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## Editorial Introduction to Special Topic Section: Transpersonal Feminism

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## Editorial Introduction to Special Topic Section: Transpersonal Feminism

Many women who have passed through the halls of the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, where both Special Topic editors are currently located, have asked, “Why are there so few women published in this field?” Women of note have published well-received books on a variety of topics such as psycho-spiritual development (Ruumet, 2005; Vaughan, 1995/2005), as well as developing research methods influential within the field of qualitative research (Anderson, 2011; Clements, 2004). While women authors in the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* have increased as a percentage since the 1980s, women have been consistently under-represented in the professional literature of the transpersonal fields (Daniels, 2005; Hartelius, Caplan, & Rardin, 2007). To date, no scholarship has adequately addressed the reasons for this historical situation or examined the motivations and support necessary for women to achieve more publication in the transpersonal field (G. Rothe, personal communication, April 20, 2011). Whatever the roots of this dynamic, the current special issue addresses this gender imbalance with an offering of women’s voices to the transpersonal audience, with a specific focus on feminist perspectives.

Along with women-centeredness, feminist perspectives offer rhetorical and analytical tools for examining issues of social and personal rights and the mechanisms through which such rights are constricted based upon gender. For example, feminist scholarship in fields such as psychology over the past four decades have revealed the imbalance in gender representation in the vast majority of research upon which these disciplines were built (Yoder & Kahn, 1993; Enns, 2004). Additionally, feminist critiques of foundational psychological forefathers such as Freud (Flax, 1990; Thurer, 2005) and Jung (Wehr, 1987; Young-Eisendrath, 2004) have expanded some of the culturally-bounded and, at times, sexist classical concepts of early psychology with the explicit goal of creating schools of thought that are more inclusive and less pathologizing of diverse perspectives.

As a field of study, feminism, in its many forms, centers scholarship around the experiences of women and issues of vital importance to women’s lives and well-being, such as economic justice, reproductive freedom, and freedom from harm and discrimination. With regard to areas of focus in much transpersonal scholarship, including states of consciousness, psycho-

spiritual development, extraordinary human experiences, and psychological well-being, considerations of the differences men and women may experience are vastly underrepresented in the literature. Socio-cultural location and the influence of gendered identities on the daily lived experience of both individuals and groups are real factors in the differing ways women and men are treated as both subjects of research as well as authors of transpersonally-oriented scholarship. Consideration of and research on the variety and richness of women's psychospiritual experiences will help to broaden understanding in the field of the various ways in which the transpersonal can be viewed and interpreted.

However, the voices of women cannot be represented by any single author: it is a confluence of voices that will bring forward the dynamic, multidimensional ways in which women's experiences can inform a deepening understanding of transpersonal phenomena. The goal of this Special Topic is to invite conversation and exploration of diverse feminist viewpoints within transpersonal studies in order to further develop transpersonal theory that is inclusive of the individuals it aims to describe.

In this issue, Christine Brooks and Martina Juko Holiday suggest intersections or possible relationships between feminism/womanism and transpersonalism. These meeting points create possibilities for novel approaches to spirituality, critical theory building, clinical practice, education, research, and activism, endeavors that ultimately aim to heal the psychospiritual wounds of those who may have suffered from non-inclusive conventions. A discussion of feminism within the transpersonal field has been sorely needed; Brooks' piece fills that gap and posits why and how the transpersonal field omitted considerations of gender in transpersonalists' early universalizing theories. Brooks delivers a broad overview of feminist psychological theory and feminist spirituality in order to give a tangible characterization of the intersection between feminism and transpersonalism, noting that beyond scholarly discourse and research, praxis and education may serve as potent locations of social action; transpersonal scholarship may benefit from reaching out to mine the wealth of subjective experience that exists outside the formal bounds of the academy, bringing the people and their experiences front and center in the integration of feminist and transpersonal scholarship. Indeed, Brooks notes that both transpersonal and feminist thought

focus on the role of individual agency in personal and social transformation, emphasizing the acceptance of subjective experience as the starting point of inquiry that aims to elucidate the experience of many within larger collective contexts. Within this epistemological vein, Ferrer's (2002, 2009) participatory philosophy is presented as a possible theoretical starting point for the envisioned feminist and transpersonal worldview, as the participatory turn values and takes account of the multiple perspectives on spirituality that are recognized today by those sensitive to feminist views and diverse transpersonal experiences.

Holiday describes the womanist perspective in all of its historical, cultural, political, and spiritual richness, giving credit to the liberationist work of women of color seeking to communicate their own subjectivity as a personal form of self-articulation, communion with spirit, connection with community, and individual and collective healing. Holiday points out transpersonal psychology's own early ethnocentricity, but carves out a space in the transpersonal discourse for the womanist perspective, which has from its inception been embedded within an explicitly spiritual context. Holiday uses the metaphor of the self-created mirror to convey how womanists must express their real lived experience authentically, sounding the call for more scholarship from within the transpersonally-oriented womanist community. According to Holliday, the healing of deep wounds and traumas of women of color may be supported through inquiry that embraces the womanist-influenced concepts of the *word*, expressed through narrative and testimony; the *body*, trusted as a viable source of data and an authoritative embodied voice of experience; and the *kinfolk*, recognized as the relationship between the individual and her community. Here, as in other articles within this issue, scholarship is not removed from the object of its study, but rather is conducted by those who come from within the studied context, by those whose participation in that reality grants them a subjective authority that is valued in both womanist and transpersonal discourse.

The other six women's voices included in this special issue demonstrate the depth and breadth of feminist thought as it is currently expressing itself in the transpersonal community. This collection of articles brims with the lived experience of women and the issues that have meaning and importance to them in their personal, academic, and spiritual lives.

Judy Grahn interprets an ancient Mesopotamian myth about the great goddess Inanna to reappraise how the personal integrity of women is vital to the urgent need to save the natural world. Grahn here considers the myth of Innana and Shukaletuda, in which Innana is subjected to a sexual transgression, and proposes that such an image stand for general disrespect of nature's order, represented not only by the transgression of Inanna's feminine power and aesthetics, but also by the transgressor's unthinking pillaging of the land. Grahn suggests that this transgression is not what other modern cultural critics might consider as a "rape," for the crime done to Innana is not personal and psychological, but rather a societal and collective wound inflicted upon the earth to which the community is bound. The powerful imagery of Innana's menstruation and menstrual blood and its power to cleanse the land reinforces the transformative role of the feminine, which Grahn asserts was and still is denigrated under the reign of patriarchy. Grahn gives us a look into how females may choose to interpret old stories along postmodern feminist lines, and how this can be ecologically, psychologically, and spiritually healing.

Sophia Korb proposes an area of potential research that has been overlooked to date in transpersonal studies: the lived experience of Jewish and Christian fundamentalist mothering. Korb points out that conservative religious movements in the West have often been derided or rejected in transpersonal circles; she suggests that the motivations and complexities of the lives of fundamentalist women must be understood, as raising children constitutes a vital culture-making process. Korb illuminates why some modern women choose to identify with a more restrictive fundamentalist path instead of a more liberal feminist one, emphasizing self-agency, religious identification, cultural and social discourse, tradition, and community. Korb presents this discussion within the sequential framework of a social and cultural process of identity formation, described as the influences of early environment, identity formation, religious transformation, and finally the molding of the early environments of women's children, concluding that identity, as a whole, is comprised of the intersecting identities of both the mother and the religious practitioner.

April Topfer discusses the embodied experience of female adoptees within a closed adoption system, weaving in personal narrative as a cogent example of

the author's own hermeneutical process of biological identification and the reclamation of her embodied female voice. Topfer combines elements from Jungian and feminist theory to propose a theoretical model of psychological and spiritual growth that highlights the role of the embodied female voice as a transformational component of a female adoptee's journey toward self-understanding. Furthermore, Topfer includes narratives from birth mothers who relinquished their children, providing a counterbalance to the discussion of the lived experience of female adoptees.

Irene Lazarus reports on the efficacy of incorporating feminism and a family systems view into a model of psycho-spiritual development as a healing modality appropriate for personal work as well as therapeutic practice. Lazarus discusses her own experience of teaching the course, *A Transpersonal Feminist Approach to Family Systems*, at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology from the years 1995-2002, and includes an organic inquiry into the personal narratives of some of her students, who used transpersonal modalities such as genealogy, dream work, journaling, and other forms of creative expression to assist in self-understanding and self-acceptance. Considering how family history is tightly bound to a particular socio-cultural framework, Lazarus' feminist revision to Murray Bowen's original family systems theory is a much-needed update to a transpersonal theoretical system that could be more inclusive and broadly descriptive by honoring perspectives grounded in complex and varied contexts. Lazarus thus sets an example of how transpersonal theory can be updated according to current feminist discourse.

The personal, academic, and spiritual lives of women cannot be considered as separate within a feminist paradigm, as demonstrated by Kim Duckett's proposition of the transformational power of using the Wheel of the Year (WOTY) as a psycho-spiritual healing process for women. Duckett's teachings and programs for the WOTY are modeled on ancient European earth-based systems of psychospiritual development, which follow the temporal patterns of the changing seasons, and are also reflected in the modern teachings of women's spirituality, Pagan, goddess spirituality, and Wiccan traditions, and draw parallels with the transpersonal developmental model of psychosynthesis. For Duckett, a woman's lived experience and her processes of healing—including the reconstructing and deconstructing of integral parts of the self—can be compared symbolically

to the mythology of the Greek goddess Persephone, whose story of spiritual and psychological development is entwined with the change of the seasons. Duckett's model recognizes the necessity of and encourages self-reflection and identification with other women going through individual processes of biological development and psycho-spiritual growth, and thus presents a healing modality for more than just the individual female, but for the whole of the community of women.

Judy Schavrien examines two sets of ancient Greek trilogies as allegories to current environmental catastrophes. Setting the stage for her analysis, Schavrien takes note of the reciprocal dynamic between the sociopolitical world and the religious beliefs and practices of the ancient Greeks; she then locates the intersection between society and society's religion in the gendered attitudes and beliefs of Athenian males, as witnessed through the influential discourse of the theater, which crafted specific visions of female deities and thus informed and was informed by the social roles of Athenian women. In the first trilogy of plays examined, Aeschylus' *The Oresteia*, Schavrien suggests that the defamation, demonization, and distortion of the female deities, linked to the maternal, to nature, and to nature's way of both creating and destroying, fit the purposes of a growing democratic male-dominated city-state. In the second example, Sophocles' *Oedipus* trilogy, Schavrien shows how the playwright might have written a tale that aligned with the sociopolitical context of the time, with the hopes of restoring the balance between family and body politic, female and male, and ultimately between humans, nature, and the gods. Schavrien's study, informed by Gross' (1993) feminist hermeneutics of suspicion, exhibits a broad vision by first attempting to uncover the androcentric and misogynistic bias within the earlier trilogy that correlated with hypermasculinity and hubris, and thus imbalance, and then finding some resolution within the later trilogy's foregrounding of the feminine, thus potentially restoring balance. Schavrien contends that the second trilogy served as a critique of not only the sociopolitical scene, but also of the psychospiritual and psychoecological characterization of the collective. Schavrien then suggests parallels between ancient Athens and contemporary America and modern corporations; then, in consonance with Sophocles' late vision, Schavrien proposes an act of rebalancing centered on the sustenance of the Earth, with implications for critical reinterpretations of history, politics, and psychology.

### **Editorial Introduction to Special Topic Section**

The editors of this section are not attempting to set out a rigid definition of what feminist transpersonal scholarship should look like, or set an agenda for the kinds of topics feminist transpersonalists and transpersonal feminists should contribute to the growing body of literature. If any viewpoint stands out within the feminist movement, it is that contemporary feminists seek to utilize the most comprehensive and sophisticated interdisciplinary methods to study and elucidate the complexity of women's experiences, from illustrations gleaned from personal, self-reflective processes and development to examination of social and collective roles, relationships, and identities.

Many of the articles in this issue describe or employ qualitative methods of research and review of extant literature; such approaches aim to privilege subjective accounts of women's experience, drawing from the psychological, the experiential, the embodied, and the actual lived reality of women. Interestingly, a number of authors chose to discuss their own personal experiences as these relate to their research endeavors. Qualitative methods are gaining increased visibility and credence within the social scientific fields, and feminist researchers and scholars have employed qualitative approaches to gathering and analyzing subjective experience, both formally and informally, for decades. Additionally, transpersonal psychology has from its inception developed qualitative approaches for research, since many of the experiences that transpersonalists have studied cannot be fully elucidated through quantitative description. Those working within both feminist and transpersonal terrains have learned the benefits of qualitative approaches to inquiry and can take strong positions in favor of these methods with decades of meaningful data to support them.

The transpersonal field is a progressive academic discipline and it is imperative to engage in scholarly discourse that promotes forward-thinking, flexible, and adaptive methods of inquiry to support the constant changes within intellectual discourse. The editors are honored to bring this special section of the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* to life. Christine began to vision such a project as a student at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology almost a decade ago. Eight years later, through collaboration with passionate women scholars in the transpersonal community, this issue offers eight articles representing diverse viewpoints from within a feminist-transpersonal perspective. The

editors hope that this issue will help to bridge feminist and transpersonal research and scholarship that fosters interdisciplinary intellectual thought, and that it will explicitly support academic work by transpersonally-oriented women. Each new and diverse perspective that is given voice adds to the whole picture of human experience, complex though it may be; if the inclusive vision of transpersonalism cannot be achieved through universalisms, then it must be pursued through a rich plurality of diverse voices.

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