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BOOK REVIEW

The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology

by Harris L. Friedman and Glenn Hartelius (Eds.)

(2013; Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell)

Reviewed by

Nick Atlas

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When asked what it means to be a psychologist, I find I need to choose my words with care. Members of the general public often assume everyone in the field of psychology is a therapist, perhaps imagining a Freudian or Jungian analyst in an office with a couch—though this usually remains unspoken. If I were to disclose that I research esoteric and spiritual matters, I might be tagged a parapsychologist—a recognizable yet equally loaded moniker conjuring images of poltergeists and hand-held spectrometers. Similarly, the notion of delineating between quantitative and qualitative epistemologies within psychology is unlikely to spark a lasting conversation, and to speak of ESP is to take a leap of faith altogether. To proclaim that one is a transpersonal psychologist, however, is virtually guaranteed to draw a blank stare nine times out of ten. Even more challenging is the issue of having to explain transpersonal psychology to layperson and shrink alike. Thankfully, *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology* succeeds in doing just that.

As Stanley Krippner—an original figurehead and perhaps the field's most prolific advocate—attests in the volume's foreword (p. xvii), the *Handbook* is the first comprehensive resource in two decades to survey the ever-expanding transpersonal altiplano and, in a sense, represents a veritable "State of the Union Address." With keen sensitivity and an eye for detail, co-editors Friedman and Hartelius have set out to both define and distinguish transpersonal psychology from other sub-disciplines while fostering transpersonal community vis-à-vis an inclusive work that serves as medium for a variety of prototypical and contemporary voices. Furthermore, the text's unique and accessible design affords readers an opportunity to delve ever deeper into

the nuances of several principal motifs. By dividing the text into six exhaustive sections, the *Handbook* succeeds in establishing a theoretical foundation that encourages continual inquiry into the field's most pertinent issues.

In Part I, chapters by Hartelius, Rothe, and Roy (1; chapter nos. in parentheses), Hartelius, Friedman, and Pappas (3), and Walach (4)—insightful pieces on branding, praxis, and future directions—set the stage for reconciliation between transpersonal and mainstream psychological projects. Part II presents a handful of the discipline's principal contributions—most notably, the enduring offerings of Grof (5), Tart (6), and Ferrer (10)—as well as commentary on Jung (7), Aurobindo (8), Wilber (9) and others. Part III highlights predominant methodological approaches, such as the seminal work of Anderson and Braud (13) and Friedman (16), while Part IV explores some of the core transpersonal experiences such as psychedelic (19), near-death, (20) and sexual experiences (21)—that have come to define the field. In Parts V and VI, the text transitions into the practical, therapeutic applications of transpersonal psychology before widening its scope to incorporate a selection of works on the fringes of the transpersonal sphere, thereby opening a dialogue between transpersonal psychology and the broader field of transpersonal studies, including ecopsychology (33), transpersonal feminism (34), and transpersonal education (38). For a more extensive synopsis and additional perspectives, readers are referred to prior reviews by Leitner and Guthrie (2014) and Vich (2014) in recent issues of *PsycCRITIQUES* and the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, respectively.

As with any compilation of this magnitude, the *Handbook's* multidimensionality, style, and breadth are both its greatest strengths and its occasional weakness.

The text intermittently lacks a unified voice, is at times redundant and—at seven-hundred pages—is somewhat cumbersome. Conversely, each chapter is exceptionally well-written and the volume’s intrinsic rhythm succeeds in transmitting a well-defined message as to what transpersonal psychology is and what it can be, addressing what is needed to mobilize the field in the twenty-first century. While a hardcopy retails for roughly \$130.00 (at the time of my writing this review), the recently released paperback version is available for around \$40.00 and a Kindle-friendly version can be snapped up for less than \$30.00. At such affordable prices, the book not only is a worthy investment, but also is student-friendly, light on your wallet and can fit in your back pocket right beside it. Forthcoming translations in Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, and several other languages will only help to proliferate the *Handbook’s* appeal.

While it would be impossible to do justice to the *Handbook’s* far-reaching vision in a short review, of particular import are Rodrigues’ and Friedman’s chapter on “Transpersonal Psychotherapies” (32) and Rowe’s and Braud’s piece on “Transpersonal Education” (38), both of which speak directly to the project at hand—namely, creating language frames, developing methodologies and implementing praxis designed to bridge the gap between the transpersonal and the mainstream. Each of these authors, as well as many others throughout the text, recognize that a renewed transpersonal psychology *must* be an integral and holistic psychology that remains sensitive to and inclusive of conventional perspectives while “danc[ing] between scholarship and intuitive exploration” (p. 679). The academic classroom and the counseling field, in particular, ought to endeavor to educate transpersonal teacher-therapists, to accentuate the basic interdependence of learning and healing, and to articulate the synergy between the flourishing of intellect and the human spirit. In short, there is a need for dynamic instructors in conventional institutions training future generations of healer-scholars and disseminating the oft-neglected “view of humans characterized as transpersonal beings” (p. 590). While *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology* is clearly a milestone in this regard, whether it in fact signifies a “coming of age,” (p. xviii) as Krippner suggested, will ultimately be determined by its readership.

References

- Leitner, L. M. & Guthrie, L. (2014). Transpersonal psychology: The big picture. *PsycCRITIQUES*, 59(25).
- Vich, M. (2014). Book reviews. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 46(2), 245-254. doi:10.1037/a0037057

About the Authors

Harris Friedman, PhD, is Research Professor of Psychology (Retired) at University of Florida and Professor Emeritus at Saybrook University. He is a Florida licensed psychologist, holds the Diploma in both Clinical Psychology and also Organizational and Business Consulting Psychology from the American Board of Professional Psychology, and practices as a clinical and organizational psychologist. He is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association and has published more than 200 scholarly books, chapters, and articles, as well as serves as Senior Editor of this journal and Associate Editor of *The Humanistic Psychologist*. He is co-editor of *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology* (2013). His doctorate in clinical psychology included additional doctoral specialization in sociology (Georgia State University), and his master’s degree was in sociology (Emory University), while he has taught both psychology and sociology at many colleges and universities, and his scholarship and practice straddles both disciplines.

Glenn Hartelius, PhD, is Founding Director of an online PhD program in Integral and Transpersonal Psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) in San Francisco, CA, where he serves as Associate Professor. He serves as main editor for the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, co-editor of *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology*, and Secretary of the International Transpersonal Association. His research on the definition and scope of transpersonal psychology has helped to define the field. His work in attention and somatic phenomenology strives to make states of consciousness measurable. He also maintains an executive coaching practice.

About the Reviewer

Nick Atlas, PhD(c), is a transformative educator, meditation teacher and wellness consultant specializing in integrative approaches to sleep, dreams, and the art of relaxation. The Director of Evolutionary Education® and advanced 200-hour Yoga Psychology Teacher Trainings, Nick is also an accomplished artist, athlete, musician, world traveler, motivational speaker and forthcoming author. In addition to his role as an adjunct professor of transpersonal psychology at Atlantic University, Nick currently teaches general psychology at the University of West Georgia, conducts pioneering research on lucid dreaming, deep embodiment, and intrapersonal psychotherapy, and inspires his students and clients to realize their maximum potential. He has been practicing and teaching various forms of yoga, qigong, and meditation since 1998.

About the Journal

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