

Transcultural Concepts in Nursing Care

Transculture, transculturalism

Transculture (transkultmtura) comes from the Latin *trans*, meaning *beyond*; a trans-cultural realm beyond any national, gender, or professional culture; a mode of being, located at the crossroads of cultures.

The concept of transculture responds to the limitations of some contemporary theoretical models of culture. It is different from the understanding of the global system as a collection of *discrete worlds* or *clashing civilizations* (as in Samuel Huntington's model). It also diverges from the older American *melting pot* metaphor, in which cultural differences are assimilated to a national norm. Finally, it departs from the multicultural model that posits aggregates of discrete subcultures (based on ethnic, racial, sexual, or other differences), each of which seeks to establish and maintain its own *pride*. Rather, the transcultural approach asserts the fundamental insufficiency and incompleteness of any culture and thus its need for radical openness to and dialogue with others, the need for humility rather than for pride.

Transculture is an emerging sphere where humans position themselves free from the limitations of the primary culture(s) of their home environment. The elements of transculture are freely chosen by people rather than dictated by rules and prescriptions within their given cultures. Examples of transcultural writers include Vladimir Nabokov and Joseph Brodsky, who not just geographically, but creatively, migrated across Russian/American cultural borders. But emigration is not the *sine qua non* of transculturalism. J. W. Goethe and Aleksander Pushkin were deeply transcultural within their national literatures and languages. As Goethe put it: *National literature does not mean much at present, it is time for the era of world literature and everybody must endeavor to accelerate this epoch* (Eckermann). Pushkin, according to Dostoevsky, *possessed the capacity of fully identifying himself with another nationality. Take his Scenes from Faust, take The Miserly Knight, take the ballad Once there Lived a Poor Knight; Read his Don Juan again* (Dostoevsky).

Although transculture depends on the efforts of separate individuals to overcome their identification with specific cultures, it also describes the process of interaction between cultures themselves. More and more individuals today find themselves in the condition of being *outside* of any particular culture, *outside* of specific national, racial, religious, social, ideological, and other *identities*. Thus the category of *transcultural* is broader than *transnational*, *transdisciplinary*, or *transdenominational*, because it embraces all possible forms of cultural differences, sending *interferential waves* across them.

According to Mikhail Bakhtin, *the most intense and productive life of culture takes place on the boundaries of its individual areas and not in places where these areas have become enclosed in their own specificity* (2). This famous statement carries a special relevance for our proto-global age. Is the multicultural model "the pluralistic world of self-enclosed cultures, each

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valuable in itselfâ€”sufficient for understanding new intercultural flows? Or do global studies have to work out a new model that will challenge the mosaic of multiculturalism, just as multiculturalism had earlier challenged the melting pot model and the â€œuniversalâ€• cultural canon?

By emphasizing the life of cultures on the boundaries, the model of transculture affirms that individual cultures are inherently insufficient when isolated from one another. For Bakhtin, people from different cultures need to develop the quality of humility and openness to each other, rather than revel in the pride of self-identity and self-aggrandizement: â€œonly in the eyes of an alien culture, does another culture open itself in a fuller and deeper wayâ€• (7). We cannot fully visualize our own faces; only others can see our true appearance. For instance, the distinctiveness of Russian culture can, paradoxically, be perceived more deeply by non-Russians, or the distinctiveness of â€œwhiteâ€• culture by â€œnon-whites,â€• and vice versa. This Bakhtinian approach leads us from multiculturalism to transculturalism.

Transculturalism is not simply a method based on the value of â€œoutsidedness,â€• but also a mode of being located at the crossroads of cultures. Culture, by releasing us from physical limitations, imposes new limitations on a symbolic level with its own idiosyncrasies, manias, phobias, ideological assumptions and restrictions, modes of indoctrination, and informational filters. As physical beings, we are governed to an extent by our bodily instincts, such as hunger and sexuality; culture transforms these instincts into rituals and generic routines through which we may come to possess what possesses us. We develop patterns of cultural behavior that curb these instincts and delay our gratification through the mediation of symbols, etiquette, and customs. Each culture has its own sets of rules and prescriptions that become second nature for its members; for instance, each culture has its particular rituals for eating, dating, and speaking. Transculture is the next step in the ongoing human quest for freedom, in which we liberate ourselves from the prison-house of language and a variety of artificial, self-imposed, and self-deifying cultural identities.

An eloquent case for transculturalism can be found in the life and philosophy of Merab Mamardashvili (1930-90). Although Mamardashvili lived for many years in Moscow and Prague, he spent his last years in his native Tbilisi, where he suffered from the excesses of Georgian cultural and political nationalism exacerbated by the downfall of the Soviet empire. Mamardashvili sympathized with what would later become known as multiculturalism, viewing it as a mode of liberation from a monolithic cultural canon. However, he objected strongly to the glorification of multiplicity for

its own sake. "Each culture is valuable in itself. People should be allowed to live within their cultures" (Mamardashvili 335). Parroting this typical multiculturalist argument, Mamardashvili sums up his view thus: "the defence of native culture sometimes proves to be a denial of the right to live in a different world" (337). Here he refers to Georgian nationalism, which strikes him as increasingly narrow and despotic. "What if I am suffocating within this very original, complicated, and developed culture?" (337).

What must be preserved, then, is the right to live beyond one's culture, on the borders of cultures,

to transcend the surrounding, native, proper culture and milieu for the sake of nothing. Not for the sake of another culture, but for the sake of nothing. Transcendence into nothing. In reality, this is the living, pulsating center of the entire human universe — a primordial metaphysical act. (Mamardashvili 336)

To transcend the limits of one's native culture does not constitute a betrayal, because the limits of any culture are too narrow for a human in the entirety of his or her potentials. Transculturalism, to follow Mamardashvili's logic, does not mean adding yet another culture to the existing array; it is rather a special mode of existence spanning cultural boundaries, a transcendence into "no culture," which is indicative, ultimately, of how the human being exceeds all natural and cultural definitions. If culture positions itself outside nature, then transculture is the new emerging sphere in which humans position themselves outside their primary naturalized cultures. Cultures develop their own sets of values, identities, and predispositions that tend to become an oppressive cultural environment for their members, leading to a new process of "denaturalization," or, more precisely, "deculturalization."

Transculture, of course, does not completely release us from our "primary" cultural bodies, just as culture does not release us from our physical bodies. Each successive sphere of existence—"nature, culture, transculture" is irreducible to the previous one, while at the same time changing its meaning. Freedom achieved through transculture may be characterized in Bakhtin's words: "[it] cannot change existence, so to speak, materially (nor can it want to)—it can change only the sense of existence" (Bakhtin 137). The sense of the existence of natural objects, such as a stone or water, is changed as they are interwoven in the context of various cultures. Similarly, the sense of the existence of a certain cultural tradition, with its rituals and symbols, such as ethnic food or a literary convention, is changed when interwoven in the expanding transcultural context.

Transculture offers a universal symbolic palette on which any individual can blend colors to produce an expressive self-portrait. As a transcultural being, I can adhere to any ethnic or confessional tradition and decide the degree to which I make it my own. This transcultural condition, which gives new meaning to all elements of existing cultures, can be described by using Bakhtin's concept of *vnenakhodimost'*, "outsidedness" or "being located beyond." This realm beyond all cultures is located within transculture.

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