

7-1-2014

The Imperative for Diversity in a Transpersonal Psychology of the Whole Person (Editor's Introduction)

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Recommended Citation

Hartelius, G. (2014). rtelius, G. (2014). The imperative for diversity in a transpersonal psychology of the whole person. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 33(2), iii–iv.. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 33 (2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2014.33.2.iii>



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The Imperative for Diversity in a Transpersonal Psychology of the Whole Person

Editor's Introduction

Transpersonal psychology was founded on the insight that a discipline seeking to study and define the human psyche needs to approach its subject through multiple ways of knowing. Through the counterculture spiritual and psychedelic movements of that era, early transpersonal scholars had become convinced that different states of consciousness provided various valid ways of engagement with oneself, others, and the world, and that by applying these multiple stances within psychology (e.g., Tart, 1972), one could gain a much fuller understanding of the human mind. While this insight was initially applied primarily through development of the concept of peak or transcendent experiences (e.g., Maslow, 1969), it has broad implications for ethnic, cultural, and gender diversity as well.

Charles Laughlin (2013), one of the primary founders of transpersonal anthropology, observed that Western culture is one of the world's few monophasic cultures: a culture that recognizes only one state of mind as normative of reality. He noted that the vast majority of the more than 4000 human cultures that the world has known have been polyphasic: they have relied on multiple states of consciousness in gathering information about themselves and their environment. A transpersonal approach to psychology is then a project to build a polyphasic understanding of the psyche. Yet variations in state of consciousness involve more than peak and transcendent experiences; they are also about the many ways that consciousness is embodied within particular meaning frames, both culturally, ethnically, and in the many variations of sexual orientation and gender identity. It is in this critique of false normativity that transpersonal psychology finds one of its points of resonance with feminist scholarship (cf. Brooks, 2010).

In this way, transpersonal's initial mission to include more than one valid state of consciousness necessarily extends to embrace many ways of being human; the vision of a whole-person psychology can blossom into a psychology of humanity that celebrates our differences as much as it honors what we hold in common.

A review of the transpersonal literature will disclose that its scholars and perspectives do not as yet embody the diversity that is imperative within its founding insights, and that movement toward the inclusion of greater diversity has progressed in very small increments (Hartelius, Caplan, & Rardin, 2007; Hartelius, Rothe, & Roy, 2013; Wright, 1995, 1998). Yet building an approach to psychology that reflects not only the whole person, but also the wholeness of humanity, remains no less vital in a world where access to necessities and power is divided so unequally among differing communities, giving rise to much suffering and violence.

Inviting a recreation and co-creation of psychology in the context of diversity offers a way to reduce the degree to which psychology may unwittingly serve as a tool to maintain societal structures of inequity and injustice. But it is also more than this; it is a recognition that any approach that sets aside the many dimensions of human diversity is simply impoverished.

In This Issue

The Special Topic Section in this issue, under the direction of Phil Wolfson, brings together what is likely the most comprehensive collection of papers anywhere on the use of ketamine, the only legal drug with psychedelic properties, as a novel and often remarkably effective antidepressant. In the separate introduction to this section, Wolfson takes the position that the

psychedelic effects of ketamine are transformative and inseparable from its efficacy, rather than an undesirable side effect. Translating this into the popular language of technology culture one might say of the psychedelic effect, "It's not a bug, it's a feature."

In addition, this issue presents two papers in its general section. The first of these, an empirical paper entitled, "Engagement in a Community-Based Integral Practice Program Enhances Wellbeing," comes from researchers primarily at the Institute of Noetic Sciences, in Petaluma, CA, including Cassandra Vieten, Mica Estrada, Adam B. Cohen (Arizona State University), Dean Radin, Marilyn Mandala Schlitz, and Arnaud Delorme. They present partial findings from a one-year study showing increased physical health and psychological wellbeing from participation in an integral practice group that included bodily movement, recommendations for nutrition and exercise, positive affirmations, meditation-like practices, and group discussions of philosophy and theory.

The second paper, by Harry Hunt, is the third in a series considering implications and consequences of post-modern philosophy for contemporary transpersonal studies; it is entitled, "Deleuze and Some Related Phenomenologies of Felt Meaning: Psychosis and Mysticism as Inherent Structures of Thought." In his erudite yet accessible discourse, Hunt argues that Gilles Deleuze, W. R. Bion, Eugene Gendlin, and Krishnamurti, all share a perspective that cognitive thought arises out of a context of felt meaning, and that it is this rich background tapestry that can mature into the fabric of mystical realization; alternately, it may be twists and tears in this substrate that constitute the terrors of psychotic experiences. This fine theoretical work is important in that brings together arguments and perspectives necessary for the construction of new models of mind that are more inclusive of what it is to be human.

These two papers, together with the groundbreaking section on psychedelic ketamine as antidepressant, make this a varied offering. Please enjoy these papers and pass them on to others who may not be acquainted with the journal.

Glenn Hartelius, Main Editor
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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 Floragrades Foundation, and serves as the official publication of the International Transpersonal Association. The journal is available online at www.transpersonalstudies.org, and in print through www.lulu.com (search for IJTS).