

Incorporating Integral Psychology and Ayurveda for Overall Wellness

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Abstract

Holistic psychology is a fairly new science in terms of the study being introduced into professional psychology; however, there are many variations of practice that have been around for hundreds and even thousands of years that have benefited practitioners in the East but have not been successfully integrated into Western practices. Ayurveda is a holistic medicinal and spiritual practice that can benefit overall wellness and health when it is incorporated into Western holistic practices. Psychologists, medical practitioners, and patients could benefit from an integrated understanding of the concepts of the Great Nest and the four quadrants with Ayurvedic principles. This topic is of importance to the field of holistic psychology as it can increase exposure of pre-modern and modern psychological practices so that individuals can benefit from any expansion in knowledge as it relates to psychological, physical, and spiritual health.

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Western medicine is often criticized for ignoring philosophical treatments that have been practiced for generations in the East and Eastern medicine is often criticized for its lack of rigor and data in its approach (Pigg, 2002). Bio-medical practitioners have long ignored treatments that are not biological and visual in their approach whereas psychotherapists have often ignored the impact and the relationship between the mind and the body (Dworkin, 2001). Holistic psychology, specifically the incorporation of pre-modern concepts and practices such as the ancient Indian practice of Ayurveda, has long been ignored by the medical and psychological community (Boorstein, 2000). Wilber presented an integral psychology model which incorporates events in the consciousness using four quadrants model and the Great Nest (Wilber, 2000, p. 62). This model could naturally integrate the pre-modern holistic system of Ayurveda with modern psychological practices. This issue is significant in the field of holistic psychology as it could increase exposure to pre-modern and modern practices with the benefit of an expanse in knowledge as it relates to improving and healing psychological, physical, and spiritual health.

Background

Holistic psychology is a fairly new science in terms of the study being introduced into professional psychology; however, there are many variations of practice that have been around for hundreds and even thousands of years that have benefited practitioners in the East but are yet to be integrated into Western practices (Boorstein, 2000).

Transpersonal psychology assumes it is possible to have growth in personal wisdom as well as respecting the various spiritual paths that can be taken to improve physical and

mental health and altered state research has been used to understand any association between reaching altered states with emotional and physical health and growth (Cortright, 1997, p. 19-21).

Holism and humanism are broad terms used to describe theories of medical treatment that differ from traditional biomedical techniques and are important to understanding the integration of pre-modern and modernism (O’Gorman, 1998). Holism is an alternative treatment when no biomedical techniques are incorporated, an integrated treatment when purposefully used in conjunction with conventional medicine, or a complimentary treatment when used alongside a primary biomedical treatment (Barrett et al., 2003). Humanism differs from traditional biomedical techniques in that it uses the understanding of psychological self, family systems, goal and value recognition, and inter-subjective techniques as therapeutic processes and these concepts are important to understanding research into the integration of pre-modern and modern concepts (American Psychological Association Division 32, 2004).

Statement of Issue

Barret et al. (2003) described complimentary and alternative medicines (CAM) as being more holistic, intuitive, empowering, and individualistic for patients versus conventional medicine which was considered to be more deductive, scientific, general, and more controlling. Holotropic states may be induced by means such as psychedelics materials, physical dance, breathing techniques, music techniques, sensory overload or deprivation, or physical means which can vary based upon a person’s culture or available means. These techniques are ancient and global in their foundations. Additionally, these states are often associated with understanding death, birth, and rebirth beliefs in cultures

(Grof, 2000, p.11). The statement of issue is that Ayurveda is a holistic medicinal and spiritual practice that can benefit overall wellness and health when incorporated into Western holistic practices with the goal of furthering research in energy medicine (Lad, 1998, p. 9). Health psychologists can benefit from an integrated understanding of the application of the four quadrants and the tridoshas to promote wellness.

Definition of Terms

In order to address these issues in detail several definitions and concepts should be defined upfront. Holistic psychology can be defined as the integration of the entire aspects of the world and all those who exist in the world with the understanding that a shift or change in one aspect will affect all the other aspects (Gulman, 2004). The Great Nest is another important concept (also referred to as the Great Chain or the Great Nest of Being) and is interpreted as an unbroken continuum or spectrum of levels of being that each person graduates through in his or her life (Kremer & Achterberg, 1994). Wilber's (2000, p. 6) interpretation of the Great Nest is the inclusion many levels beginning from inside the circle extending outwards. The levels start with the understanding and acceptance of a) matter and physics, b) life and biology, c) mind and psychology, d), soul and theology, and lastly e) spirit and mysticism. The four quadrants are associated with Wilber's integral psychology theory and include 1) Intentional: Upper Left Interior-Individual which includes traits such as emotions, concepts, symbolism, and impulse, 2) Behavioral: Upper Right Exterior-Individual which includes traits such as brain systems, molecular systems, and atoms, 3) Cultural: Lower Left Interior-Collective which includes traits such as magic, vegetative states, and physical activity and 4) Social: Lower Right Exterior-Collective which includes traits such as galaxies, family dynamics, and social

systems (Wilber, 2000, p. 62). Ayurveda can be defined as a traditional medicinal system with origins in ancient India (Pingree, 2002). Ayurveda looks for a balance in the tridosha, which is a term used to describe how the elements (ether, air, fire, water, and earth) manifest themselves in the human body with the purpose of regulating the biological, psychological, and physiopathological functions of the consciousness, mind, and body (Lad, 1985, p. 26). Last, the concept of modernity centers around the change of human behavior from a time in which pre-modern humans were forced to migrate and scavenge to survive versus modern humans who began to bury their dead, used tools, and incorporated symbolism into their daily lives (Henshilwood, 2003). This term now can be applied to a time in which science has overtaken the dependence upon spirituality.

Literature

Wilber is a prominent figure in current literature and he looks at spiritual development in terms of waves in which the individual develops certain characteristics and progresses, in an outwards wave like manner, to the next characteristic all the while building upon and encompassing the prior characteristics (Wilber, 2000, p. 7). He has drawn upon historical references to the understanding of holistic psychology using the Great Nest of Being and he has defined the wave layers into the following categories: a) matter and physics, b) life and biology, c) psychology and mind, d) soul and theology, and e) spirit and mysticism (Wilber, 2000, p. 6 & 12). The ability for a person to transcend these waves is believed to increase his or her spiritual potential. This higher development process is not linear; rather, this occurs in a fluid manner throughout life with the goal of becoming more fully awake and effective in all aspects of life (Wilber, 2008). However, these waves do follow a pattern of overall development in which each

level, or category, (although independent of each other) must be incorporated into the second level (Wilber, 2000, p. 28). As a person undergoes these transformations the experiences can become a part of the person's permanent self (conscious) rather than existing only in unconscious holotropic states. Wilber (2000, p35) further connects consciousness and self with three stages he calls identification, disidentification, and integration with regard to undergoing the transformations of the different levels. The first stage is the identification phase in which the 'self' has just encountered a new phase of the 'Great Nest' and identifies with this phase (Wilber, 2008). In the second phase the self transcends, or de-embeds, from the phase and, in the third phase the self includes the phase and integrates it with any other phases that have already gone through this process (Wilber, 2000, p. 35). An example of this process could be moving in a wavelike fashion from psychology and mind to theology and soul. Once these waves have been integrated into one's self it could be said that a person fully understands his or her relationship with matter and physics, biology and life, with psychology and the mind (Achterberg, 1992). This could be considered a viable integration as most of these categories (levels) can be scientifically defended and backed up with data.

Wilber's (2000, p.60) conceptualization of pre-modernity and modernity differs in the sense that modernism has resulted in the development of morals, a sense of science, and the application of the arts into daily life. Additionally, Wilber noted that there are 'dignities' and 'disasters' associated with the evolution into modernity versus pre-modern times. Some dignities include the increase of technological advances to find scientific truths and artistic freedoms whereas some disasters include the fragmentation and alienation of the incorporation of the systems of the body, mind, matter, soul, and spirit

(the Great Nest of Being) as a result of scientific systemizations (Wilber, 2000, p. 61). This still evident in our medical systems in which holistic medicine, psychology, and biomedical treatments are all kept separate and are not integrated well (Scherger, 2005). Wilber (2000, p. 63) noted this disintegration of the Great Nest of Being, which he refers to as scientific reductionism, and he responded by developing the Four Quadrants to not only discuss individual consciousness but to also demonstrate how individual consciousness is a part of a larger collective. The awareness of these four quadrants (as figuring into individual body, mind, and spirit development) exists in the sense that each quadrant represents some aspect of modern human behavior while incorporating pre-modern behaviors such as the reptilian brain stem, vision-logic, foraging, and physical worldviews as examples (Wilber, 2000, p. 68). The incorporation of all the quadrants has the potential of developing a holistic psychological modernity as these quadrants can be applied in a variety of ways with variety of psychological models such as the inclusion of Ayurveda or religion as subsets. Westhearfer (2004) suggested that the four quadrants could allow psychologists to study human behavior in all four contexts (intentional, behavioral, cultural, and social) based upon the situation and the needs of the person. Additionally, a person can use all four quadrants in an effort to further their own development in a very broad manner rather than just focusing on intellectual pursuits while ignoring family development or cultural growth (Benner, 2002).

Ayurveda is considered to be a complete medical system in that it incorporates meditation, diet and digestion, pharmacology, behavior and emotions, biological rhythms, and additional biopsychosocial factors into diagnosing and treating a person (Ohio State University, 2008). Although the majority of research on Ayurveda has been performed in

India, Ohio State University (2008) conducted a search of PubMed's databases and found clinical research to support the role of Ayurveda in the treatment of asthma, irritable bowel syndrome, bronchitis, hypertension, cancer support therapy, coronary artery disease, anxiety, stress, menstrual disorders, diabetes mellitus, impaired immunity, prostate disorders, and depression. Ayurveda, as a philosophy, believes that man is a microcosm into himself and that balanced health can be achieved when his or her individual existence is balanced in the areas of instinct which are religious pursuits, financial security, procreation, and freedom (Lad, 1985, p.18). With this as the foundation, the goal of Ayurveda is to balance the body's energies so that deterioration and disease, both physical and mental, can be decreased or eliminated (Scharfe, 1999). To understand the manner in which Ayurveda can accomplish these improvements in overall physical and mental health it is important to understand the concepts of the tridosha and the individual constitution (Scharfe, 1999). Biologically, Ayurvedic practitioners look towards the individual constitutions, which are kapha, pitta, and vata, to understand how these combinations of constitutions influence the creation, maintenance and destruction of the human body (Lad, 2008). The tridosha is created by complex combinations with the first being the principle of movement (vata). What is different from the Western definition of muscular-skeletal movement as a system is the fact that vata also incorporates feelings and emotions as well as movements throughout the nervous system and mind (Lad, 2008). The principle of bodily heat-energy (pitta) is responsible for digestion, absorption, nutrition, metabolism, psychological traits of anger and jealousy, as well as the intellect and the consciousness of understanding. The principle of water and earth (kapha) is associated with joint lubrication, wound healing,

the chest, throat, sinues, plasma, mucus, and psychological aspects of attachment, greed, envy, love and forgiveness. It is noticeable that the constitutions incorporate physical, mental, and emotional aspects into each characterization, and this balance in the tridosha is pertinent for overall health (Scharfe, 1999). An ayurvedic provider can analyze a person and determine whether the person has a vata, pitta, kapha, vata-pitta, pitta-kapha, vata-kapha, or vata-pitta-kapha constitution (Lad, 1985, p. 37). Ayurveda which, according to Indians (Asian), is a holistic and complete system of medicine does believe in the reality of being as well as the consciousness and development of psychopathologies due to being out of balance. This concept has similarities in Wilber's explanation psychopathologies developing out of an individual's management of the transitions from fulcrums in the Great Nest (Scharfe, 1999). In addition to using the advances gained by Western medicine, Ayurvedic practitioners first look for a consciousness connection, or lack thereof, to understand why there may be imbalances in the mind, body, or spirit (Ohio State University, 2008).

Research supports that beliefs about consciousness, spirituality, and the afterlife vary greatly upon culture, religion, social awareness, and transpersonal belief systems. Many people in western society feel threatened by the awareness of death and often cling to cultural values (without deeply investigating the values) in an effort to find an authentic meaning and significance to their eventual death and the importance of their life (Ryan & Deci, 2004). Healing, birth, death, and discussions of spirituality used to occur privately within the family unit (Masters, 2006). With the advances in medicine and life sustaining procedures that can only be managed in a hospital, many significant events and spiritual emergencies now occur in an unfamiliar and sterile environment (Coppola,

2002). Psychologically this can result in feeling an even greater anxiety or threat surrounding the experience for the terminally ill patient rather than presenting an environment that facilitates a transpersonal investigation about the meaning of death and a spiritual awareness of the transformation to a different state of being (Masters, 2006). Sadly, this is not available or discussed in the hospital environment even with the inclusion of chaplains (Coppola, 2002).

Western cultures have been criticized for systematically removing the rituals that were prevalent in pre-modern societies such as specific rites of mourning, birth rituals, the participation in the transfer from the land of the living to the land of the dead, or ceremonial healing rituals involving nutrition or unseen energy (Benner, 2002; O’Gorman, 1998). Current literature has noted that Western society has challenges understanding holistic treatments such as Ayurveda and integral consciousness theories, possibly due to cultural differences in linear thinking regarding health and wellness versus incorporative therapeutic approaches (Deife, 2003; Purdy & Dupey, 2005). Ayurveda has been shown to be helpful in a variety of treatments such as applying yoga for stress anger management, however the connection between Ayurveda, integral consciousness, and the understanding of the power of energy medicine has not been fully developed (Mooney, 2003; Srinivasan, 2003).

A literature review as noted a modern interest in holistic psychology which has brought back an interest in the incorporation of health and dying concepts, education, and rituals to modern health and healing perspectives, often with the incorporation of traditional cultures into current religious and health practices (O’Gorman, 1998; Purdy & Dupey, 2005). This is represented in both Wilber’s integral psychology theory as well as

in the foundation for physical and psychological healing in Ayurveda practices. Both systems recognize what could be mutually defined as energy medicine it is important to understand what current research efforts are being undertaken in these areas.

One way to incorporate pre-modern and modern practices is through the understanding of the concept of energy medicine. Wilber (2000, p. 6) recognizes that perennial philosophers have found dozens of levels of consciousness in which a person's state can be altered resulting in a change due to some type of unseen energy or matter. Ayurveda recognizes that the attributes of the tridosha contain energy and when actions are taken due to attributes of the tridosha kinetic energy occurs (Lad, 1998, p. 64). Therefore, based upon this literature review, it is logical to incorporate the understanding of the concept of energy medicine into Wilber's four quadrant model.

Evaluation and Critique

Upon evaluating the available research, it becomes apparent that the next step to forward modern holistic psychology is to investigate energy medicine. Energy medicine has been defined as 'prana' in Ayurveda and as the term 'spirit' in Western thought but, in general, it is defined as the use of an unseen force to promote health, help recovery, or ease symptoms of terminally ill patients (Mitchell, 1998, p. 13). From a biological perspective complimentary and alternative medical practitioners have been leading the way for the integration of concepts such as energy medicine as practiced in Ayurveda techniques by coining the phrase 'vibration medicine' (Gulmen, 2004; Hankey, 2004). Vibration medicine is viewed by biologists as quantized fluctuation fields, or subtle energy fields, which are well known in their application to magnetic, gravitational bio-energy, and fluids and energy medicine is being actively investigated research

interactions with electrons, photons, and neutrons (Hankey, 2004; Henderson, 2005).

With regard to energy medicine's application to overall wellness, it has been noted that quantized fluctuation, which is a measurement of the change of energy using discrete set of values by quantum mechanical rules can be observed in the action of vibrational medicine techniques such as Ayurveda (Hankey, 2004; Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008).

Philosophically a psychologist can combine the concepts of Ayurvedic principles (with the balance of the tridosha energies) and Wilber's concept of psychopathology development to understand how a disruption of a person's shift through the waves of the Great Nest could be captured in an energy form (Lad, 1985, p. 39; Wilber, 2000, p. 96). Critically, this concept can be difficult to grasp and required greater research. However, there are practical examples of energy medicine being applied to molecular healing such as Reiki, acupuncture, yoga, or meditation. There are many documented cases of psychopathologies that demonstrated illnesses at a vibration level, such as patients experiencing what seems to be an upset stomach or nervousness (Henderson, 2005; Oschman, 2003). Henderson (2005) noted that the symptom may be misdiagnosed as a chemical imbalance in the body when the patient is actually demonstrating anxiety causing the stomach pain. Using energy medicine concepts this person could be experiencing a psychopathology (anxiety) due to an unnatural energy field in the body that has not been released and is now encoded into the body. Using energy psychology, Henderson (2005) used a cold laser (device that transmits electronic fields to acupuncture needles) to disrupt the vibrations of the "locked energy" and transferred control of the anxiety back to the client with the elimination of the upset stomach. Vibration medicine,

or energy medicine, has great potential with regard to being applied to improving overall health, however there is a lack of theoretical tools available or in the process of being researched to bring significant credibility to the biomedical field (Hankey, 2004).

Theory and current research in integral psychology and Ayurveda (energy medicine) techniques have contributed to an understanding of the special needs of many people with diverse spiritual practices and physical and psychological ailments and the benefit from these theories working together (Benner, 2002). In particular, Wilber has acknowledged in his research that the ideal situation in psychology would be the integration of an all-quadrant all-level consciousness so that pre-modern and modern concepts of consciousness can be incorporated together successfully. This strategy is supported by many current psychologists; however, it leaves a great deal of room to work out the details of what pre-modern philosophies and psychological components could be incorporated into the Great Nest and the four quadrants (Schneiderman, Antoni, Saab, & Ironson, 2001).

It is the opinion of this author that Ayurveda has a natural fit within both the Great Nest and the four quadrants. For example, Wilber's models are not linear in nature, possibly because of the understanding that people experience the different levels of self-existence at different ages and phases in life. Ayurveda fits in nicely with Wilber's models in the sense that a person's current state is either majorly vata, pitta, or kapha; however, these states are not permanent or linear, and throughout different phases a person can experience different combinations or phases of existence as they transpose themselves through different levels of consciousness as they do with Wilber's waves (Lad, 2008; Raney & Cinarbas, 2005). Wright (1995) noted that transpersonal

psychology works within the boundaries of understanding the incorporation of spiritual and mystical psychological experiences as a part of an understanding of a potential universal psychology without viewing spirituality as a regression of human development. Modern holistic psychology benefits from the incorporation of full spectrum models, such as Wilber's four quadrants, and the inclusion of Eastern Ayurvedic practices with the desire to incorporate biology, arts, alternative states, the soul, and many other experiences in a nonreductionist fashion (Wright, 1995; Wilber, 2000, p. 75).

Summary and Future Direction

There are strengths associated with Wilber's models and Ayurveda; specifically there are excellent opportunities to research energy medicine to win over Western skeptics. Additionally, the integration offers opportunities to uncover psychopathologies, provide appropriate psychotherapeutic treatments, and incorporating self-exploration and regression techniques to uncover repressed feelings and physical illnesses (Raney & Cinarbas, 2005). Nevertheless, there are gaps associated with this proposed theory as there could be challenges incorporating environmentally caused psychopathologies such as allergies, malnutrition, substance abuse, or over the counter medication-induced psychiatric symptoms (Barrett et al., 2003). Wilber (2000, p. 175) supported this notion by describing the mind-body problem as being complex and hard to fully understand and integrate. For instance, the body can be looked upon as the biological organism (as a whole) and the mind can be looked upon solely as the activities from the brain as described in the upper right quadrant of Wilber's model (2000, p. 177). The integration of the tridosha concept into Wilber's model can help to solve the mind-body problem as the aspects of the constitutions can be manipulated with nutritional supplementation, dietary

adjustment, mental training such as yoga and meditation, or physical biomedical treatments such as nasal cleansing or intestinal flushes (Lad, 1998, p. 52). Yet, the biomedical community in Western cultures consistently has been stagnant in its willingness to incorporate CAMs including Ayurveda and integral psychology into biological or psychological theories or practice. This resistance is similarly found in the lack of integration of the biopsychosocial model into biomedical educational systems and practices (Samuel, 2007).

Additionally, the incorporation of holistic techniques in Ayurveda into the Great Nest and four quadrants, into the study of spirituality and psychology has practical and spiritual benefits. Oschman (2003) noted that energy medicine, and understanding of one's personal journey through the realm of the self, and spirituality have suffered a type of disconnect in modern medicine. If these concepts could be brought together those individuals receiving rehabilitative medical or psychological treatment could benefit (Masters, 2006). For example, Oschman (2003) noted that a focus on something higher (than the random thoughts that cross a person's mind) allows for a transformation in which the mental, emotional, and physical body will demonstrate an improvement in psychological and biological health. Further, Bidwell (1999) reiterated what Wilber (2000) described regarding the 'great chain of being' (The Great Nest) as the manner in which a person graduates through their spiritual development. Bidwell (1999) further discussed the 'human self' as reflection upon the three stages of spirituality which are identification, disidentification, and integration with regard to undergoing the transformations of the different levels (Wilber, 2000, p. 35).

Lastly, future directions of research should focus on the integration of pre-modern

and modern integral psychological practices with regard to their application to health psychology and disease prevention strategies (Dworkin, 2001). For example, Ayurveda has been shown to be helpful in a variety of treatments such as applying yoga for stress anger management; however, the connection between Ayurveda, integral consciousness, and the understanding of the power of energy medicine has not been fully developed (Jackson, 2007; Tiller, 2004). After much research and review it is apparent that there are many opportunities to incorporate pre-modern concepts such as Ayurveda into modern psychology. Ayurveda is gaining credibility in Western cultures and several accredited universities that offer degrees specializing just in Ayurveda are becoming available in the United States and this may increase with additional research into energy medicine. Currently, there is not a great deal of peer-reviewed literature available to add to this research that specifically discusses the integration of Ayurveda into integral psychology leaving a great deal of opportunity for future research into the specific details of integration (Dworkin, 2001). Regardless, health psychologists will benefit from an integrated understanding of the application of the four quadrants and the inclusion of the tridoshas for promoting wellness and improving the management of chronic illnesses (Schneiderman, Antoni, Saab, & Ironson, 2001; Tiller, 2004).

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