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Editor's Introduction

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Editor's Introduction

Empirical research is a natural human way of living and learning. Small children develop their own informal versions of empirical testing—for example a child who is learning about object permanency might put a stuffed animal behind a pillow and then repeatedly pull away the pillow to see whether the toy is still there. Adolescents do informal qualitative research by talking—or texting, or using any of a score of new social media apps—with peers about the events and choices in daily life. Young adults learn dating skills through the empirical process of trial and error. How one learns from experience may be re-evaluated from time to time through life, and the skills of turning experience into insight may improve, but there is a certain spontaneous empiricism that is embedded in living.

Scientific method is a formalized version of living and learning. Beginning in the early 20th century, existential, humanistic, transpersonal, integral, and other holistic psychologies developed as a recoil against the ways that scientific psychology reduced human beings to mere bio-mechanical and informational processes in need of occasional repair. It is, in fact, fair to ask whether methods originally developed to study stars and planets and falling rocks are adequate for the examination of living systems, let alone sentient minds. One response to this concern for the adequacy of purely positivistic research has been the development of qualitative research methods, used more widely within holistic psychologies because it represents human experience in more complex and nuanced ways.

While empirical research has not been neglected within the transpersonal field, it is more scant than in many other fields. A recent review of the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* and this journal, from inception through 2010, found that the total number of empirical papers—

qualitative and quantitative alike—was exactly 97. This means that many fields of psychology publish more empirical papers in a year than the transpersonal field has done in a span of over 40 years. While there are transpersonal papers published in other journals as well, such as the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* and *The Humanist Psychologist*, this figure highlights the need for more empirical research to be published within transpersonal psychology and transpersonal studies, along with theoretical papers that develop the concepts and contexts of the field.

The current issue reflects both empirical and theoretical scholarship. On the theoretical side, it represents a collection of papers gathered and edited by Special Topic Editor Ryan Rominger on the nascent field of transpersonal sociology—these are introduced more fully by Rominger at the head of that section. One of these, *Intentional Kayaking*, by Nancy Rowe, represents a form of empirical research that takes a light hand to its highly personal subject matter—thematic analysis of journal entries written by the author while on a kayaking trip. While from a conventional perspective these experiences are solitary, it is in solitude from other humans that a connection with the community of the natural world opens up, representing as it were a different sort of transpersonal sociology that extends the meaning of society beyond the boundaries of human culture.

The single offering in this issue's general article section, a paper by Jeremy Taylor entitled, *The Peak at the Nadir: Psychological Turmoil as the Trigger for Awakening Experiences*, represents a development of concepts based on empirical evidence recently published elsewhere by the author. This reflects another important facet of transpersonal research, namely, the importance of bringing out the practical and theoretical implications

of research as they apply to human experience. In this case, Taylor examines the role of emotional turmoil or distress in triggering experiences of personal awakening.

Special attention is also due to a theoretical paper by Harry T. Hunt entitled, *Georges Bataille's Post-Nietzschean Secular Mysticism, Phenomenology of Ecstatic States, and Original Transpersonal Sociology*. This is the second part of a two-part paper that considers the implications and consequences of post-modern philosophy on transpersonal scholarship, and represents the sort of foundational work that is vital to the building of a transpersonal field. Specifically, Hunt brings out Bataille's efforts at articulating a mysticism not defined within any particular religious or spiritual tradition. This sort of project is one that is highly pertinent for transpersonal studies, which seeks to examine phenomena such as mysticism without either reducing them to the "noise" of particles in random motion, nor inflating them to something that is beyond the reach of critical examination.

Finally, the work of special topic editor Ryan Rominger should be acknowledged for bringing together a fine collection of papers on the nascent field of transpersonal sociology. Transpersonal studies, as the application of a holistic and transformative approach to various disciplines, can only take root as scholarship and literature develops around the various disciplines where it may offer a different and possibly richer perspective. Ryan's efforts in developing this topic area, where relatively little has been done to date, is especially worthy of note and appreciation.

The *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* remains dedicated to the project of promoting the publication of empirical research within the transpersonal field(s), and specifically encourages empirical submissions—though it welcomes careful scholarship of other kinds as well. Empirical research of any kind, whether quantitative or qualitative, involves some reduction of human experience in the service of looking for useful patterns of evidence that may be applied more broadly. Yet the risks of reducing human phenomena may be smaller than the risk of obscurity that goes with the failure to conduct and publish an adequate body of empirical research.

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About the Journal

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