

Psychospiritual Development through the Life Span: Body-Based Phenomenological Model

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The life long process of psychospiritual transformation was studied in 7 mature females and 3 males practicing various forms of psychosomatic mysticism (Louchakova & Warner, 2003). Interviews emphasized attention to the embodied spatiality of the developmental structures of meaning (Shapiro). For the analyses, a combination of descriptive and interpretive methods was used (Giorgi, 1992).

Study shows the stage-specific correlations of individuation, religious/spiritual experiences, and the modalities of embodied awareness. Marker religious/spiritual experiences signify the overall changes in the self, specifically changes in perception, self-awareness, self-identification, values, attitudes and character structure. Stages, spread through the life-span, were not associated with the biological age.

1. First stage included paranormal experiences, and the spontaneous actualization of the access to subconscious, spatially associated with the lower portion of the body-scheme.
2. Second stage was associated with the modalities of awareness in the chest, actualization of self-awareness, spontaneous deconstruction of the “false” self and acquisition of the true psychological self. Marker experience was a gestalt of oneself as pure consciousness.
3. Stage three involved the shift from in-depth psychological work to deeper existential issues, heightened discrimination and impossibility to live inauthentic life.
4. Stage four was characterized by the awareness of the upper regions of the body scheme, spontaneous recognition of archetypal structure and deep characterological transformation. Marker spiritual experiences included “transcending the root of the ego”, “uncreated” light, and cosmic psyche. All practitioners reported the increasing sense of life satisfaction and the stable sense of well-being.

This living body based model was clinically applied in promoting personal growth in healthy volunteers. The study suggests the necessity of the future research of the stages of psychospiritual development, validates the stage-specific approach involving spatial organization of experience (Yung), and emphasizes the methodological value of combination of descriptive and interpretive methods in complex longitudinal studies.

References

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