




1-1-2014

# Walking Between Worlds: Holding Multiple Worldviews as a Key for Ecological Transformation

Jeanine M. Canty  
*Naropa University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.ciis.edu/ijts-transpersonalstudies>

 Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#), [Psychology Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

## Recommended Citation

Canty, J. M. (2014). Canty, J. M. (2014). Walking between worlds: Holding multiple worldviews as a key for ecological transformation. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 33(1), 15–26.. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 33 (1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2014.33.1.15>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals and Newsletters at Digital Commons @ CIIS. It has been accepted for inclusion in *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CIIS. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@ciis.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@ciis.edu).

# Walking Between Worlds: Holding Multiple Worldviews as a Key for Ecological Transformation

Jeanine M. Canty  
Naropa University  
Boulder, CO, USA

The current ecological, social, and personal crises spark the need for radical transformation to shift from one world that is mechanistic, destructive, and egocentric to another that is relational, life affirming, and embedded in the widest understandings of interconnected selves. The author employed an organic research inquiry to depict the patterns of people making this shift, identified six qualities, and found that embracing these crises provides opportunity to enlarge individual and collective perspectives in a way that aligns with larger systems of life opening one up to what has been called the multicultural self, the ecological self, or the self-transforming self. These concepts demonstrate that, when one can navigate more than one worldview, one is more resilient and responsive.

**Keywords:** *Ecological and social crisis, ecological self, multicultural self, transpersonal, self-transforming self*

As the world is caught in the sobering realities of the ecological crisis including social injustice, there is growing need for tools to foster transformation. The present age is marked by an outward collapse of human and natural systems and concurrently many humans are experiencing profound personal crises (Albrecht, 2012; Davis & Canty, 2013; Glendinning, 1994; Macy & Brown, 1998; Plotkin, 2007; Shepard, 1995). Macy and Johnstone (2012) illustrated the destructiveness of the current *industrial growth trance*, the resultant “unraveling” of human and planetary systems, and the emerging revolution towards sustainable paradigms and practices—the *Great Turning*. The ecological crisis is a crisis of home, the Earth. From a natural resource and living systems approach, this crisis is seen through phenomena such as climate change where on a whole the planet is getting hotter and experiencing rising sea levels, bigger storms, and unstable ecological systems. This is directly linked with the ages of industrialization and globalization that have resulted in rapid development of technologies and practices that have unsustainable ecological footprints such as large scale agriculture and mining that relies on: massive amounts of water, toxic chemicals, fossil fuels, and the conversion of wild places; unprecedented population growth that puts too much stress on ecological systems and results in competition for scarce resources; and the rapid disappearance of large animals, birds, fish, insects,

and other forms of biodiversity as well as their continued toxification and endangerment. The exploitation of the natural world is directly linked with that of people across the planet, particularly marginalized populations such as people of color, indigenous cultures, the working class, the poor, women, and children. These groups are disproportionately relied upon for cheap labor for agriculture, mining, and industrial and military operations, and they also tend to live in the areas that are most devastated by toxic waste, war, natural disasters, and displacement (Agyeman, Bullard, & Evans, 2003; Amster, 2013; Shiva, 2002; Tokar, 2010). There are extensive resources documenting the ecological and social crisis, and the purpose of this study is not to prove its existence, rather to offer resources for those interested in practices that help one to shift toward a life-embracing paradigm in light of these critical times. This study is interdisciplinary and draws from the fields of transformative learning, ecopsychology, the deep ecology movement, organic research, and transpersonal studies.

On a collective level, particularly within the United States, there seems to be a general apathy in engaging the ecological and social crisis. There appears to be a psychic numbing in which looking at these complex issues is too overwhelming and many would rather stay in a more comfortable view of the world (Glendinning, 1994; Macy & Brown, 1998; Sewall, 1995). In terms of

the ecological crisis and transforming worldviews such that they are resilient rather than closed, a person with a resilient paradigm understands that the living world is much more than material resources—Earth systems are alive, conscious, and dynamic. A person with a resilient paradigm is one who is living in relationship to the planet, both humans and other living beings, in life affirming ways and is willing to change her ways of thinking and acting in order for this relationship to thrive.

How does one shift to a life embracing, resilient worldview? In the research project presented here the author identified a number of qualities shared by people who are making this shift (Canty, 2007). The study was conducted with individuals working in some capacity such as activism, education, psychology, policy, green building, and so on, to address the ecological crisis. The six qualities that were identified included: (1) relationship with the natural world, (2) spiritual practice, (3) both accepting and feeling despair over the ecological crisis, (4) participating in self-healing, (5) experiencing many challenges to one's worldview that resulted in changing it, and (6) altering one's thought patterns to relational modes. The last two qualities revealed that it is only by going successfully through crisis that one transforms one's worldview including one's practices. Embracing the ecological and social crisis provides the opportunity of enlarging perspectives in a way that aligns with larger systems of life. It opens one up to what has been called *the multicultural self* (Anthony, 1995), *the ecological self* (Naess, 1995), or *the self-transforming self* (Kegan as cited in Debold, 2002). Essentially, these concepts demonstrate that when a person can navigate more than one worldview or identity, he or she is more resilient and responsive. This is particularly insightful for people who are living on the edges of multiple identities or what the author terms *walking between worlds*. These concepts are further defined within the next sections.

### Theoretical Perspectives of Self

*When the health of your children (and grandchildren) is dependent, in space and time, upon the health of a commons, communities extend the little "self" of self-interest into the future and challenge modern economies that reduce both commons and community to raw materials for short-term profit.* (Turner, 1995, p. 45)

A root cause of the current ecological crisis is that humans, particularly humans of Western

civilization, have separated their identities from the rest of the natural world. This separation is particularly rooted in Western culture and through the processes of industrialization and globalization. In essence, this perceived division between humans and nature allows humans to destroy the spaces of Earth, which is the habitat they are dependent upon. The destruction of natural habitats, and the behaviors employed as part of this, result in humanity's collective illness (Davis & Canty, 2013; Glendinning, 1994; Roszak, 2001; Shepard, 1995).

Both the process and results of this disconnection manifest in narcissist behaviors where there is an overemphasis in ego needs that often stem from desires rooted in overconsumption and other addictive traits that cover "deep-seated but unacknowledged feelings of worthlessness and emptiness" and develop into a "false self" (Kanner & Gomes, 1995, p. 79). Within the field of ecopsychology and the deep ecology movement, the healthy way to address the false self is to develop the ecological self, where what was once a small self or egocentric self expands to a sense of self that includes the perspectives of other beings. While Paul Shepard (1995) brought up the concept of the *relatedness of self* in ecological thinking, the ecological self most prominently arose through the work of Arne Naess, founder of the deep ecology movement who first introduced it as self realization (Devall, 1995). Naess (1995) described the ecological self or self realization as a process where humans mature their self to extend from ego to the social (other humans) and to a metaphysical or ecological self that extends to both the apparent and unseen living world. Ecophilosopher and spiritual activist, Joanna Macy (2007), termed this as *the greening of the self* and expressed the process as moving from smaller ego boundaries of self "replaced by wider constructs of identity and self-interest—by what Arne Naess termed the ecological self, coextensive with other beings and the life of our planet" (p. 148). Sewall (1995) illustrated the ecological self as "a permeability and fluidity of boundaries" where "the division between inner and outer worlds becomes an arbitrary and historical distinction" (pp. 202-203)—truly a merging of one's ego-bounded identity with that of one's sensory and sensual experiences with the ecologically alive world.

Such a self expands beyond our human-centered conditioning and sense of being split off and

separate, in order to engage intimately with other species, cultures, and peoples, as well as with places. To live in a relational way requires a gradual opening to broader, more permeable boundaries. (Shapiro, 1995, p. 235)

An ecologically responsible construction of self will require what Arne Naess calls an “ecological self,” which includes not only growth in human relationships with family and community, but a broadening of the self through identification with all beings, even with the biosphere as a whole. This broadened identification is the basis for the mutuality and passionate engagement, the direct experience of interconnectedness, called for by the ecological crisis of our time. (Conn, 1995, p. 163)

Each of the above definitions of the ecological self illustrate that at its heart, it is about engaging in a relationship, with all of the living world, that fosters caring and compassionate action on behalf of the whole, rather than one’s limited notions of self interest.

Within diversity and social justice work, the concept of the multicultural self, parallels the ecological self in expanding one’s notion of self from the ego or small self to a worldview that includes multiple cultures and/or identities. It is the development of self-realization into the social that is distinct in identifying with different human groupings. Anthony (1995) spoke to the need to learn the multicultural stories of diverse peoples as a means to shift away from the dominant Western worldview that is based on Whiteness. He introduced the need for a multicultural self partially in reaction to the lack of engagement with the realities of diverse peoples by White environmentalists and claimed: “The multicultural self represents the capacity for empathy with many people and cultures, and also with our capacity for empathy with living creatures. This capacity is really essential as a foundation for sustainability” (Canty et al., 2011).

One develops the capacity for holding multiple perspectives through experiences of engaging with diverse peoples. Just as the ecological self is nurtured through being in relationship with the natural, more than human world, the multicultural self arises through relationships with diverse humans. Bennett (1993) brought an approach that allows one to first identify one diverse perspective and ultimately move into a self-concept that integrates multiple perspectives. His training model moves from stages of denial where one has had no

exposure to cultural differences to the final two stages of adaptation and integration in which the self is first able to emotionally relate with one diverse worldview until finally one can integrate multiple, diverse worldviews into one’s self identity to such an extent that the original self identity or worldview is transformed—the self is flexible and exposure to differences no longer results in conflict to one’s worldview.

One objective of the field of transpersonal psychology is for the individual to move from a small self to a Self that “transcends the individual as a separate entity” (p. 604) and connects to larger life in material, psychological, and spiritual terrains (Davis & Canty, 2013). This is known as *the transpersonal Self* or *the self as witness*. Contemplative practices such as meditation foster the transpersonal Self through the development of a witnessing self, where the individual is able to see their habitual patterns of thought and action through detached, rational observation (Davis, 2000).

Within the field of transformative learning, the concept of a self transforming self is actively realized through continually reforming and expanding one’s frames of reference. In this context, transformation is altering one’s perspectives and practices—one’s worldview. A worldview or frame of reference is comprised of two dimensions: a habit of mind and a resulting point of view. The habit of mind concerns how one makes meaning assumed from one’s culture, and the resulting point of view concerns how one plays this meaning out in one’s daily life (Mezirow, 2000b). One might simplify these with the habit of mind correlating with patterns of thinking and the resulting point of view as actions. A frame of reference is challenged when encountering a “disorienting dilemma” (Mezirow, 2000a, p. xii)—an experience that does not easily assimilate into one’s current worldview. As a result, one has a choice to ignore this conflict or to transform one’s frame of reference by “elaborating existing frames of reference,” “learning new frames of reference,” “transforming points of view,” or “transforming habits of mind” (Mezirow, 2000b, p. 19). When a challenge confronts an established worldview, there is opportunity to respond and alter views so they are more resilient. By having multiple disorienting dilemmas, one becomes more comfortable with change through recognizing that there are larger realities within the world than originally held. This process is known as the self-transforming self or fourth order consciousness where one continually reforms the way one makes

meaning to the extent where one moves beyond a self-centered perspective (Kegan as interviewed in Debold, 2002). Through this type of transformation, one develops the ability to understand the perspectives of others and to even hold multiple perspectives at once.

The concept of the habit of mind as well as the concept of transforming consciousness is not unique to transformative learning. Feinstein and Krippner (1988) illustrated that each person is operating under a personal mythology, which is largely unconscious and that “people often live their lives with very little awareness of the lens through which they are looking (p. 1).” The notable transpersonal psychologist and consciousness researcher, Charles Tart (1986) claimed: “The pattern of a state of consciousness deliberately maintains its integrity in a changing world” (p. 5), affirming that worldviews are often contained within fixed patterns. Using the terms *consensus reality* (1975) and *consensus consciousness* (1986), Tart described these patterns as deriving from larger cultural conditioning and indicated that most are unaware of this conditioning.

The bulk of the conditioning and shaping of our acquired nature, our enculturation, took place in consensus consciousness. . . . Part of the enculturation process works to convince us that the acquired characteristics of enculturation are actually natural, so it can be very difficult to see these things when we are in a state of consensus consciousness. Sometimes being in some altered state . . . gives us an alternative view that is like an outside perspective on yourself. Then you may see the conditioned, restrictive quality of consensus consciousness. (Tart, 1986, p. 16)

Here, it is through altered states of consciousness that one can see and transform conditioned worldviews.

The fields of transformative learning and transpersonal studies agree with the problem of fixed consciousness and the need to transform it. It is interesting to look at the varied approaches to doing so. Tart and many transpersonal researchers (e.g., Grof, 2000; Nelson, 1994; Rock, 2012) advocated the timeless tradition of using altered states of consciousness to shift worldviews, for which Tart (1986) included: “nocturnal dreaming . . . the hypnotic state, states induced by psychoactive drugs such as alcohol, states centered on strong emotions such as rage, panic, depression, and elation, and states induced by meditative practices” (p. 5). Using altered states for

transformative purposes parallels the use of disorienting dilemmas in transformative learning. However, while a disorienting dilemma could certainly be prompted by an altered state of consciousness that is transpersonal, often they are prompted by life events that conflict with one’s currently held values. Both altered states of consciousness and disorienting dilemmas may lead from one world (worldview) to another, essentially walking one between worlds. They often serve as modern rites of passage.

West African Dagara elder and writer Malidoma Somé (1998) claimed that while Western peoples are often seeking rites of passages that mirror those of traditional indigenous societies, Western rituals often actually lie in modern life challenges—the loss of relationships, jobs, and loved ones as well as illnesses and other forms of crisis.

The serious troubles we face in life are nothing other than initiatory experiences. . . . They are a necessary ingredient in the removal of whatever stands between us and our essential self. If tribal people reach this stage through formal rites of passage, other people may do the same differently. It is as if there is a natural pull toward challenges and ordeal in the interest of gaining inner strength and living a responsible life. Hardship and ordeal therefore initiate a change from within. One emerges from them with a profound sense of having undergone a radical education. (Somé, 1998, p. 278).

Here it is life crises or traumas that serve as disorienting dilemmas. Morrison (2012) saw both rites of passages and life crises as traumas that unjar consciousness.

Trauma, whether born of initiation ceremonies, pre-meditated criminal actions, or natural causes, abducts victims and initiates alike from the confines of their day-to-day lives. It is socially separating and often psychologically dissociating. Suddenly, and without warning, trauma victims and ritual initiates are forcibly removed from familiar circumstances and involuntarily deposited into unfamiliar psychological environments. (p. 41)

### **Groundlessness and Defense Mechanisms**

People employ various defense mechanisms in order to repress and avoid feelings of pain for the global crises (Koger & Winter, 2010; Macy & Brown, 1998). Defense mechanisms can be healthy in protecting one



from falling into severe crisis; in essence, they keep one sane. Yet at some point, one needs to drop one's defenses and look at what is happening on this planet and the roles one plays in supporting this. Koger & Winter (2010) revisited the classic Freudian defense mechanisms and related them to the ecological crisis. These include: creating rationalizations for unsustainable behaviors; intellectualizing the issues so to view them abstractly, rather than feeling them; displacing feelings by acting out to seemingly unrelated issues and people that are less threatening; consciously or unconsciously blocking feelings (suppression and repression); and flat out denying that there is a crisis, often with hostility at those who speak of it. While these defense mechanisms can be healthy for short term sanity, they destroy both human and the planet's long term health. Similarly, Macy & Brown (1998) created a list of reasons why people choose to repress (unconsciously blocking feelings) the crisis and the consequences for this repression. The reasons why one shuts down one's feelings include: not wanting to experience despair, guilt, and the gloomy reality of the crisis; not wanting to seem anti-American, causing others distress, and seeming irrational, emotional, and weak; or simply associating these feelings with personal problems rather than the state of the world. In response to her research surrounding attention, perception, and neuroscience, Sewall (2012) stated:

Anxiety is a visceral, informative response to real conditions. Looking directly at ecological distress may be the only opportunity to adapt human consciousness to changing environmental conditions. In this case, denial is maladaptive. (pp. 269-270)

Hence while the process of waking up to the ecological crisis often provokes varying levels of denial and defense, in order to address the state of the world, it is necessary to look at these realities and respond. As referenced previously, within the context of transformative learning, change occurs when the individual successfully navigates a disorienting dilemma—an experience that conflicts with one's worldview. Deep examination of the causes and consequences of global crises can facilitate this.

#### **Qualities of a Resilient Paradigm:**

##### **A Qualitative Study**

In engaging why some people choose to transform their worldviews in order to respond to the ecological crisis, while others choose to shut down (consciously and

unconsciously), the author designed a study to gather some key qualities of people who were shifting to a resilient paradigm, one that is awake to and in affinity with the living world (Canty, 2007). As stated earlier, the participants were already situated in work that directly or indirectly focused on ecological issues in a variety of professions. The central question posed was, "How do people addressing the ecological crisis shift their consciousness away from a scarcity paradigm and towards one that embraces resilience when addressing the ecological crisis?"

#### **Method**

This study used an organic inquiry method (Clements, Ettlting, Jenett, & Shields, 1998a; Clements, Ettlting, Jenett, & Shields, 1998b), a qualitative approach that encourages the use of formal and personal networks in creating a relational study. The method employs both the researcher and co-researchers' (participant) stories surrounding the topic using interviews and focuses on "telling and listening to stories," which leads to "transformation in the researcher, researchers (research participants), and readers, alike" (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. 31).

#### **Participants and Recruitment**

Using a screening survey, the author established specific criteria for participant selection. This survey assessed the participants' suitability for the study through identifying criteria believed to be key conditions involved with this type of transformation. Potential participants had to be part of Western culture, living within the United States, and involved in the environmental movement on some level whether through study, teaching, activism, politics, economics, psychology, spirituality, creativity, developing appropriate technologies, or restoration work. The screening criteria, which relied largely on self-assessment and report by potential participants, included:

1. Realizes that the Earth is experiencing a global ecological crisis
2. Has personal experience with feeling depressed and dismayed by this realization
3. Has personal experience with feeling that ecological healing is possible
4. Recognizes that there is a living intelligence within the universe that is greater than human intelligence
5. Engages in participatory relationships with nature

6. Does not have an indoctrinated practice such as formal religion or policy that serves as the central solution to the ecological crisis
7. Is not centered around personal ego, yet engages in self-nurturing
8. Exhibits critical thinking skills
9. Has a strong intuitive sense
10. Is comfortable with ambiguity
11. Demonstrates ability to learn from emotional pain

Based on these criteria, ten participants were selected from respondents to the screening survey—seven women and three men. The group included eight Anglo Americans, one Jewish American, and one African American. Ages ranged from 25 to 62, with more than half of participants in their 40s or 50s.

### **Research Procedures and Analysis**

Three separate interviews were conducted with each participant. Following the nine month period of collecting interviews, the author self-transcribed all of the narratives and identified key emergent themes, which were analyzed to identify the primary themes.

### **Results**

As previously noted, six main qualities were discovered from interviews with these participants exhibiting resilient paradigms: (1) a relationship with the natural world, (2) spiritual practice, (3) both accepting and feeling despair over the ecological crisis, (4) participating in self-healing, (5) experiencing many challenges to one's worldview that resulted in changing it, and (6) altering one's thought patterns to relational modes.

**Relationship with the natural world.** The first characteristic, a relationship with the natural world, is straightforward. Spending time in nature instills a relationship with more than human life. This is known as biophilia, a hypothesis developed by E.O. Wilson, which claims human beings have an emotional connection or affinity for other forms of life (Roszak, 1995). All participants had relationships with the natural world, which ranged from appreciative ones to others that were more transpersonal and reciprocal. With those that had the more transpersonal and reciprocal relationships with nature, it seemed clear that they recognized there was a living force within the universe that was greater than humans—a larger consciousness. By opening self boundaries and connecting to a larger experience and reality, one is deeper informed, supported, and conscious

of the regenerative patterns of all of life.

**Spiritual practice.** Within the context of this study, a spiritual practice connects with being able to recognize the larger consciousness of the living world as well as having a strong sense of intuition. A spiritual practice is different than having a religion, which is often more of a policy or doctrine that is not necessarily a firsthand experience. Spirituality invokes connecting with and having an active, personal relationship with the sacred. The author acknowledges that the terms spiritual and spiritual practice do not occupy a clear definition in many fields and that the use of transpersonal is sometimes preferred (Schroll, Rowan, & Robinson, 2011). The participant interviews supported a transpersonal connection, yet the researcher did not delve into deep analysis of these aspects and for purposes here chooses to use the terms spiritual practice to indicate an active, first hand relationship to the sacred that is not dictated by an organized group. All of the participants reported having a spiritual practice ranging from various forms of meditation, Buddhism, nature spirituality (including Christian and Jewish versions), and other forms of transpersonal spirituality. Many of the participants' spiritual practices engaged the natural world and gave them guidance surrounding the ecological crisis.

**Acceptance of and despair over the ecological crisis.** The third characteristic, acceptance of and despair over the ecological crisis, correlates with the realization that the Earth is experiencing a global crisis, having personal experience with feeling ecological despair, and the ability to learn from emotional pain. This characteristic is central to shifting paradigms, for if one never accepts or feels despair surrounding the crisis, one may be in a state of denial or dissociation. Within the inquiry process, an extremely strong theme emerged in response to what participants felt was the purpose of feeling ecological despair. They felt that despair served to communicate the pain of the larger system (the Earth) and to spark people to respond, become active, and to create change. Through feeling their despair, the participants demonstrated that they could communicate with a larger consciousness, that of the Earth.

During the first interview, the research participants were asked multiple questions surrounding their story of when they first experienced environmental despair. The responses to how they experienced despair were varied and statements included feeling "quite empty, quite numb, quite hopeless," that the crisis would "break

our hearts before it breaks our subsistence system[s],”and “if I can let those feelings come through the vehicle of myself and somehow be moved out to create a ripple . . . maybe the purpose of ecologic despair is really good.” Participants were also asked whether they still felt ecological despair and what they felt were the purpose of these feelings. Seven of the participants responded that they did still feel ecological despair, yet their current experiences with ecological despair were different from their initial ones.

The ability to learn from emotional pain also relates to a high level of participants’ experiences with personal challenges, even emotional breakdowns, and the transformations and learning that surfaced. It was quite interesting that the sequence of waking up to the crisis, feeling despair, and learning from pain, occurred in various forms for different participants. The author had assumed that learning about the crisis would then result in the pain, and then yield the learning, yet this was not the case. In some cases, participants felt despair over the state of the Earth prior to fully recognizing the crisis, and in many cases the process of awakening to the crisis and feeling despair stretched over a long period of time.

**Participation in self-healing.** The fourth characteristic, participation in self-healing, correlated with being self-nurturing, yet not in an egocentric way, as well as engaging in participatory relationships with nature. There was an overwhelming theme with the participants, expressing the idea that ecological healing begins with the self. Many of the participants shared metaphors of hitting rock bottom with their ecological despair as a means to let their former selves die and allow for a new self to emerge. There is a transformative relationship between despair and healing and this idea surfaces within various theorists (e.g., Bache, 2000; Chödrön, 1997; Conn, 1995; Glendinning, 1994; Greenspan, 2003; Macy, 1995; Macy & Brown, 1998; O’Connor, 1995; Windle, 1995). All of the participants engaged in some sort of self-healing work whether through therapy, experiences in nature, spirituality, another form, or combination of many forms.

The idea that ecological healing begins with one’s self demonstrated a high level of authenticity by the participants. This was not done in an egocentric way where their personal healing took precedence over global issues as, for the most part, participants had consciously chosen to do work to help heal the ecological crisis and their levels of personal accountability across a material,

emotional, and spiritual level were humbling. Many of their stories expressed that personal healing was intricately related to larger healing, which is a central principle of ecopsychology, and also mirrors ideas within systems theory and consciousness studies where the interconnectedness of life permeates everything and change can be spawned from the smallest part. One participant stressed that the system itself was self healing, and that, if humans participate within the system, this healing will occur. Several other participants agreed with this notion, indicating that, if people rejoin this system, healing can occur. One participant stated that unhealed pain, being experienced on an individual level, mirrors the pain of the Earth. Through self-healing, humans are able to “gain a new perspective and respect” for all of life. Another participant claimed healing would not consist of nouns but instead would “be made up of verbs . . . doing, acting, believing, processing, asking, trusting.” Yet another stated:

the root cause of so many things is forgetting the wholeness of us and the planet, the earth, and the people on it, and the animals, and the trees, everything that connects . . . and when we stop realizing and remembering that we’re connected we find ourselves feeling separate and the separateness is what causes so much damage.

This sentiment stresses the importance of extending one’s focus to the widest frames in order for healing to occur. In the context of transformative learning, the author greatly resonated with another participant’s declaration: “Healing means you’re going to heal something which means you’re going to change.”

**Experiencing many challenges to one’s worldview that resulted in changing it.** The fifth characteristic, experiencing many challenges to one’s worldview that resulted in changing it, was extremely revealing. The author had assumed that the participants’ realizations that there was an ecological crisis, served as a transformative moment—which both led them to do work engaging the ecological crisis and caused them to question and transform their worldviews. While many of the participants’ awakenings to the ecological crisis prompted them to do ecologically oriented work, some of the participants started doing work prior to recognizing the crisis. Moreover, perhaps the most important theme that surfaced in this study was that all of the participants experienced challenges and resulting transformations



to their worldviews prior to engaging or recognizing the ecological crisis. These transformations included experiences with addictions, abuse, racism, transpersonal realities, gender and sexuality, death of a loved one, cultural awareness, divorce, breaking from a religious tradition, personal breakdowns, and institutional education. The author believes that it was this process of being able to question their assumptions and those of their larger culture and world that allowed them to expand their frames of references through both subjective and objective reframing (Mezirow, 2000b). As outlined earlier, these challenges are also known as disorienting dilemmas where one has an experience that forces a questioning of one's worldview (Mezirow, 2000a).

**Altering one's thought patterns to relational modes.** The sixth and final characteristic is having examined one's thought patterns and started to shift them to more relational modes. Overall the author found that the co-researchers had examined their thought patterns and were shifting them from linear to more relational modes. Linear is associated with mechanistic, quantitative thinking and acting, while relational is associated with the quality of one's interactions employing qualitative traits such as feeling, sensing, and employing creativity. Often people understand things abstractly but do not integrate this knowledge with their behaviors, particularly with their psyches, hearts, and bodies. As stated earlier, a worldview or frame of reference is comprised of two dimensions, a habit of mind and a resulting point of view. The habit of mind is how one makes meaning assumed from one's culture, and the resulting point of view is how one plays this meaning out in one's daily life (Mezirow, 2000b). While the author discovered that all participants had changed their frames of references, some of the participants seemed to have only changed their habits of mind, the first dimension of the frame of reference, but had not necessarily changed their resulting points of views or behaviors, the second dimension. With the high level of education among the participants, the author speculated that changing their habits of mind often occurred through intellectual processes such as reading and other forms of abstract learning. These often spawned partial changes in behaviors yet may not have resulted in first-hand experiences that supported and furthered more substantial changes in behavior and their resulting paradigms. Education can be a powerful way to transform habits of mind in terms of unraveling assumptions. However, if people do not have first-hand

experiences that support these alternatives, there is danger that they may only abstractly know them without feeling them. Here lies the danger of the defense mechanism of intellectualization (Macy & Brown 1998).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

It is essential for those addressing the ecological crisis to shift to a regenerative paradigm. A linear or scarcity paradigm embedded in Western culture, is ineffectual for creating revolutionary change. As stated previously, the central question of this inquiry was "how do people addressing the ecological crisis shift their consciousness away from a scarcity paradigm and towards one that embraces resilience when addressing the ecological crisis?" The study was specifically geared to looking at those embedded within a Western, linear paradigm. As discussed above, the results identified six qualities that were shared by the participants that underscored the patterns of a resilient paradigm. The author in no way claims that these are the only qualities that support the shift to a resilient paradigm; they are the qualities shared by the participants in her study. While the interview process and the analysis of the results were quite extensive, it should be noted that the participant pool was small (ten people) and that this study focus appeals to people who have a certain level of privilege. While the ecological crisis affects everyone, the discourse on the consciousness surrounding the crisis seems to situate with those that have a higher level of affluence as well a greater freedom to philosophize about and act in response to it. While many of the participants came from lower socio-economic groups, most had high levels of education and all were meeting their basic needs. One can speculate that in some circumstances the qualities revealed are accessible for non-privileged people, access to undeveloped natural habitats as well as the time needed for self-healing work is not necessarily available. The author contends that it is those with privilege within Western culture that most embody the problems with Western thinking.

Perhaps the most important discovery from this study is that while many of the qualities were supportive of the participants' healing journeys and connection with nature, the final two qualities of navigating a crisis that transforms one's worldview, and resulting actions, are the most pertinent for transitioning to a resilient paradigm in response to the ecological crisis. The analysis revealed that the participants had high levels of disorienting dilemmas that resulted in changing their frames of references (held views) that opened their worldviews in

ways they moved them from more ego oriented frames to ones that identified with wider perspectives that extending to non-human entities and even a larger living consciousness. It was this ability to transcend their own realities and to connect with this expanded sense of self that enabled them to work towards ecological healing within a new paradigm.

### **Walking Between Worlds:**

#### **An Expanded Sense of Self**

Kegan (2000) illustrated that in order to truly transform paradigms one must engage in “reforming our meaning forming” in which “we do not only change our meaning forming; we change the very form by which we are making our meanings. We change our epistemologies” (pp. 52-53). By having multiple disorienting dilemmas, people become more comfortable with change as they recognize that there are larger realities within the world than they originally held. This process is known as the self-transforming self or fourth order consciousness, where one continually reforms the way one makes meaning (epistemology) to the extent where one moves beyond an egocentric perspective (Kegan as cited in Debold, 2002). This process also aligns with the characteristics of creative people, which include using independent judgment, being able to hold opposition and dualism (multiple and even conflicting perspectives), being comfortable with ambiguity, using one’s intuition, and risk taking (Barron, Montuori, & Barron, 1997; Montuori, Combs, & Richards, 2003). Through this type of transformation, one develops the ability to understand the perspectives of others and to even hold multiple perspectives at once.

This idea of the self-transforming self depicts not only a process of changing one’s relationship to self, it alters the whole notion of self where what was once a small self or egocentric self expands to a sense of self that includes the perspectives of other beings. It is as if one walks between the worlds of self and larger life. This process parallels diversity work where one adopts more than one worldview and develops a multicultural self (Anthony, 1995; Bennett, 1993). Naess’ deep ecology movement perspective (1995) described this process as self-realization where humans mature their self to extend from ego to the social (other humans) to a metaphysical or ecological self that extends to both the apparent and unseen living world. Concomitantly, this transformation supports the shift from a world that is based on the destruction of life, the industrial growth paradigm, to

one that is life affirming. This idea of walking between worlds where one’s consciousness is expanded through embracing multiple realities aligns with what visionary, Starhawk (2004) called *edge awareness*, where “change in systems often comes from the edge (p. 37).” By holding multiple senses of self or walking between worlds, one becomes awake, responsive, and transforms.

### **References**

- Agyeman, J., Bullard, R. D., & Evans, B. (Eds.). (2003). *Just sustainabilities: Development in an unequal world*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Albrecht, G. (2012). Psychoterratic conditions in a scientific and technological world. In P. H. Kahn & P. H. Hasbach (Eds.), *Ecopsychology: Science, totems, and the technological species* (pp. 241-264). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Amster, R. (2013). Toward a climate of peace. *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, 25(4), 473-479. doi: 10.1080/10402659.2013.846129
- Anthony, C. (1995). Ecopsychology and the deconstruction of Whiteness. In T. Roszak, M. E. Gomes, & A. D. Kanner, (Eds.), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, healing the mind* (pp. 263-278). San Francisco, CA: Sierra Books.
- Bache, C. M. (2000). The eco-crisis and species ego-death speculations on the future. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 32(1), 89-94.
- Barron, F., Montuori, A., & Barron, A. (Eds.). (1997). *Creators on creating: Awakening and cultivating the imaginative mind*. New York, NY: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam.
- Bennett, M. J. (1993). Towards ethnorelativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. In M. Paige (Ed.). *Education for the intercultural experience* (pp. 21-71). Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.
- Braud, W., & Anderson, R. (1998). *Transpersonal research methods for the social sciences: Honoring human experience*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Canty, J. M. (2007). *Ecological healing: Shifting from a scarcity consciousness* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3264343)
- Canty, J. M., Amster, R., Anthony, C., Benally, S., Dellinger, D., Rooks, B. (2011). Roundtable: Race, environment and sustainability (Part One). *Sustainability: The Journal of Record*, 4(5), 238-241. doi:10.1089/SUS.2011.9661

- Chödrön, P. (1997). *When things fall apart: Heart advice for difficult times*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.
- Clements, J., Ettlting, D., Jenett, D., & Shields, L. (1998a). *Organic inquiry: If research were sacred*. Palo Alto, CA: Serpentina.
- Clements, J., Ettlting, D., Jenett, D., & Shields, L. (1998b). Organic research: Feminine spirituality meets transpersonal research. In W. Braud & R. Anderson (Eds.), *Transpersonal research methods for the social sciences: Honoring human experience* (pp. 114-127). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Conn, S. A. (1995). When the Earth hurts, who responds? In T. Roszak, M. E. Gomes, & A. D. Kanner (Eds.), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, healing the mind* (pp. 156-171). San Francisco, CA: Sierra Books.
- Davis, J. V. (2000). We keep asking ourselves, what is transpersonal psychology? *Guidance & Counseling, 15*(3), 3.
- Davis, J. V. & Canty, J. M. (2013). Ecopsychology and transpersonal psychology. In H. Friedman & G. Hartelius (Eds), *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of transpersonal psychology* (pp. 597-611). Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell. doi:10.1002/9781118591277.ch33
- Debold, E. (2002, Fall-Winter) Epistemology, fourth order consciousness, and the subject-object relationship: Or how the self evolves, with Robert Kegan [Interview with Robert Kegan]. *What is Enlightenment: Redefining Spirituality for an Evolving World, 22*, 143-154.
- Devall, B. (1995). The ecological self. In A. Drenguson & Y. Inoue, (Eds.), *The deep ecology movement: An introductory anthology* (pp. 101-123). Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.
- Feinstein, D., & Krippner, S. (1988). *Personal mythology: The psychology of your evolving self*. Los Angeles, CA: Jeremy P. Tarcher.
- Glendinning, C. (1994). *My name is Chellis & I'm in recovery from Western civilization*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.
- Greenspan, M. (2003). *Healing through dark emotions: The wisdom of grief, fear, and despair*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.
- Grof, S. (2000). *Psychology of the future: Lessons from modern consciousness research*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Kanner, A. D., & Gomes, M. E. (1995). The all consuming self. In T. Roszak, M. E. Gomes, & A. D. Kanner (Eds.), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, healing the mind* (pp. 77-91). San Francisco, CA: Sierra Books.
- Kegan, R. (2000). What "form" transforms?: A constructive-developmental approach to transformative learning. In J. Mezirow (Ed.), *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 35-69). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Koger, S. M., & Winter, D. D. (2010). *The psychology of environmental problems: Psychology for sustainability*. New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Macy, J. (1995). Working through environmental despair. In T. Roszak, M. E. Gomes, & A. D. Kanner (Eds.), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, healing the mind* (pp. 240-259). San Francisco, CA: Sierra Books.
- Macy, J. (2007). *World as lover, world as self: Courage for global justice and ecological renewal*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press.
- Macy, J., & Brown, M.Y. (1998) *Coming back to life: Practices to reconnect our lives, our world*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society.
- Macy, J., & Johnstone, C. (2012). *Active hope: How to face the mess we're in without going crazy*. Novato, CA: New World Library.
- Mezirow, J. (2000a). (Ed). *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (2000b). Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts of transformative theory. In J. Mezirow (Ed.), *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 3-33). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Montuori, A., Combs, A., & Richards, R. (2003). Creativity, consciousness, and the direction for human development. In D. Loye (Ed.), *The great adventure: Toward a fully human theory of evolution* (pp. 197-236). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Morrison, R. A. (2012). Trauma and transformative passage. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies, 31*(1), 38-46.
- Naess, A. (1995). Self-realization: An ecological approach to being in the world. In G. Sessions, (Ed.), *Deep ecology for the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Readings on the philosophy and practice of the new environmentalism* (pp. 225-239). Boston, MA: Shambhala.
- Nelson, J. E. (1994). *Healing the split: Integrating our understanding of the mentally ill*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

- O'Connor, T. (1995). Therapy for a dying planet. In T. Roszak, M. E. Gomes, & A. D. Kanner (Eds.), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth healing, the mind* (pp. 149-155). San Francisco, CA: Sierra Books.
- Plotkin, B. (2007). *Nature and human soul: Cultivating wholeness and community in a fragmented world*. Novato, CA: New World Library.
- Rock, A. J. (2012). Introduction to special topic section: Shamanism. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 31(2), 42-46.
- Roszak, T. (1995). Where psyche meets Gaia. In T. Roszak, M. E. Gomes, & A. D. Kanner (Eds.), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, healing the mind* (pp. 1-20). San Francisco, CA: Sierra Books.
- Roszak, T. (2001). *Voice of the earth: An exploration of ecopsychology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press.
- Schroll, M. A., Rowan, J., & Robinson, O. (2011). Clearing up Rollo May's views of transpersonal psychology and acknowledging May as an early supporter of ecopsychology. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 30(1-2), 120-136.
- Sewall, L. (1995). The skill of ecological perception. In T. Roszak, M. E. Gomes, & A. D. Kanner (Eds.), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, healing the mind* (pp. 201-215). San Francisco, CA: Sierra Books.
- Sewall, L. (2012). Beauty and the brain. In P. H. Kahn & P. H. Hasbach (Eds.), *Ecopsychology: Science, totems, and the technological species* (pp. 263-284). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Shapiro, E. (1995). Restoring habitats, communities, and souls. In T. Roszak, M. E. Gomes, & A. D. Kanner (Eds.), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, healing the mind* (pp. 224-239). San Francisco, CA: Sierra Books.
- Shepard, P. (1995). Nature and madness. In T. Roszak, M. E. Gomes, & A. D. Kanner (Eds.), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, healing the mind*. (pp. 21-40). San Francisco, CA: Sierra Books. doi:10.1038/377019b0
- Shiva, V. (2002). *Water wars: Privatization, pollution, and profit*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.
- Somé, M. P. (1998). *The healing wisdom of Africa: Finding life purpose through nature, ritual, and community*. New York, NY: Penguin-Putnam.
- Starhawk (2004). *The Earth path: Grounding your spirit in the rhythms of nature*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Tart, C. T. (1975). *States of consciousness*. New York, NY: Dutton.
- Tart, C. T. (1986). *Waking up: Overcoming the obstacles to human potential*. Boston, MA: New Science Library.
- Tokar, B. (2010). *Toward climate justice: Perspectives on the climate crisis and social change*. Porsgrunn, Norway: Communalism Press.
- Turner, J. (1995). Gary Snyder & the practice of the wild. In G. Sessions (Ed.), *Deep ecology for the 21st century: Readings on the philosophy and practice of the new environmentalism* (pp. 41-46). Boston, MA: Shambhala.
- Windle, P. (1995). The ecology of grief. In T. Roszak, M. E. Gomes, & A. D. Kanner (Eds.), *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, healing the mind* (pp. 136-145). San Francisco, CA: Sierra Books.

### About the Author

Jeanine M. Canty, PhD, is an associate professor of Environmental Studies at Naropa University in Boulder, CO, teaching in Environmental Studies. She has a PhD in Transformative Learning and Change from the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), an MA in Cultural Ecopsychology from Prescott College, and a BA in International Relations from Colgate University. A lover of nature, justice, and contemplative practice, Jeanine teaches courses in Ecopsychology, Deep Ecology, Multicultural Perspectives for Environmental Leaders, and an 8-day Wilderness solo. Her work intersects issues of social and ecological justice, and she is very interested in the process individuals go through to reach heightened awareness and in translating this into positive change. She has presented and facilitated workshops at many local, conscious, green events including Denver Green Festival, Front Range Colorado Bioneers, Wilderness Therapy Symposium, Colorado Wanderlust, and the Rocky Mountain Sustainability Summit, as well as national and international venues. Her selected publications include "Ecopsychology and Transpersonal Psychology" (co-authored with John V. Davis in *The Wiley Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology*); a feature in the *Sustainable You Issue of Spirituality and Health Magazine* (2012); "Linking Ecological and Social Sustainability within the Curriculum" (*Sustainability: The Journal of Record*, 2011); and "Roundtable: Race, Environment and Sustainability Part One and Two" (*Sustainability: The Journal of Record*, 2011). She has been a both a meditation and yoga practitioner for fifteen years and is a certified Wilderness First Responder.



## **About the Journal**

The *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* is a peer-reviewed academic journal in print since 1981. It is sponsored by the California Institute of Integral Studies, published by Floragades Foundation, and serves as the official publication of the International Transpersonal Association. The journal is available online at [www.transpersonalstudies.org](http://www.transpersonalstudies.org), and in print through [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com) (search for IJTS).