



Transpersonal accounts of the role of astrology

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May 2011

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ABSTRACT

Transpersonal Psychology is a branch of Psychology which aims to study the transpersonal, self-transcendent and spiritual aspects of an individual's experience. These experiences in which the individual sees beyond the conditioned ego are identified as illuminating a deeper and a more enduring sense of self. This paper is concerned with transpersonal accounts of members of some Astrological Societies in the UK. The study examined participants' perceptions on astrology and their accounts on how astrology has shaped their lives. Six participants took part in semi-structured interviews. Data collected was subject to an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The participants demonstrated that Astrology had played an important role in their spiritual development as well as their well-being, particularly focusing on the importance of a deeper sense of self. Moreover, the findings suggested that the participants do not accept Astrology as a belief system as such but rather as a phenomenological account.

Key Words:	Transpersonal Psychology	Astrology	Phenomenology	Self	Spiritual Development
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“...All at once, without warning of any kind he found himself wrapped around, as it were, by a flamed colour- cloud. For an instant he thought of fire... in the great city; the next he knew that the light was within himself. Directly afterwards came upon him a sense of exultation, of immense joyousness, accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination, quite impossible to describe.....Among other things he did not come to believe, he saw and knew that the Cosmos is not dead matter but a living Presence, that the soul of man is immortal, that the universe is so built and ordered without any peradventure, all things work together for the good of each and all, that the foundation principle of the world is what we call love and that the happiness of everyone is , in the long run, absolutely certain...The illumination itself continued not more than a few moments, but its effects proved ineffaceable; it was impossible for him ever to forget what he at the time saw and knew: neither did he, or could he, ever doubt the truth of what was then presented to his mind”

(Bucke, 1901; taken from Tart et., al, 2009, pp. 12)

Literature review

In his book *“Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind”* (1901) (cited in Tart et al, 2009) Bucke, a man of science and a devotee of accuracy and factuality wrote about his mystical experiences in the third person in an attempt to be as subjective as possible (Tart et al, 2009). Bucke’s experience is not extraordinary or different to any experience that many may have experienced in the past or may experience in the future (Tart et al, 2009). There is a stereotype that intelligent, mainly scientists do not have such impossible and pathological experiences and if they do, these experiences are deemed abnormal and reduced to biological investigations (Wilber, 2007). However, experiences are complex constructs that sets of rules and theories of deterministic thinking of the Western science cannot standardize or measure (Wilber, 2007). While most people agree to the conventional world view, others challenge the most fundamental assumptions of materialistic science (Tart et al, 2009). Transpersonal experiences suggest that human consciousness is continuous with the inner nature of the universe (Jung, 1989). In an attempt to understand these experiences and explore their phenomenological background, psychology has adapted some set of methodologies, but recognizes that aiming to access the individual’s world and understating their experiences is a difficult process and the outcome of the analysis is always an interpretation of these experiences (Smith et al, 2009).

Bucke's study has become part of the foundation of Transpersonal Psychology, a branch of psychology that has attempted to explain and take seriously the side of spirituality and mystical experiences. Developed in the 1960s, as the forth force by Maslow, Grof and Sutich, (following the other three schools of psychology; psychoanalysis, behaviourism and humanistic psychology) Transpersonal Psychology considers “transpersonal, trans human, centred in the cosmos rather than in human needs and interests, going beyond humanness, identity, self actualization and the like” (Maslow, 1999, p.3-4). It honours the phenomenological enquiry of the meaning of experiences and the effect these have upon people’s behaviour. As described by Fontana (2003), the transpersonal self extends beyond

personal identity and meaning to include a “mindfulness and equanimity with self and other” (Fontana 2003, p. 155). The concept of Transpersonal Psychology is that of non duality which recognises that each person is essentially a part of the whole (Lajoie and Shapiro, 1992; Washburn, 1994). From this insight comes the validity of self-transcendence or “beyond personal” from which the conditional and conditioned personality reflects a sense of identity which is deeper, broader, and more unified with the whole (Lajoie and Shapiro, 1992; Scotton et. al, 1996). The term “beyond personal” seeks to disclose and develop the source and deeper nature of our identities, self-images and roles on a more universal basis rather than individual or personal identity (Scotton, et. al, 1996). This of course causes radical implications for psychological systems founded on the premises of atomism, reductionism and separateness. Within Western psychology, research has been conducted in the area of self-transcendence, authors amongst many, include Assagiolo (1971), Grof (1985, 1988) Washburn (1988, 1994), Nixon (2001, 2005) and Wilber (1995, 2000-2007), which have attempted to challenge the “materialistic” ideology of science by creating a spectrum of consciousness developed by synthesizing psychology, philosophy and religion from Western and Eastern perspective (Kalischuk and Nixon, 2009).

Transpersonal Psychology loosely called the psychology of spirituality was not initially accepted by mainstream psychology because spirituality was used under the banner of religion. Among other things, spirituality is not linked to the religious doctrine as such but spirituality can refer to the inner path enabling the person to discover the essence of their being, the values and meanings by which people live (Tart et al, 2009). In turn, these practices can lead to an experience of connectedness whether that may be with religion, nature or the cosmos. In many cultures, people involved in rituals tend to search for connections with each other, with communities, with the Earth, and with the cosmos (Somé, 1998). Transpersonal Psychology should not be deemed as religion or portraying religious values because it does not present a belief system or provide an institutional structure but rather it is a field of enquiry based on theories, research and practices which evaluate the findings of phenomenological experiences that have their own rich views of development, social interactions, emotional and behaviour insights (Braud and Anderson, 1998).

Astrology

In keeping with a general interest in spirituality and transpersonal development, this study will attempt to explore how astrology is perceived by members of an astrological society and the influence that Astrology has in their lives. Astrology is the world's oldest theory of personality; it is to some extent accepted within Western and Eastern societies (Campion, 2009). In addition, astrology can be categorized as a set of systems and traditions originating from the notion that the relative positions of the celestial bodies (the sun, moon and the seven planets) can predict human behaviours, fate, and human affairs. Astrological understanding is not conceptualized as astrology of fortune-teller and newspaper columns but astrological influence on human affairs discovered intellectually by demanding methods of analysis, mathematically precise and planetary geometrical alignments (Tarnas,

2006). The Astrological perspective describes the world as an intelligibly ordered, patterned and coherently interconnected system with humanity as the main focus of the whole (Grof, 1998). In this view the astrological thinking assumes the existence of archetypes, which are timeless principles that underlie and inform the structure of the material world (Grof, 1998). Plato considered archetypes, psychological, cosmic and objective primordial forms of a universal mind that transcends the human psyche (Tarnas, 2006). Carl Jung (1959) brought the concept of archetypes to psychology and described them as primarily psychological principles (Jung, 1969; Grof, 1998). Archetypal psychology, according to Jung (1959), is thought as innate universal psychic structures, shared cross-culturally by all human beings and is regarded as universal expressions of collective consciousness (Jung, 1959; Tarnas, 2006). "Archetypes are self portraits of the instinct and render human experiences meaningful according to certain timeless universal patterns of forms : Light and Dark, Birth and Death, Rebirth, the Hero, the Great Mother, the Child, the Trickster, the Shadow, Good and Evil, Eros and Logos, Feminine and Masculine" (Tarnas, 2006, p.57). Astrology is thought to support both the Platonic view and the Jungian view which seem visible in human psychology, in human experience and behaviour.

Tarnas (2006) suggested that individual's experiences must not be divided between subjective human self and an objective external world; after all we are all part of a universe (Cosmos) which may not be mechanistic and purposeless. Using Jung's archetypal astrology and theory of synchronicity (two or more unrelated events occur by chance in a meaningful manner) astrology could be adopted as the foundations for explaining the human psyche, or at least the collective unconsciousness. Investigations of serious Astrology has helped break the barriers of scepticism which often spring from ignorant lay mans assumptions about what astrology can and cannot do (Campion, 2009).

However, where the latter cannot go beyond the scepticism of the modern mind, science has achieved astounding success and has become the powerful force of materialistic and mechanistic operations replacing some important principles of human existence (Grof, 1985). Many scientists agree that Astrology is a pseudoscience but there is little explanation as to why it is consistently considered a pseudoscience and why people still follow astrology (Tarnas, 2006). Mainstream science argues that beliefs in this phenomenon are considered a matter of cognitive biases and product of the Forer effect (Marks, 2000). The Forer effect aims to explain the observed effects in the human mind and the pattern of deviation in judgement that occurs in particular situations which can lead to illogical or irrational interpretations of those situations (Marks, 2000). However, the theory fails to take into consideration the spiritual predisposition of an individual. Spirituality has played a central role in self-help movements and is understood as the search for the development of inner peace or the foundations of happiness (Hogan, 2010). Thus, spiritual practice of some kind is essential for personal well being (Maslow, 1999). Steiner (1994) has attempted to study the spiritual phenomena and the personal well being as a result of spiritual development by applying systematic methodologies that do not attempt to redefine natural science as such but explore individuals' inner experiences. Astrology has continuously been deemed as a pseudoscience along with other beliefs and practices of the spiritual nature. However, individuals interested in Astrology, dedicate a lifetime of study and argue that there is depth to the principles of astrology. Moreover, these individuals do not claim that astrology is

science as such, nor do they accept astrology as a belief system, but it is fundamentally viewed as a phenomenological being (Campion, 2009). In addition, astrology serves some important motivational functions and assists the individual to comprehend both the world and the self (Lillqvist and Lindeman, 1998).

In order to understand individuals' experiences committed to Astrology and perhaps incorporate an interpretation of their world, this study will be adopting Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative methodology that is fundamentally committed to examine how individuals make sense of their major life experiences (Smith, 2009). IPA is concerned in examining experiences in their own concept, phenomenological in terms of what happens when the everyday flow of lived experiences takes on a particular significance for people.

IPA relies upon people's personal perceptions of an event or state as opposed to attempting to give an objective record for those events or states of being. Based in subjectivity, it's considered that the meanings that people attribute to events shape their experience (Smith, 2009). However, it is accepted that interactions between actors in the social world are responsible for the meaning people ascribe to events. As a result of this interaction peoples' interpretation of events may not be totally idiosyncratic so while trying to get close to the participants world, IPA considers that it cannot do this directly or completely (Coolican, 2004). Thus, access to the participants world is dependent on researchers own conceptions which are made available through a process of interpretative activity, so therefore, IPA has its theoretical stance in hermeneutics which originated by Husserl's idea of study of consciousness (Smith et al, 2009). Rigorous scientific procedures may not encompass research into important human questions so IPA makes a valuable contribution to furthering psychological understanding of human experiences.

Method

Participant

The research used a purposive sample from a number of different Astrological Societies in the UK. The sample consisted of six males and females of over 18 years of age. The sample was considered homogeneous to the extent that all participants were members of an Astrological society. **Adrian** is a 52 year old philosophy professor at a leading UK university. He started his interest in Astrology in his early twenties. He is a Libra. **Anna** is an administrator at a private company; she is 35 years old and an Aquarius. She began her journey through astrology in her early teens. **Chrissy** is a 60 years old upper class individual, she is unemployed but is currently a PHD student of Cultural Astronomy and Astrology. Her fascination with astrology became prominent in her thirties and she is a Sagittarius. **Jinny** is a Homeopath, she is 50 years old and a Gemini. She joined the Astrological Society in 2006 but had been a student of astrology since 2000. **Michelle** is a 32 year old PA for a fashion company and is an Aquarius. She joined the Astrological Society a year ago. **Polly** is a professional Astrologer and has a PHD in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology. She is 55 years old and a Capricorn. She began her journey in Astrology in her early twenties.

Procedure and data collection

Cases were presented in the form of semi-structured interviews. The interviews adhered to a relatively informal structure permitting the respondent to produce richer and more realistic information.

The interview was primarily developed to build a rapport between the researcher and the participants where they felt comfortable and allowed an honest and open conversation. It was therefore important to inform the participants of the purpose of the research and acknowledge the confidentiality of the interview.

General questions were introduced at first in order to grasp a general understanding of the topic area and a funnelling structure was developed allowing the researcher to explore in depth more specific concerns. Funnelling involves primarily introducing questions that generate a general view towards the area of interest, and following these, more probing questions were asked to grasp a more specific concern of the research. The methodology is seen in the following example of the interview schedule; "*When and how did you become interested in Astrology?... Tell me a bit more about Astrology?...* If conducted in reverse the interview is likely to produce data that may be biased by taking the direction of the interviews prior and specific concern (Smith, 2009).

The format of the interview schedule was devised in three sections, relating to the general area of research of what Astrology is, how Astrology is being perceived by the participants and how Astrology has shaped their lives. The interview commenced by exploring not only the participant's general knowledge of Astrology but also what areas of astrology they were most interested in. Questions relating to the area of interest allowed for subsequent probing to explore how astrology is being perceived by different participants, including "*What are the things about astrology that intrigues you the most?...What does Astrology mean to you?*". The final part of the interview focused on directive questions about the relationship with astrology and the impact that this phenomena has in assisting the participant in their spiritual growth. However, the schedule was employed as guidance in exploring the area of study rather than an order of questioning.

Contact was made via email to the president of an Astrological society seeking volunteers from the society. The researcher's query was forwarded to the members who allowed those wishing to participate to contact the researcher directly. Members who wished to volunteer were contacted directly and suitable times for interviews were arranged. There were no specific times allocated to each participant, the arrangements were made subject to participants' availability and choice of venue. Some interviews took place in a coffee bar, and others were carried out at the participants' homes.

Upon the interview each participant was presented with a consent form to sign, which had been a request condition of ethical approval. Each participant was then guided through a semi-structured interview, approximating at fifteen to thirty minutes in duration. The interviews were conducted using normative guidelines as suggested

by Smith (2009), which instructs the interviewer not to be obstructive, use minimal probes and allow the interviewee to reflect and not to prompt a response. On completion of interviews, the participants were asked to contact the researcher if any queries arose or they wished to withdraw from the study.

Analysis

This analysis employed an idiographic approach instigating with clusters of concepts and slowly digressing to more universal categorisations or claims (Smith, 2009).

The process began by reading transcripts several times with annotations and significant comments or responses recognized by the researcher documented in the left hand margin. These reflections included aspects of the participant's occupation, area of interest within the Astrology spectrum and their ultimate perceptions of Astrology. The next stage focused on more salient areas of text and identified characteristics sections, these emergent themes were more psychological and captured the core of what was being represented by that section of the transcript. These emergent themes required a more advanced terminology as a higher level of interpretation was necessary to explore the respondent's accounts. These particular themes were selected on the basis of their recurrence throughout the texts and most importantly due to their specific connotations relating to the participants' accounts, which not only enriched the researcher's understanding of the participants' experience but also aided the appearance of other aspects of the account. Finally, super-ordinate themes were developed by forging themes into clusters and labelling them on the basis of what they represented as a group reflected in the transcript.

Results

The results report three main themes which were derived from the analysis. First, persuasion presents an account on how the participants became interested in Astrology, focusing on curiosity of mystical practices, New Age phenomenon and persuasion of social interactions. The second theme is defined as guidance, in terms of Astrology as a guidance tool which plays an important role in self-help and development of personal and social relationships. Finally the third theme presents aspects of well being. The features of the theme include happiness and spiritual development of the participants. The analysis presents specific phenomenological experiences in the context of the experiences with astrology. The following narrative will attempt to give an account of the themes in context and how these were understood and interpreted.

Persuasion

Similar to any belief or practice of spiritual phenomenon, interests of the mystical and the unknown often springs from curiosity. For Ana, this was very much the case;

“ Umm, my mum...was in the habit of reading things out of newspapers...I remember her having a book of palms...I was quite interested in mysterious things like gypsies,

astrology and palm reading...Dot was an old hippy...she used to read tarot card and astrology...so it started from then really..." Anna

For Adrian on the other hand, it was more the influence of family members and personal relationships that sparked his interest towards astrology, Adrian explains;

"My brother had gone to an astrology course but he had only done one evening. He bought a book, I got hold of it...it looked interesting so I dug into it, started from there..." also reflected in the following; *"...I met this sort of partner at the same time as I was getting into it and she was also interested in astrology..."* Adrian

This was also seen in Ann, she says *"In 1997, through two friends who had been interested in astrology for many years"*. Ann

For Michelle, astrology was another way to escape the ordinary and the mundane social interaction, she describes;

"Since I was 16...it was great reading about whether boyfriends would be a suitable match..." Michelle

In contrast, for others the social influence of the sixties and seventies which devoted a lot of cultural and political trends across societies influenced their interest in astrology. The era's flamboyance, radical and exciting new trends changed how individuals accepted different social aspects and it was almost fashionable to become part of the New Age movement. For Polly this was certainly the case, she revealed;

"As a young person living and working in London...I then worked with a woman who was very involved with "New Age" ideas" Polly

Ana also describes her interest as influenced by the social movements at the time;

"I was born in the in the 70s and I think in the 70s it was quite fashionable astrology in that kind of respect sort of movement so I think it started from that really..." Anna

For Chrissy astrology was not something that was accepted lightly within her familial milieu. Being from an upper-middle class background, astrology was viewed as a social taboo. However, for Chrissy, some life coincidences with some casual and apparent connections, what Jung calls synchronicity, triggered her interest in astrology;

"I knew nothing about astrology...Then in 1972, I bought an eyestone in Christies...I was intrigued by cuneiform inscription...within few weeks bringing the object into the house...my mother sent me a magazine article she wanted me to read. ...the magazine included an ephemeris for Mars (sex) and Venus (love) and a description of how they activated in specific signs. My husband and I had had some difficult years...I had gathered much experience and when I read a description of these three very different men in this magazine I was shocked..." Chrissy *"As if it was all synchronizes...have you heard of Jung's golden scarab?... I was meant to come across astrology at some point..."*

Thus, for Chrissy this significant coincidence or synchronicity engendered a sense of orientation towards astrology which embodied a purpose and meaning of this random observed coincidence, which at face value had no apparent causal connections but nevertheless seemed to form meaningful patterns.

Guidance

Interest in astrology may often spring from social movements, curiosity or general interest for the unknown. However, for its students, astrology is often accepted as a tool to explain different patterns of behaviour and energies between individuals, frequently used as a guidance tool whether that may be for personal development or personal relationships.

Ann explains; *“To me it has been an invaluable tool in self-understanding, understanding my family, my friends and my patients”* Ann

For Adrian, astrology means understanding; *“ what goes on...for example in the morning I can look at the planet, planetary positions and I will know if the Venus is in a certain sign and I am more likely to encounter experiences of pleasant interactions with people...if Mars...I will experience some aggressive challenges...”* Adrian

Adrian's perception of astrology does not only spring from the interest of predicting concepts of what is going on or what will happen in the future but also astrology is used here as a journey of life; *“...generally it has a positive effect and helped me to get a grip on many different things, personal past and the present...um in personal life...”* Adrian

Thus for Adrian, astrology has perhaps played the role of the therapist, this was seen when a question was asked on why did the participant choose to look at astrology for guidance, the response was as follows;

“I moved from South Africa to Britain and had a break down, a mental break down....so I was in hospital for a bit so I tried to make sense of what I had gone through. So I looked at a book about psychology and religion...looks at coincidence, synchronicity...finding in my early 20s I was encountering a lot of coincidences and I was trying to make sense out of it....decode of what was going on.” Adrian

The latter was also seen in Chrissy, she describes;

“My husband and I had had some difficult years...he walked out on me and the children twice and had only returned when I was settled with another man...But I had discovered a system that explained his behaviour and explained myself...” Chrissy

For Chrissy, understanding her husband's behaviour, through astrology, was somewhat unlocking of what Chrissy calls, *“the next stage of humanity's evolutionary journey”*. To some extent Chrissy is referring here to the archetypal personality traits as coined by Jung. By understanding her husband's personality traits portrayed through archetypal astrology (ie. Sun signs) she can manoeuvre and allow certain

types of behaviour because *“he is a Scorpio so you need to accept his mood temperaments and support him, rather than argue all the time”* Chrissy.

Personal development plays an important role in well-being. For Michelle, astrology was used as a tool to understand herself as well as others in the process of personal development, she explains; *“It helps me realise that there is a reason why individuals behave the way they do. It has also helped me become more aware of who I am and why I operate the way I do.”* Michelle’s positive experiences, fundamentally, derive from her “discovery” of human behaviour through patterns of energy;

“It was good to discover the reason for my lack of focus and inability to discover my purpose in life in 2010 was down to neptunian fog in my solar return chart. It made a lot of sense and was very reassuring at the time” Michelle

Most of the participants' experience as a whole is a product of understanding astrology and they use this tool tailored to their specific needs. However, it is fundamentally used to understand themselves and others around them. Polly describes this as; *“... a dimension of meaning to my experience and my understanding of myself, other people and the world around me”* Polly. This was also seen in Anna’s response; *“...it made me see things in a quite different way than other people, maybe more interesting...in quite a sort of obvious way its changed my life...”* Anna

Well- being

Self acceptance, is realisation of true self (Maslow, 1999), coming to terms with a sense of purpose and meaning in life. All participants “belief” system concluded to one concept, self acceptance. Much of their spiritual growth is due to the idea of synchronicity and energies of planets that go beyond our human explanations. In other words, disposition of fate and accepting oneself as part of the cosmos, has encouraged the participants to become more tolerant, self aware and open-minded towards ideas and experiences.

Chrissy explains; *“I think understanding others and self-awareness are the major arenas for spiritual growth...I could certainly thank astrological understanding for my healthy relationship with my husband and his healthy relationship with himself”*
Chrissy

For Adrian, being part of the universe means that he can understand himself and understand life as a whole; *“Ones dynamic attribute to the universe rather than just a passive recipient out there, so is an interactive process whereby you can actually help shift things at different levels so astrology is a wonderful tool to understanding life but also helping to change it.”* Adrian

This was also portrayed in Polly’s response; *“...has helped me to see that life is a process that is filled with changes”* Polly

Individual’s life trajectory consists of good and bad experiences. Sometimes it is difficult to overcome these negative experiences and one seeks explanation as to why these things occasionally occur and astrology offers an explanation through

natal charts and transits of planet. For Ann, by exploring the natal chart she can now understand her life path; *“It has made my journey much more interesting, much more worthwhile and I hope I now take fewer wrong turnings. I believe I am doing what I came to do and I love my life”* Ann. This indicates that Ann may now be at the peak of her experiences according to Maslow’s self-actualization theory.

Similarly, for Michelle, astrology offers an individual perspective on life experiences, whether good or bad. She feels equipped with a shield of protection against the unknown and it allows Michelle to enhance her well being;

“I feel I have a secret weapon which helps me figure out why things are happening and has made me even more aware that things are transitory and make the most of life today...there is comfort to know that it’s not always going to be that way.”

Michelle

Anna’s involvement with astrology has provided her with an acceptance for an “everything happens for a reason” concept. Looking at herself as part of the world rather confined to individual perspective has somewhat changed her perception of self;

“...there is something about the geometry and harmony and the idea of being part of a bigger order that seems to refine peoples mind and think and make people thinkers and make them part of a more synchronistic world to give them sense of meaning and harmony of the world so I think it can enhance your very thin...it gives you a better meaning of the world.” (Anna, pp) By acknowledging the self as part of the whole, Anna’s describes he life as *“enriched 100%”* Anna

According to the participants, astrology has many dimensions and many levels of understanding. Once you become interested in astrology, it draws you in and opens new levels of potentialities and responsibilities that have significant personal meanings, which of course may lead to well being and better understanding of personal and social relationships.

Discussion

Qualitative techniques such as IPA help develop a contextual understanding of the experiential dimensions of the individual’s life world. For these participants interest in astrology typically began as part of a mystical journey or spiritual experience, which may illustrate a transpersonal experience. Once they understood and learnt in depth what astrology entails, they used it as a guidance tool to assist them in their spiritual growth, which is one of the main features of astrology. This tool was then tailored to each of their needs, focusing on personal development and to build relationships with others. It was, thus, accepted as part of the participant’s persona. Astrology and the study of astrology for these participants are not accepted as a belief system as such but as a philosophy of life. Transpersonal psychology aims to ascertain this phenomenological enquiry of the meaning of experiences and the effect these have upon individual’s behaviour (Washburn, 1994).

People are pulled towards astrology because it makes sense in their lives and has functional relevance to their lives. The journey of astrological study for these

participants, sprung from the desire of self- knowledge. In everyday life, people engage in various cognitive and behaviour strategies to confirm their self concept (Swann, 1990). Astrology is seen as a strategy that verifies self-concept and it offers descriptions of personality that are both positive and ambiguous, thus people are more likely to be drawn to this strategy especially if it confirms and provides information of self conception (Swann, 1990). In this view, according to Allport (1961), self knowledge or confirmation of self-conception is associated with positive outcomes and well being. Some of the participants in this study were born in the 1960s and 1970s which saw a great deal of spiritual movements and what the Western society calls New Age. This spiritual movement attempted to create a connection between science and spirituality, hence, perhaps the beginning of Transpersonal Psychology. Some of the participants were influenced by the movement and adhered to the philosophies and spiritual phenomenon that New Age had to offer. Others, in contrast, became interested in astrology from observing coincidences in the course of their life. These coincidences, what Jung referred to as synchronicity, suggest that coincidences that have no apparent connection, seem meaningful and difficult to believe they have been produced by chance alone (Tarnas, 2006). This was evident from Chrissy's response when prompted about a question on how she became interested in astrology "*As if it was all synchronizes...have you heard of Jung's golden scarab?... I was meant to come across astrology at some point...*". Tarnas (2006) suggested that synchronicities seem to reflect some of the archetypal form that Jung referred to as the basic underlying principles of the human psyche. Thus, it is possible that this direct encounter with the archetypal unconscious, creates not only psychological self-awareness but also spiritual transformation, allowing an engagement with those mystical realities that can promote well-being and purpose, hence providing a transcendent meaning (Tart et al, 2009; Tarnas, 2006).

It seems plausible that, although astrological information is illusionary, it provides (for those who study astrology) meaningful information about individuals' experiences that are a reflection of the interactions between celestial bodies. According to Tarnas (2006), an individual's view of the world varies to the degree of their innermost being and colour what they experience by the state they are in. The state of being as portrayed in the results of this research suggests individuals' experiences that support the move towards disclosing and developing the deeper nature of participant's identities, self-image and roles on a more universal basis (Scotton et al, 1996). The findings suggest that astrology has played an important role in the self-help movement and is understood as the search for the development of inner happiness (Hogan, 2010). Thus, spiritual practices, such as astrology are essential for personal well being; evidence from the analysis portrays this well. According to Fontana (2003), individuals who experience difficult life experiences, for instance as seen in Adrian and Chrissy, may help the person move beyond the concerns for self towards a more universal perspective. Astrology, in turn offers a coping strategy to deal with personally threatening events and regain control over them by enhancing individuals' self-esteem (Taylor, 1983). This was noted in the participants' responses when asked why they believed in Astrology, "*help understand why things happen to me*", "*understand that after a negative event, a positive one will follow*" and so on. According to Fahlberg and colleagues (1992), the ego often opens to self-transcendence, following a life crisis, eventually leading the

individual to a new perspective and a new definition of reality. This novel reality is thought to be accepted as unchanged and for some individuals it creates a feeling of completeness which of course, ultimately results in healing or well being (Coward and Reed, 1996). However, Keinan (1994) suggested that an increase in superstition and magical thinking arises more frequently in individuals who live in stressful conditions, than those under low stress. The theory seems plausible when considering the nature of Astrology, which constitutes a conceptual system based on predictability and controllability and it claims to provide a meaningful explanation of unexpected and negative events based on the relative interactions between the planets. As a consequence, people in stressful situations may feel that astrology helps them understand why these events are occurring, hence it protects the individual from anxiety. The latter is evident from Michelle's response "*It was good to discover my lack of focus and inability to discover my purpose in life in 2010...it made a lot of sense and was very reassuring to me...*". The evidence supports the claim that interest in astrology may increase together with negative or stressful life events. However, Keinan's (1994) theory fails to take into consideration the phenomenological context of astrology in terms of self-actualization and inner harmony with one's self (i.e. after life crisis) that seems prevalent in the participants' responses. Given astrological adherence to spirituality, the participants seemed more emotion focused than practice focused, in other words, they do not view astrology as a belief system or highly structured as such but more of a phenomenological deployment. Contrary to the traditional reputation, astrology is not concretely predictive but rather archetypically predictive, which means that astrology does not work in line with various forms of intuition but rather on the precise discernment of archetypal dynamics (Tarnas, 2006). In essence, according to the participants, archetypal astrology offers a valuable insight into the dynamic activity of archetypes in human experience which projects "fate" that is repressed or unconscious. Although, it must be noted that fate and unconsciousness operate in various dimensions but for the purpose of this paper, it is suggested in terms of predisposition of individual's behaviour and predictive patterns of events in relation to planetary alignments. In this view, astrology students seek spiritual experiences to interpret their own non-ordinary states of consciousness. The latter functions well under Jung's archetypal framework, which suggest that individuals experience life in a manner which is conditioned by the past history of humankind (Daniels, 2002). In this view, understanding the predisposition of individuals character and predicting forthcoming events, has equipped the participants with a sense of self-acceptance and self-actualization (Maslow, 1999) which is both beneficiary for their well being and inner happiness. For instance, this is evident from Chrissy's response when asked how astrology has affected her life "*I could certainly thank astrological understanding for my healthy relationship with my husband and his healthy relationship with himself*". These transpersonal experiences may influence individual's well-being, in a sense that it reduces ambiguity and uncertainty and assists them in comprehending both the self and the world (Washburn, 1994). In order to explore these experiences Transpersonal Psychology endeavours to integrate psychological concepts, theories, and methods with practices of the spiritual disciplines. It may not be accepted as portraying a rational empirical research base but it will press the scientific mind beyond its conventional limits. Experiences are subjective and the significance and purpose cannot be accurately measured, therefore it is not possible to give a precise outcome of the analysis. IPA,

used as a method of enquiry attempts to explore some avenues of these experiences but recognizes that the outcome is always an interpretation. Adrian, Michelle, Polly, Anna, Ann and Chrissy have been students of astrology for many years and are yet to fully comprehend the “mystical” world of Astrology. Individuals who are involved in the study of astrology do not value horoscopes as the true face of astrology, nor do they accept that astrology is in line with clairvoyance or “psychic” values. The psyche and cosmos are intertwined and mutually complicated and the understanding of the universe affects every aspect of the individual’s interior life from the highest of spiritual convictions to mundane daily experiences. It is true that astrology is continuously being criticized as absurd and simplistic, however, for these participants astrology is more than a way of life; it is accepted as a philosophy of life. The indiscriminate rejection of this spiritual phenomenon does not seem to affect the participants, nor do they wish to influence others in joining their journey. They have accepted that astrology is rejected on the basis of personal and cultural prejudice and that is why astrology works better when individualist and inwardly directed. Whether it is seen as science, art or philosophy, astrology is fundamentally acknowledged as a guidance tool in assisting its students to spiritual development, self-acceptance and knowledge of oneself and the world.

Conclusion

Transpersonal psychology is understudied and often not considered in line with scientific research because mysterious phenomenon does not come under the lens of science. However, I believe that people are for and foremost spiritual beings, which is the core assumption of Transpersonal Psychology. People always assume spirituality draws links with religion and the bizarre. However, experiences are subjective, what we experience can not possibly be described through experimentation because the depth of perception is always assumed. The participants of this study feel that astrology has guided them through a better understating of themselves and their milieu. I can appreciate their enthusiasm and perhaps value their experiences; however, as a sceptic I am not converted. Transpersonal experiences are present in most of us; however the degree of these experiences depends on the individual. Some individuals would go beyond the scientific explanation of cause and effect and look beyond the unknown. Others, on the other hand are happy with what has been presented to them but that does not imply lack of spirituality. Of course the importance of astrology in a spiritual sense for individuals can be decimated through the use of materialistic and scientific arguments. Many questions remain unanswered mainly due to the quantity of celestial bodies in the universe. A rational scientist would firstly argue whether stars that remain unobservable to the human eye and earth bound telescopes would have an effect on people’s behaviours. They would also argue that astrology itself examines the world as the centre of the universe with the relationship of celestial bodies with the earth as their main function but, the Copernican revolution in astronomy and further scientific discoveries undermine the centrality of earth to the universe. With further exploration of the universe the discovery of such bodies as stars going supernova that turn into black holes are not answered by astrology because when the founding principles of astrology were invented these phenomena where not in the lexicon of everyday language. On a philosophical point it is thought that astrology would undermine the idea of free will if taken to the furthest examples.

One of the many founding notions of society is the idea of some limited free will action by individuals. For instance, it would be a farcical scene in a court room if a murderer pledged that he could not be trialled as he was born with the wrath of Mars under his cloud sign. However, there is tension and interplay between this educated sceptical posture and the discovery of the larger truth. For the purpose of this essay I researched what it is the very tip of a large iceberg, thus to say that astrology does not function well under the framework of contemporary human experiences. Amidst the multitude of debates and controversies that fill the intellectual arena, our basic understanding of reality is fundamentally subjective.

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