VULNERABILITY & RESILIENCE ACROSS THE LIFESPAN: A Trans Elder’s “Dialectical Dance” from Trans Youth to Trans Activist, Therapist, Trainer & Writer

Transgender Archives Symposium
University of Victoria
March 22-25, 2018

Rupert Raj, M.A., Counseling Psychology
Multidimensional Intersecting Identities

Personal, Political & Professional Identities:

- Eurasian-Canadian, Pansexual Trans Man
- Existential “Philosopher,” Ecofeminist, Secular Humanist & Social Democrat
- Trans Activist & Eco-Activist/Animal Rights Liberationist
- Psychotherapist, Gender Consultant & Professional Trainer
- Published Writer/Editor

- Trans Youth to Trans Elder (1971 – 2018 -): age 19 to 66 +
- Trans Activism (1971-2018): 47 years, 3 countries

Multidimensional Intersecting Identities

DANCING THE DIALECTIC:
True Tales of A Transgender Trailblazer
(2017)

I: **Dialectical Dancer:**
Existing “Philosopher”/“Psychologist”/“Anthropologist” (1971-)

II: **Gender Worker:**
- Group Founder
- Peer-Counsellor
- Newsletter/Magazine Editor
Multidimensional Intersecting Identities

III: **Therapeutic Healer, Teacher & Writer:**
& Writer/Editor (1973-2018)
- Unpublished Writer
- Published Writer
- Book Editor

IV: **Rainbow Warrior:**
Eco-Activist/Animal Rights Liberationist (2017-)

*Dialectical Model: Thesis + Antithesis \(\Rightarrow\) Synthesis*
Vulnerability & Resilience

Dialectical Dynamic

- Polar opposites of a dialectical dynamic.
- We can often be vulnerable & resilient at same time (Jung’s “Wounded Healer” or “Healed Wounded Healer”).
- **Example I:** danger = fear (feel afraid/vulnerable) $\iff$ anger (feel angry & become strong/resilient) = fearful/angry courage/strength).
- **Example II:** a trans/intersex/two-spirit person might feel vulnerable to transphobic violence, but also resilient (through passive or active, creative resistance).
Vulnerability & Resilience

My Early Vulnerability:

- Victim of a physically abusive/emotionally neglectful mother, intense gender dysphoria (starting at 3), & tragic death of parents (at 16).

Vulnerability <=> Resilience:

“While I deeply mourned the loss of my beloved father, I rejoiced in my freedom from my hated mother, and even better, I was finally free to be me: a teenage Boy. Now, I could truly affirm that “in the depths of winter, I finally learned there was in me an invincible summer.” [Existential philosopher Albert] Camus expressed this dialectical tension of despair and hope, vulnerability and resilience in L’Eté (The Summer) (1954) after concluding that the only way to stay sane and not “dis” this absurd life is to purposefully embrace the maddening meaninglessness of it all, to transcend the violent suffering of this hell on earth, and to live life to the full regardless! Fervent hope spiced with sardonic humour is the medicine needed to cure our existential anxiety.” (Raj, R., Dancing The Dialectic, 2017).
Vulnerability & Resilience

Resistance as Resilience

- “Passive Resistance” (Mahatma Gandhi’s political non-violence)
- “Creative Resistance” (Drs. Roberta Timothy & Umana Mercedes’ Anti-Oppression Psychotherapy Model™)
- “Trans Resistance” (to genderphobic violence) (Dr. Dean Spade, Esq.) & (Raj, R., D.D., 2017)

Modular Applications

- Vulnerability/Resilience models can be applied in psychology, early childhood development, human development, politics, ecology, etc.
Indigenous Medicine Wheel (Mystical Pathways)

The Four-Fold Way™

- Crosscultural anthropologist’s Native American medicine wheel - mystical pathways towards resilience.
- **Four Pathways**: Visionary, Healer, Teacher & Warrior
Existential Life Model (Ways of Being-in-the-World)

My Multidimensional Self-Model/Existential Life Model

- I adapted A.A.’s Indigenous mystical model (four-fold pathway) to create my own existential-philosophical, ecofeminist, secular-humanist, social-democratic life model (ways of being-in-the-world), to accord the four Parts of my memoir (*Dancing The Dialectic: True Tales of A Transgender Trailblazer*):

  Visionary = **I. Dialectical Dancer** (“philosopher”/“psychologist”/“anthropologist”)
  Warrior = **II. Gender Worker** (trans/intersex/two-spirit activist)
  & **IV. Rainbow Warrior** (eco-activist/animal rights liberationist)
  Healer & Teacher = **III. Therapeutic Healer, Teacher & Writer**
Existential Life Strategies

Channelling despair & anger into “righteous indignation” (activism) & healing (therapy), teaching & writing:

- Trans Activism (incl. intersex & two-spirit advocacy)
- Eco-Activism/Animal Rights Liberation
- Counselling/Psychotherapy/Consulting
- Research/Education/Training
- Writing/Editing/Publishing

“Guiding Life Directives”

Existential Life Strategies

“Emotional Life Ledger”
- Polar opposites: “Regrets/Resentments” (vulnerabilities) on left side & “Gratitudes/Appreciations” (resiliences) on right side of life ledger to balance emotional life. (Raj, R., D.D., 2017)

Self/Life Affirmations
The Bamboo Tree

Bent by the wind, beaten by the rain, yet the bamboo tree thrives - strong as steel.

Human beings are both vulnerable and resilient...

Vulnerability to suffering fosters our humility, empathy, and compassion for ourselves and others.

Resilience helps us endure our pain, loss and grief, while sustaining our courage, hope and faith.

Like the perennial bamboo, it is just this dialectical tension that allows us to prevail.

~Rupert Raj
Power of the Human Spirit

I’m continually amazed by the unlimited power of the Human Spirit to overcome Life’s adversity time and time and time and time again...

May there always be wind in your sails as you navigate the turbulent seas of Life.

And never give up Hope that you will reach that seemingly far-off safe harbour one day soon.

~Rupert Raj

- Clients: trans, genderqueer, intersex & two-spirit adults; gender non-conforming youth
- Individual, Couple & Family Therapy
- Psychoeducational Group Therapy (“Gender Journeys” – teens & adults)
- Art-Based Group Therapy (“TransFormations” – youth)
- Trauma Therapy
- Jungian Therapy
- Existential-Humanistic Therapy
- Feminist Therapy
- Anti-Oppressive Therapy
- Gender-Affirming Therapy (incl. non-trans & non-transitioning clients)
- Transpositive Therapy
- Transitional Therapy (pre-, transitional & post-)
- Clinical Assessment & Supportive Counselling
R.R.’s (Published) Models


- Client Self-Empowerment Model™ (Raj, R., 2007. *Trans activism as therapy.*)

- Transformative Therapeutic Model™ (Raj, R., 2008. *Transforming couples & families.*)

- Clinical Assessment & Supportive Counselling Model™ (Raj, R., & Schwartz, C., Sept. 12, 2012, revised May 1, 2015. “A collaborative preparedness and informed consent model: *Guidelines to assess trans candidates for readiness for hormone therapy and supportive counselling throughout the gender transitioning process.*”)
Generic Therapeutic Models


Generic Therapeutic Modalities


- **Existential-Humanistic Therapies** (e.g., Frankl, V. Logotherapy: [www.viktorfrankl.org/e/logotherapy.html](http://www.viktorfrankl.org/e/logotherapy.html))


- **Narrative Therapy** (White, M. & Epston, D.: [www.narrativetherapycentre.com/narrative.html](http://www.narrativetherapycentre.com/narrative.html))
Gender-Specific Therapeutic Models


Anti-Oppression Intersectional Mental Health Model

**Anti-Oppression Psychotherapy (AOP) Model™**

- **Trainers:** Transpositive, queer, African-Canadian professor/therapist/consultant/trainer, Dr. Roberta Timothy, & her Latin American personal/business partner Mercedes Umana (PhD cand.): [www.healingconsultants.org/](http://www.healingconsultants.org/)
- **Intersectional factors:** race, indigeneity, class, gender, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, age, (dis)ability, spirituality
- **Social determinants of health:** racism, anti-indigeneity, classism, genderism, transphobia, sexism (incl. misogyny), homophobia, ageism, ableism, religious discrimination
- Actualizing *(Creative) Resistance & Resiliency* for clients and therapists
- Personal Narratives in Training (therapists) & Therapy (clients)
Jungian Psychology/Psychotherapy

Dr. Carl Gustav Jung, Swiss psychologist/psychotherapist/”alchemist”:

Archetypes
- Often act as metaphors for specific function of multidimensional identity
- E.G. “The Inner Healer” (compare to A. Arrien’s Four-Fold Way™)

Transcendent Function
- Transcending/reconciling the dialectic of polar opposites
- E.G.: Male/Female = Androgynous (Genderqueer, Intersex, Two-Spirit)
- E.G.: “The healed wounded healer” (Vulnerability <=> Resilience)
  http://jungiancenter.org/jung-on-the-transcendent-function/
Existential-Humanistic Therapies

**Logotherapy**

- The love of knowledge/wisdom of Self (psyche) & other
- The will to meaning
- Setting existential (life) goals to overcome despair, embrace hope & find purpose/meaning in life

Dr. Viktor Frankl, Jewish-Austrian psychiatrist & holocaust survivor: [www.viktorfrankl.org/e/logotherapy.html](http://www.viktorfrankl.org/e/logotherapy.html); [www.logotherapyinstitute.org/About_Logotherapy.html](http://www.logotherapyinstitute.org/About_Logotherapy.html)

Existential-Humanistic Therapies

Existential Trans Therapy:

- **Existential Angst** (life despair) & **Life Purpose**
- **Gender Anxiety** (gender dysphoria) & **Gender Expression/Transitioning**
- Dr. Anne Vitale, American Trans-Female Therapist: [http://www.avitale.com/](http://www.avitale.com/)
Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)

- DBT: Combination of Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) & Mindfulness practice (Western psychology & Eastern [Buddhist] spirituality)
- Balancing Wise Mind, Emotional Mind & Reasonable Mind
- Existential component: dialectic of change: Changing attitudes & behaviours to new healthy/positive ones while still allowing oneself to enact old negative/unhealthy strategies.
  
  www.linehaninstitute.org/resources/dbtvideos.php
Metaphors in Therapy & Writing

**Metaphor Therapy**


- Existential Therapy, Narrative Therapy & others also use metaphors

**Metaphors in Writing/Blogging/Live Journalling/Video-Making**

- **R.R.’s Metaphors:** The phoenix, “Dialectical Dancer,” “Gender Worker,” Healer & Teacher, “Rainbow Warrior” (Raj, R., 2017. *Dancing The Dialectic*).

- **Other Metaphors:** rose, orchid, chrysalis, butterfly, seahorse, etc. – names of transsexual/transvestite/intersex groups
Narratives Therapy

**Narrative Therapy**

- Derived from systems theory, cybernetics, literary theory, cultural anthropology, non-structuralist psychology & French post-structuralist philosophy
- “Re-authoring” client’s dominant stories (e.g., reframing a “loser” as a yet-to-be self-actualized “winner,” or a born (gender-dysphoric) perceived “male” as a pre-transitional trans female)
- Narrating one’s back story (past history); “re-writing the script” to a new story (present position and/or future goal); reminiscing about one’s hopefully successful life transition so far” (present retrospective of one’s past). Example: born a gender-dysphoric boy (past), now identifying as a girl/teen (present), planning to transition to a woman (future). Now (as an Elder), a post-transitional woman retrospecting on one’s life-span story (a new present).
Narratives in Writing

Narratives ((Auto)biographies, Poetry, Blogs, Live Journals, Videos)

- **Memoir:** Raj, R., 2017. *Dancing The Dialectic: True Tales of A Transgender Trailblazer.*


Narratives in Video-Making

**R.R. Featured in Video & TV Documentaries**


- "Rewriting the Script: A Love Letter to Our Families" (2001). Desi Queer Collective. (Video of queer, Canadian South Asians & their families - now on YouTube)

Trans Activism as Therapy

- Therapist can potentially increase trans client’s **resilience** by facilitating client’s entry into trans community connection and trans activism.

- Trans-advocating therapist can be transgender or cisgender. It’s an added bonus if therapist is trans-identified (or gender non-conforming, genderqueer, intersex, two-spirit) as they can act as a positive role model as a trans person (or trans activist).

Therapist as Trans Activist

- Therapist can potentially increase client resilience by advocating for timely access to psychological/psychotherapeutic &/or physical gender therapies for trans, intersex or two-spirit adults or gender non-conforming youth.

- Trans activist (gender-advocating) therapist can be transgender or cisgender. It’s an added bonus if therapist is trans-identified (or gender non-conforming, genderqueer, intersex, two-spirit) as they can act as a positive role model as a trans person (or trans activist).

R.R.’s Written & Edited Works

**Books**


R.R.’s Written & Edited Works

**Book Chapters**


**R.R.’s Written & Edited Works**

**Periodicals**


*The latter two are online on Canadian Lesbian & Gay Archives’s website: clga.ca/clga-collections/guides/; https://www.archeion.ca/rupert-raj-fonds-4*
R.R.’s Written & Edited Works

Clinical Research Papers


R.R.’s Written & Edited Works


Fact Sheets/Resource Documents

R.R.’s Written & Edited Works

Selected Poetry

Contact

RupertRajToronto@gmail.com