

International Journal of Transpersonal Studies

Volume 30
Iss. 1-2 (2011)

Article 2

1-1-2011

Editor's Introduction

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Recommended Citation

Hartelius, G. (2011). Hartelius, G. (2011). Editor's introduction. International Journal of Transpersonal Studies, 30(1-2), iii-iv. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 30 (1). <http://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2011.30.1-2.iii>



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Editors' Introduction

This special double-issue on ecopsychology falls on the 30th anniversary issue of the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*. The journal, which was founded as the *Australian Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* in 1981 by Don Diespecker, has developed from a typewritten collection of inspirational articles, poetry, and bibliographical summaries to a peer-reviewed journal with an online circulation of more than 15,000 unique visitors per year (also distributed on-demand in hard copy). This is cause for celebration, as it is further evidence of the growing success of the transpersonal field.

The first general article, entitled Mindfulness-Based Substance Abuse Treatment for Incarcerated Youth, reports on a mixed-method pilot study conducted by Sam Himelstein. Although it is preliminary, the importance of this work is that it is one of the few pieces of empirical evidence that mindfulness-based interventions can be effective with adolescents, and may be the first paper demonstrating meaningful benefit of such treatment approaches with youth who have substance abuse issues. This is part of a trend toward research on therapeutic applications of mindfulness with specific populations—one that begins to provide empirical evidence for transpersonal psychology's position that certain time-honored alternate states of consciousness can be of great benefit.

Les Lancaster, an outstanding transpersonal scholar who also has strong backgrounds in neuroscience, consciousness studies, and the Jewish mystical writings of the Kabbalah, follows with a paper on The Cognitive Neuroscience of Consciousness, Mysticism and Psi. Lancaster delves into the heart of the hard problem of consciousness (Chalmers, 1996): phenomenality. Explaining the computational processes of the brain is

relatively easy. The harder task is to explain why these processes lead to qualities of experience. This is another way of saying, How is it that there “someone” who experiences brain states as “their” experience? A computer can run by itself for weeks on end, but so far as anyone knows, there is no phenomenality involved: there is no someone who is having an experience. Experience only happens if someone comes along to engage with the computer through the screen and keyboard. The brain may be much more than a computer, but even if one only considers its computational functions, who is the one reading the screen and having an experience? How is this someone related to the neural circuitry of the brain? For Lancaster, the answer to this question is not going to be found in neuroscience. He turns instead to mysticism, and specifically to the ideas of the Kabbalah. Then he weaves neuroscientific fact together with mystical thought, suggesting that kabbalistic ideas are not only compatible with neuroscience, but that they can extend understanding beyond empirical science into the domain of consciousness itself.

The next two papers deal with ways in which work in the domain of consciousness can affect physical health. Adrian Andreescu, Associate Circulation Editor of this journal, offers a beginning sketch of how profound healing may happen. Healing is not mere clinical recovery from symptoms, but the experience of regaining health. He draws on copious amounts of research to suggest that three factors that may be of key importance in eliciting healing: worldview, intentional normative dissociation (IND) and psychosomatic plasticity-proneness (PPP). Worldview represents a patient's concepts of reality—ideas that may enhance or limit his or her ability to participate in a healing process. For example, patients who believe in divine healing are at times able to

experience otherwise inexplicable, seemingly miraculous recoveries; such an experience would likely not be available to a person who rejects the possibility of divine healing. Because worldview has such power, and because severe illness often challenges a person's worldview, the narrative that one creates for themselves around illness may have an impact on their chances of finding healing.

A second factor, IND, refers to intentional use of normative dissociation: the ability to enter a state of total attention and become fully absorbed in an object of attention. If a person who has cultivated IND, consciously or unconsciously, sets healing as their object, this capacity to set aside sense data and focus completely on such a goal might be a valuable asset. Similarly, some individuals are better than others at expressing psychoemotional content in bodily ways (PPP). Again, high PPP might correlate with the ability to turn envisioned health into bodily health. Andreescu then suggests that prayer is a modality in which all three of these factors are brought together. This inquiry offers a view of healing that might be used to inform future empirical research.

The topic of healing continues in the next paper, which is an exploration of traditional healing practices in Calabria, Italy. Authors Stanley Krippner, Michael Bova, Ashwin Budden, and Roberto Gallante spent time travelling through this region interviewing individuals and collecting stories and information regarding the pre-scientific healing practices still practiced by some in this region.

After this comes a paper by Igor Berkhin and Glenn Hartelius, entitled, *Altered States Are Not Enough*. This paper grew from a response to Judson Davis' paper, presented at the International Transpersonal Association conference in Moscow, Russia, in 2009. Berkhin delivered a strong rebuttal to Davis, representing the way in which tradition-based spirituality often receives attempts at integral scholarship. While this journal welcomes integral work, Berkhin raised some points that should be given serious consideration within transpersonal scholarship. In this paper, he collaborates with the editor in contrasting traditional Buddhist thought with what are sometimes superficial assumptions within transpersonal psychology.

The final paper, by Alan Haas, offers a strikingly different, pragmatic approach to transpersonal psychology: a physical scientific approach. For Haas, simple principles of physics, chemistry, and electromagnetism may be as useful or even more helpful than esoteric theories in working to understand transpersonal phenomena. Haas offers an original and unusual approach to transpersonal

psychology, one that challenges the assumptions of much of its scholarship. If for no other reason, this fresh perspective is good reason to consider his suggestions carefully.

Glenn Hartelius
Editor