game," is played by small groups of people who share a shallow bowl into which are placed 10 hexagonal nuts. People are told that they can take as many nuts as they want whenever they choose to do so, but that the number of nuts in the bowl will be doubled every 10 seconds. A synergistic approach would lead to gradual taking of nuts from the bowl, but in his study Edney (1979) found that:

65% of the groups in the pilot experiment never even reached the first 10-second replenishment cycle. The game ended in the first few moments of play, often because subjects took all the nuts immediately. (p. 102)

Some central element within cultures seems to enhance either high-synergy or low-synergy responses to the satisfaction of needs. Our Western mode of experience, with its logic, science, and rationalism cannot resolve the tragedy of the Commons. We must discover the element in our current value system that prevents us from resolving the Commons dilemma.

## HAVING AND BEING

Having and being are differentiated by Fromm as two fundamental modes of experience that determine the characters of individuals and societies as well as the ways individuals perceive their lived worlds. The having mode of experience pertains to a relationship that involves using, possessing, and owning in which people attempt to make everything in their environments into their personal property. Fromm considers this mode to be the basis for manipulation, authoritarianism, and most forms of oppression. If we are not satisfied with ourselves as individuals, we tend (in this mode) to seek from our environments the fulfillment of needs that can never be met by those environments. This leads to a perpetual state of dissatisfaction, anxiety, and dread.

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The perfect symbol of the having mode of experience within Western culture is the consumer. Our cogito is, "I consume; therefore, I am." Consumption, especially excessive consumption, is the perfect example of the having mode at its worst.

To consume is one form of having, and perhaps the most important one for today's affluent industrial societies.... Modern consumers may identify themselves by the formula: *I am = what I have and what I consume.* (Fromm, 1976, p. 27)

The being mode refers to the experience of life as an ongoing process, to the feelings of wholeness and aliveness, to the feeling of present centered being-in-the-world. Being is also attractive because it is a timeless experience of continued change and growth; it is a process that transcends the individual ego and connects us with our entire environment. If we exist in this being mode, we see ourselves as already possessing everything we require; we see ourselves as whole and complete; and we see our environments as integral parts of ourselves. With this the case, there is never a possibility of using anyone to satisfy our needs because they are a part of us. In the being mode, we do not cling to our possessions and therefore are not possessed by them. We can let things go that interfere with our being and need not seek our identity in accumulated property or reputation. To be also means to let be, to allow other people the right to be themselves without our interference. A being mode of experience can be the basis for a synergistic culture.

The people who operate from the having mode of experience seek power and authority as coming from symbols, offices, degrees, and positions. In each case, power and authority are things people acquire and the way to determine who is powerful and who has authority is to look at the position they hold, the uniform they wear, or the prestige they have. People operating from the being mode of experience consider power and authority to come from within the person as an existential experience. What we seek from outside ourselves will always seem stale and flat; only that which we experience as part of ourselves gives satisfaction of higher needs.

## HAVING NEEDS AND BEING NEEDS

Within Maslow's hierarchy of needs there is a place both for having and being modes of experience. Obviously we must have food, air, water, and shelter. We also must have some physical and interpersonal arrangements that provide for security. Fromm may call these forms of having, if approached with the proper attitude, "existential having" (Fromm, 1976). Even within these two levels of needs, being is important for such an attitude. Within the having mode of experience, the more



we have the more we seek to acquire. Within the being mode of experience, we recognize what Lao Tzu taught: “He who recognizes that enough is enough will always have enough.” If all we are concerned with is having, we will respond competitively; if we are concerned with being, we will be concerned with how we acquire things as well as with what we acquire.

Within the next level of needs (the belongingness needs), it may seem that having is important. We need to have friends, have a family, have groups we can join, and have a job. The problem is that we too often take this literally and try to possess these things. As long as we approach relationships as something to have we will never experience satisfying relationships. The same holds true for self-esteem and self-actualization; these needs can never be met by having but only through being. To a degree, having was relevant for the lower needs, but for the higher needs it is detrimental. One of the great mistakes of any culture is to assume that what we have will satisfy our needs for belonging, love, esteem, and self-actualization. We too often approach experiences as a way to have our needs met. By going to seminars and retreats, studying meditation and martial arts, and seeing a therapist, we assume we will have more esteem, more love, and more enlightenment.

It is here that the fundamental difference can be made between having and being. If we believe we have something, we no longer feel we need to work for it. We have it, it is ours, now we can forget it. If we focus on being, we realize that only the act of the experience is real and only when we live lovingly does love exist. The moment we cease to be love, love disappears. We need to live our higher needs; we need to be them. We cannot hoard self-esteem by having power, prestige, influence, or wealth. We can feel self-esteem as an existential experience and we can be this at any time regardless of our social position. We live our self-esteem and the moment we cease to live it, our self-esteem ceases to exist. Marriage is no guarantee of love and wealth is no guarantee of esteem; only as we live are these needs satisfied.

The satisfaction of higher needs does not require that we have something beyond what we already have to satisfy our basic needs. The mistaken assumption that higher needs are satisfied by higher forms of having is at the heart of the Commons dilemma. Higher needs are satisfied only through a being mode of experience, and a being mode of experience essentially is a transformation in our attitude and approach to satisfying our basic needs. Through a having mode of experience we approach the satisfaction of basic needs as a means to an end—often an increase in material possessions. Through a being mode of experience we approach the satisfaction of basic needs as a process. We approach our everyday activities as transcendent activities; we perceive the transcendent as implicit within the mundane.



**My daily activities are not unusual,  
I'm just naturally in harmony with them.  
Grasping nothing, discarding nothing,  
In every place there's no hindrance, no conflict.  
...(My) supernatural power and marvelous activity—  
Drawing water and carrying firewood. (P'ang, 1971, p. 46)**

### **SELF-TRANSCENDENCE**

**Approaching experiences from a having perspective in order to satisfy being needs seldom results in any actual individual change. Only the being mode of experience, that of being-in-the-world, can result in the satisfaction of being needs. The learning of self-transcendence techniques too often leads to the feeling of having acquired something that will result in growth and therefore not looking beyond the technique to the necessary change in being required for satisfaction. Too often we seek external techniques or skills and believe that mastering them (having them) is the equivalent of being self-transcending. Such an approach deludes us into thinking that being needs can be satisfied through having or mastering some special technique. It is not what experiences we have or what techniques we master that lead to self-transcendence as much as how we experience ourselves as living in the world. We can experience ourselves as growing from our everyday experiences as easily as from any consciousness raising seminars or retreats if we focus our attention on being rather than on having. What Jean Houston (1978, p. 21) terms the “technologizing of the human potential movement with laundry lists of techniques all of which work and none of which really deepen,” is the result of an approach to self-transcendence that is based on a having mode of experience.**

**Old habits die hard. Because we are accustomed to satisfying lower needs by seeking to have things, we assume that we should apply the same approach to satisfying higher needs. When this approach is unsuccessful, we easily feel depressed, powerless, or empty. We then believe that we simply should have more, so we search harder, develop more skills, and seek out more experts who teach only techniques. Always seeking outside sources for satisfaction, we become discouraged when the techniques we learn never change us.**

**This process of seeking can become an attempt at hoarding or having. Seeking itself, if approached as a way of being, can become an experience of self-transcendence, of encountering others, and of becoming intertwined with others. Implicit in a having mode of experience is a separate and individual self that possesses things. A being mode of experience, however, is based on the experience of a *transpersonal self* not limited by physical constraints, but encompassing one's entire lived world as a single process. No techniques are necessary for this experience, only awareness. What we do to live in the world may not change, but the**



**mode of experience from within which we perceive and respond to the world changes dramatically.**

**The being mode of experience itself is self-transcending because it naturally is a transpersonal mode of experience. The having mode of experience, the attitude that we can learn techniques that will permit us to have self-transcendence, is not a transpersonal mode of experience but an alienating, isolating mode. Our dominant Western value system, based to a degree on a having mode, too often discourages self-transcendence.**

**The Commons dilemma is not an inevitable result of expanding civilization, but the result of a having mode of experience taken to its logical conclusion. What is needed to prevent the denuding of the Commons is to go beyond the existing value system that enhances the idea of an isolated individual existing as a protagonist fighting against an impersonal environment.**

#### **FROM ME TO WE**

**The Me Generation, or the 1970s, was christened as such by Thomas Wolfe in 1976. His article captured the mood of the country.**

**The Me Decade begins with one of those facts that is so big and so obvious (like the Big Dipper), no one ever comments on it anymore. Namely: the 30-year boom. (Wolfe, 1976, p. 31)**

**The 30-year boom was an economic boom. Affluence had spread to more people than ever before. In correlation with Maslow's theory, people had satisfied their needs for life, security, and belonging, and were working on love and actualization. But they worked on these new needs with the old strategies. They were attempting to perfect the self and were doing so in the only way they knew, by trying to acquire self-realization.**

**This made the Me Decade into a paradoxical situation: The more people sought to satisfy these higher needs, the more they did so in a way that alienated them from others and from themselves. The more alienated they felt, the less satisfied they were.**

**An approach to counseling that integrated self and environment was needed. The self could not be perfected in isolation from the environment because the transpersonal self was the environment. Counseling approaches that helped people improve at the expense of their environments were in fact doing more harm than good.**

**Counseling strategies such as assertiveness training may have been designed solely to teach techniques through which people could manipulate their environments. This implied a boundary between the self (that which did the manipulating) and the environment (that which was manipulated). Unfortunately, "every boundary line is also a potential battle line" (Wilbur, 1979, p. 19). To move from the Me Decade to the We Decade, people needed to learn to expand their sense of self.**

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This need was recognized by Maslow (1968). In his later writings, he suggested that humanistic psychology was only a stage in the evolution of a more complete psychology—transpersonal psychology. Roberts (1978) suggested that Maslow's later works included a higher sixth level of need; this higher need was for transcendence. The ultimate need of the self was to transcend itself to encompass its entire lived environment.

Thus, the counseling needs of the 1980s require an approach that recognizes the transpersonal nature of the self.

When you are describing or explaining or even just inwardly feeling your "self," what you are actually doing, whether you know it or not, is drawing a mental line or boundary across the whole field of your experience, and everything on the inside of that boundary you are feeling or calling your "self," while everything outside that boundary you feel to be "not-self." Your self-identity, in other words, depends entirely upon where you draw that boundary line. (Wilbur, 1979, p. 4)

Transpersonal approaches have existed for many years in the forms of C.G. Jung's Analytical Psychology, Roberto Assagioli's Psychosynthesis, and the entire discipline of transpersonal psychology. In many ways, the histories of most religions trace the development of transpersonal counseling.

The common characteristic of all these psychotherapies is that each helps open the individual to transcendent experiences. They move the person to a broader form of self-reference that encompasses the entire lived environment. From this perspective, personality problems are not so much corrected as they are transformed. The personality tends to become less rigid and more flexible as the self expands. Rather than working to resolve personal problems, people who practice transpersonal disciplines report that the problems disappear by themselves.

Friedman (1976) calls this the paradox of aiming at the self. The more people work to improve the self, the more conflicts, problems, and hang-ups they uncover. If people forget about the self, they transcend it and all of their concerns dissolve like the illusions or shadows they are. For counselors to encourage people to work on the self may be essential if they must meet lower needs. Once they begin working to satisfy any of the higher needs, however, aiming at the self becomes dysfunctional.

The role of the counselor is to be more than a technician who teaches techniques to clients. The role of the counseling agency is to be more than an institution within which counselors work. Moving from a having mode to a being mode of experience requires a transformation of value systems. Implicitly, therefore, the value systems of counselors and of counseling agencies have a direct effect on counseling outcomes.

Those agencies that encourage the teaching of techniques for self-realization or for interpersonal skills implicitly teach a value system based on a having mode of experience. Those agencies that teach social



action as a vehicle for wealth redistribution implicitly teach a value system based on a having mode. For people operating at certain levels of need satisfaction this may be appropriate, but for other people such an approach only perpetuates the presenting problem: needing to move toward a value system that encourages a being mode of experience.

The value systems held by counseling agencies are the interpersonal atmospheres that permeate all counseling relationships. These atmospheres may be implicit or explicit. It is possible that an agency may have one value system that is explicit and a conflicting value system that is implicit. In this case, it is possible that much confusion is experienced by employees and clients as to their appropriate role expectations.

Transpersonal psychology, therefore, is more than a strategy for self-transcendence. It is also an approach to environmental assessment that clarifies the interpersonal atmosphere of an agency and helps to demonstrate the impact of this environment on clients. Such factors, hardly noticed during the Me Decade, become increasingly important during the interpersonal revolution of the We Decade.

## CONCLUSION

Since the nondirective style initiated by Carl Rogers, counseling has remained explicitly value free. At the same time, however, counselors tended to hold an implicit value in the notion of an individual self in conflict with itself and with its environment. In many ways, such a value contributed to the Me Decade of the 1970s. It is time to clarify our professional values more scrupulously and derive a value system more amenable to positive interpersonal relationships, intimacy, and cooperation. Transpersonal psychology offers a way to begin accomplishing this.

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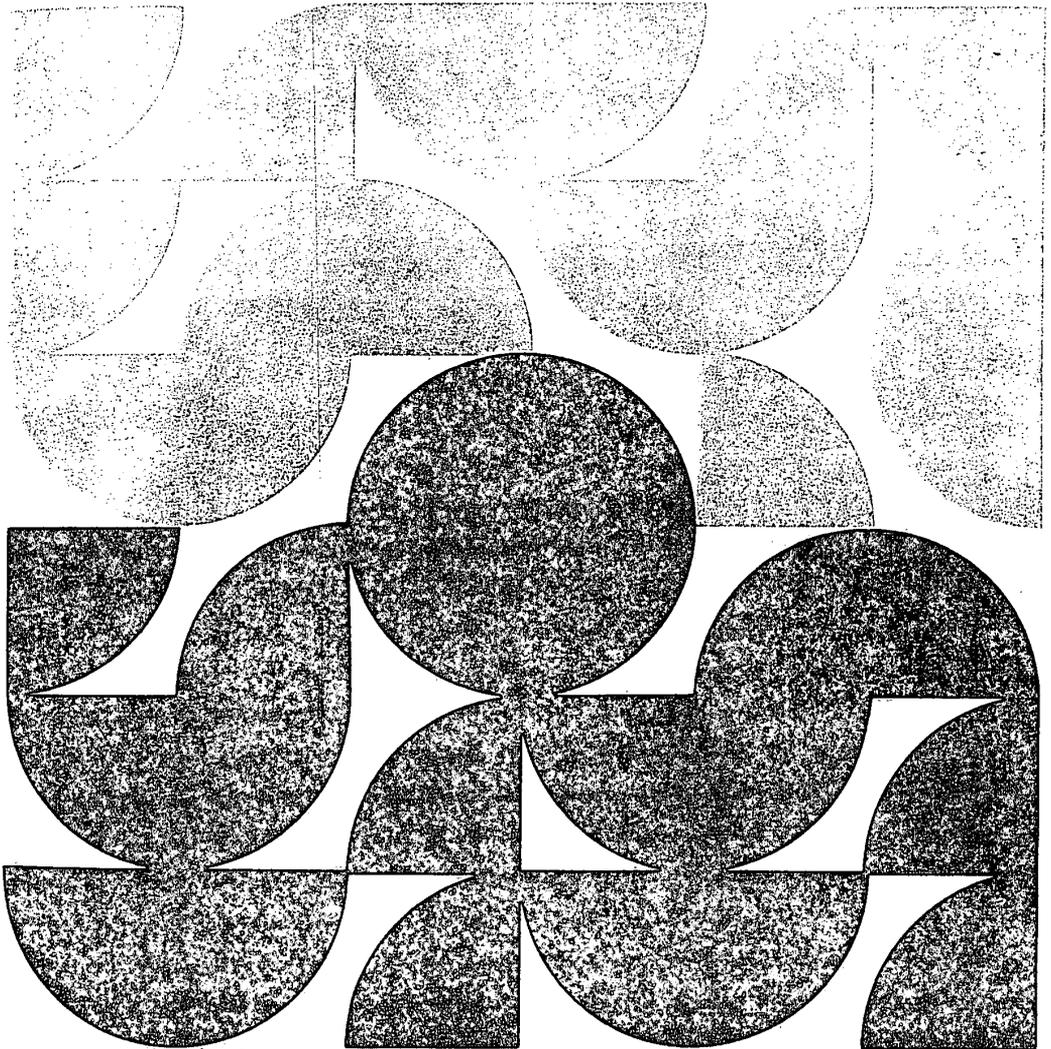
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