


2019

Participatory Research Methods in Transpersonal Studies: Introduction to the Special Topic Section

Olga R. Sohmer

California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco, CA, USA

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

 Part of the [Philosophy of Mind Commons](#), [Philosophy of Science Commons](#), [Religion Commons](#), [Somatic Psychology Commons](#), and the [Transpersonal Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sohmer, O. R. (2019). Participatory research methods in transpersonal studies: Introduction to the special topic section. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 38 (2). <http://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2019.38.2.66>.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#). This Special Topic Introduction is brought to you for free and open access by International Journal of Transpersonal Studies. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Journal of Transpersonal Studies by an authorized administrator. For more information, please contact the editors.

Participatory Research Methods in Transpersonal Studies: Introduction to the Special Topic Section

Participatory research methods—in this context, referring to the related streams of participatory action, action, and collaborative research as elaborated below¹—have yet to secure an established role in transpersonal studies despite clear alignment with transpersonal research praxis (e.g., Anderson, 2018; Anderson & Braud, 2011; Braud & Anderson, 1998) and promising potential to further the transformative mission of the field (Sohmer, 2020a, 2020b). This gap has grown increasingly evident as the years elapse since the *participatory turn* in transpersonal theory (e.g., Ferrer, 2002, 2008, 2017; Ferrer & Sherman, 2008; Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013). Whether one views this “turn” as a paradigm shift that marks the second era of transpersonal thought (e.g., Hartelius et al., 2021; Lahood, 2007a, 2010a, 2010b; Tarnas, 2001) or simply acknowledges the well-substantiated rise of participatory perspectives in the field (e.g., Dale, 2014; Ferrer, 2011; 2017; Ferrer & Sherman, 2008; Lahood, 2007b, 2008), the contrastingly limited attention paid to practical enactments of the participatory ethos is striking.

In this spirit, this monograph brings together a collection of participatory research articles of relevance to transpersonal studies. Before outlining these papers, this introduction briefly defines participatory research methods and situates them in relation to transpersonal research in general and in particular since the participatory turn. The prospective contribution of these methods is

examined in light of the transpersonal mission: the shared commitment to individual and collective human flourishing in harmony with social, ecological, and spiritual spheres that, arguably, unites the diverse disciplines and initiatives of transpersonal studies (Sohmer, 2020a, 2020b). Finally, a preview of the collected articles, curated to highlight current participatory research within the transpersonal field, is offered. Ultimately, this monograph aims to pave the way for future applications of participatory methods in transpersonal studies not only to support the much-needed invigoration of research in the field (Cunningham, 2007, 2015; Daniels, 2013, 2021; Hartelius et al., 2017; Kaklauskas & Randol, 2016), but in service of the transformation—personal, social, ecological, and spiritual—to which transpersonal studies aspire to contribute.

Brief Introduction to Participatory Research

To first outline the territory, *participatory research methods* refer to a diverse class of participatory, action, and collaborative approaches to qualitative research in the social sciences. While numerous distinct methods fall within this category—Fals-Borda (1996) reported at least 35—some of the most established include *participatory action research* (e.g., Chevalier & Buckles, 2019; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991), *action inquiry* (Torbert, 1991, 2001), *community-based participatory research* (Hacker, 2013; Israel et al., 2013), *appreciative inquiry* (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987), *participatory research* (Skolimowski, 1994),

cooperative inquiry (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 2006), and *collaborative inquiry* (Bray et al., 2000; Kasl & Yorks, 2002). Together, these methods contribute to what Lincoln and Guba (2011) acknowledge as the fifth major paradigm in qualitative research—the *participatory paradigm* (following Heron & Reason, 1997)—after positivism, postpositivism, critical theory, and constructivism (note, alternatives have been posited for the fifth research paradigm, such as pragmatism [e.g., Creswell & Clark, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2017]).

Although the various participatory approaches may have distinct historical antecedents, unique methodological features, and affinity with different disciplines, they share a common ontological stance on the nature of knowledge and reality and employ research practices in accordance with a *participatory worldview* (e.g., Ferrer, 2002, 2017; Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013; Heron, 2006; Reason, 1994a, 1994b; Skolimowski, 1994; Tarnas, 1991, 2006). Namely, from a participatory perspective, experiential reality is seen as a dynamic *cocreation* between interdependent players within living systems. A participatory epistemology follows from this worldview, forwarding a perspective of knowledge as *enacted* (e.g., Ferrer, 2002, 2008, 2017; Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013) between a knowing subject; their domain and methods of inquiry; and the social, ecological, and spiritual contexts that contain them.

The participatory stance contrasts with positivism, which assumes an inert, mechanistic universe—or even living human subjects—that can be objectively known by an external researcher. Moreover, this perspective also differs from the *perennial philosophy* (Huxley, 1945) prominent in early transpersonal theory (e.g., Cortright, 1997; Grof, 1998; Wilber, 1975, 1980), in which diverse spiritual paths are seen as different approaches to the same spiritual Truth or ultimate (i.e., usually framed as a neo-Vedantic nondualism). Instead, a participatory orientation supports the possibility of ontological pluralism (i.e., the possible coexistence of multiple subtle or spiritual realities with which individuals and systems cocreate), while acknowledging the influential role of a researcher’s intention, attention, and positionality (e.g., social identity location, cultural background, historical context, and psycho-

spiritual development) in shaping acts of knowing, and emergent realities, as well as the dynamics of power inherent in knowledge production. That being said, participatory perspectives differ from relativism and radical constructivism by honoring the ontological validity of external and internal organizing structures with which individual subjectivities participate. Thus, it is not quite accurate to say, as some accounts suggest (e.g., Cunningham, 2007), that a participatory stance is infinitely pluralistic, “grant[ing] the existence of as many spiritual realities as there are individuals who experience them” (p. 42). Yet, there is likely a spectrum among participatory theorists on the respective roles and emphases granted to personal-individual agency (i.e., authority or primacy) versus interpersonal and transpersonal agency in cocreative endeavors (see Heron & Sohmer, this issue). Although beyond the scope of this introduction, this nuance in participatory transpersonal discourse marks an important area for future dialogue and engagement.

These ontological and epistemological underpinnings of participatory methodologies correspond with their practical dimensions in three major ways. First, perhaps most explicitly, participants—often called *coresearchers* or *coinquirers*—in participatory research are included to varying degrees in research design, implementation, and meaning-making. In this way, everyone involved in the research endeavor is empowered as an agent of knowledge, challenging the typical distribution of power in conventional research (i.e., in which knowledge making agency is granted primarily to the initiating—often academic, elite—researcher). This practice is based on the ethical and political assertion that persons have a right to participate in processes that seek to generate knowledge about them (e.g., Heron & Reason, 1997) as well as the epistemic argument that the validity of knowledge is enhanced through the full participation of the individuals or communities who are being studied (e.g., Heron, 1996; Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

Secondly, participatory approaches often employ experiential learning strategies to engage inquiry in real-life contexts and actively generate research data through recursive cycles of action and reflection. Thus, rather than relying purely on past

experience and retrospective data, as is typical in interview-based qualitative methods, participatory research processes create opportunities for novel, emergent knowledge to be generated and for dynamic steering in recursive inquiry cycles. In contrast with experimental research under controlled conditions, participatory research cycles are often taken within the living contexts of inquiry—in coresearcher's daily lives, work, and communities.

Relatedly, some methods—such as cooperative inquiry (Heron, 1996) and embodied spiritual inquiry (Ferrer, 2017; Ferrer & Sohmer, 2017; Sohmer, 2018; Sohmer, Baumann, & Ferrer, this issue)—accept an expanded epistemology, including propositional, presentational, practical, and transformative knowledge (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 1997, 2006, 2008). These methods invite multiple ways of knowing (e.g., contemplative, embodied, intuitive, emotional, and creative) within inquiry-action cycles, thus, leveraging intelligences beyond the rational mind as well as possible *state-specific knowledge* (i.e., knowledge accessed through psychospiritual practice, intentionally cultivated states of consciousness, or spontaneously arising expanded states of consciousness; Cunningham, 2015; Ferrer, 2014, 2017; Tart, 2009). Finally, in addition to informative or conceptual outcomes, the practical and transformative dimensions of research are emphasized in participatory methods, asserting the axiological directive that both research outcomes *and* process should meaningfully transform researchers, their spheres of study, the research audience, and the wider world.

It is important to clarify that most participatory research methodologies do not have a historical correspondence with transpersonal participatory philosophy. Rather, the majority of participatory methods have streams of influence and histories independent of, or not directly connected with, transpersonal participatory theory (e.g., Bray et al., 2000; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Hacker, 2013). Cooperative inquiry (Heron, 1996) is, arguably, an exception given clear historical and contemporary connections with the transpersonal field, including shared antecedents in humanistic psychology, an existing body of transpersonal cooperative inquiries (e.g., Heron, 1998; 2001), and Heron's contributions

to transpersonal scholarship (for further discussion, see Sohmer, 2020a, 2020b). In addition, Ferrer's (2017) *embodied spiritual inquiry*—a contemporary participatory approach to research and learning inspired by cooperative inquiry—was generated within a transpersonal orientation. Thus, prior to this monograph, these two participatory methods have been most explicitly substantiated and applied within transpersonal contexts, perhaps lending them unique strengths of relevance to transpersonal studies. That said, the shared paradigm outlined above unites participatory methods and aligns them with the participatory orientation in the transpersonal field. Thus, I see ample opportunities ahead for diverse participatory methods to become better known and utilized within transpersonal studies.

Promising Horizons:

Participatory Methods in Transpersonal Studies

While the viability and extent of the prospective contribution that participatory methodologies may offer transpersonal studies will need to be substantiated through more practical examples—like the ones in this monograph—existing research in related fields has suggested promising horizons. In fact, participatory methods may offer an important key to ameliorating some of the most persistent challenges in the transpersonal field (Sohmer, 2020a, 2020b). Specifically, in a recent synthesis of critiques of transpersonal psychology, I explored three interrelated challenges discerned within the field: cultural bias, limited social engagement, and limited research (Sohmer, 2020a). These limitations threaten the relevance of transpersonal psychology in contemporary scholarship and society and inhibit the actualization of the field's expressed transformative vision (Boucoulas, 1980, 1981; Brooks et al., 2013; Caplan et al., 2003; Daniels, 2013, 2021; Hartelius et al., 2007; Hocoy, 2016; Hoffman, 2016; Kaklauskas et al., 2016a, 2016b; Rothberg, 1999). Participatory methods offer value in these regards, with the potential to simultaneously address all three critiques and provide an underutilized class of research strategies well suited for the subtle, dynamic, and complex terrain of the transpersonal field. That is, many transpersonal domains of inquiry lend well to the experiential inquiry cycles employed in participatory research.

For example, exploring the mechanisms, benefits, and pitfalls of particular psychospiritual practices (e.g., Rubinart et al., 2016) would be well served by rounds of experiential immersion in the practice, immediate reflection, and intersubjective exploration. Similarly, exploring best practices to address collective challenges—like facing the realities of ecological grief and social injustice—or healing psychospiritual ailments, can be meaningfully engaged through active-reflective inquiry cycles within mutually concerned groups. In addition, the expanded terrain of transpersonal studies calls for epistemic diversity through the inclusion of multiple ways of knowing, state-specific knowledge, potential intelligences developed through psychospiritual practice, and expanded states of consciousness in research. Participatory methods not only leave room for the inclusion of these expanded ways of knowing but may also provide the experiential means to cultivate them during research endeavors (e.g., Ferrer & Sohmer, 2017; Heron & Reason, 2008; Reason, 1994). Finally, participatory methods may provide avenues beyond the persistent Western, patriarchal cultural bias for which the transpersonal field has been critiqued (Brooks, 2010; Brooks et al., 2013; Ferrer, 2002, 2017; Heron, 1996, 1998; Hocoy, 2016; Hoffman, 2016; Lahood, 2016), through processes amenable to the inclusion of multiple, diverse

perspectives or deliberately through research initiatives to address the roots of cultural bias, social identity dynamics, and issues of power, privilege, and oppression (for exemplar inquiries in this realm, see, Barlas et al., 2000; European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness, 2002, 2009; Kasl & Yorks, 2002; Rossenwasser, 2000; Paxton, 2003).

In light of these potential benefits, the applied value of participatory research methods in transpersonal studies may be relevant beyond a strictly participatory theoretical frame. It is striking, however, that growing interest in participatory perspectives in transpersonal studies has not reflected an adoption of participatory methods of learning, research, and activism as well. With shared ontological, epistemological, and axiological values, these approaches contribute to the essential, and so far, underdeveloped, branch of methodology to transpersonal participatory movements (Table 1). That is, participatory methods can provide the means to engage in inquiry, generate knowledge, and foster transformation from within the same ethos of transpersonal participatory theory. In the reverse, without attention to methodology, transpersonal participatory theory is, arguably, limited in its potential scope of practical value. Additionally, participatory and action research in any field can serve as a relational spiritual practice that may offer

Table 1. *Features of the participatory paradigm*

Ontology	Subjective-objective ontology or intersubjective ontology—reality is co-created between the observing subject and the personal, interpersonal, and transpersonal dimensions in which they are embedded
Epistemology	Critical subjectivity in cocreative participation (intersubjectivity); extended epistemology including multiple ways of knowing; collaborative meaning making
Axiology	Purpose of research and learning is to ultimately facilitate healing, growth, and/or transformation; with attention to social, ecological, and/or spiritual dimensions
Methodology	Collaborative and active learning cycles, often embedded in real-life contexts; practical and transformative outcomes are primary; grounded in shared experience

(informed by Lincoln & Guba, 2011; see the original for a table comparing positivism, post positivism, critical theory, constructivism, and participatory paradigms, p. 168)

unique opportunities for contemporary spiritual practitioners (Heron & Lahood, 2008) by providing avenues for experiential psychospiritual exploration beyond established religions, traditions, or schools (Heron, 2006). Thus, integrating and developing participatory methods in transpersonal studies may open creative pathways to enact the participatory turn in both process (i.e., experiential immersion in participatory learning and spirituality) and outcomes (i.e., inviting novel, participatory knowledge to be cocreated; Sohmer, 2020b).

Moreover, the shared emphasis on the transformative dimensions of research—what Anderson (2018) has called *transformative research praxis*—provides a salient bridge between participatory and transpersonal research methods suggestive of a promising synergy in service of the transformative vision of transpersonal studies (Anderson & Braud, 2011; Braud & Anderson, 1998). Although historically, transpersonal research has exhibited a greater emphasis on personal transformation and participatory methods have focused more explicitly on social and political transformation (e.g., Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; McIntyre, 2007; McTaggart, 1997), this divergence in focus is not intrinsic to the methodologies per se, but rather illuminates implicit preferences and biases in the transpersonal field that warrant further investigation. Nevertheless, the shared fundamental concern with *transformative validity* (Anderson & Braud, 2011)—the practical effects of research in addition to conceptual or *informative validity* (i.e., conceptual knowledge)—demonstrates the resonance of participatory research methods in transpersonal contexts. Moreover, while the transformative mission of transpersonal studies may be aspirational, serving perhaps more as an organizing principle or implicit ideal than a practical central focus, maintaining integrity with it requires ongoing reflection on the ways our professional efforts and scholarship genuinely contribute to this end. The research in this monograph provides an applied basis to suggest that participatory methods may not only be well suited for transpersonal domains of inquiry but may also help bridge the gaps between the transpersonal vision and its actualization.

In this spirit, this special issue offers the first focused collection of participatory research studies

of relevance to transpersonal studies. Admittedly, it took considerable effort to gather contemporary research at this intersection, corroborating the need to build awareness, legitimize, and invigorate the use of participatory methods in the transpersonal field. This monograph marks a beginning rather than a culmination—illuminating future directions as much as celebrating existing works. These future directions extend both into practical applications of participatory methods within diverse inquiry groups and contexts, as well as toward further establishing methodological validity in light of transpersonal research standards (Anderson & Braud, 2011; Braud, 1998; Heron, 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 2011).

In large part, this conversation is embedded in a deeper debate regarding what constitutes transpersonal science (e.g., Cunningham, 2015, 2019a, 2019b; Daniels, 2021; Ferrer, 2014, 2017; Friedman, 2002, 2013; Hartelius, 2019) that reaches beyond the scope of this introduction. In this context, it should suffice to say that the effort to legitimize the validity of participatory methods requires further theoretical elaboration and practical application. Much remains unknown regarding optimal applications of various participatory methods in service of diverse transpersonal contexts and initiatives. For example, future research is necessary to clarify whether certain participatory methods are more amenable to transpersonal studies in general or within specific inquiry domains. In addition, future research should intentionally apply proposed validity practices—such as Heron and Reason's (2006; Heron, 1996) CI validity procedures, Ferrer's (2002, 2017) participatory validity tests, Anderson and Braud's (2011) member checks or participant validation—and consider developing new ones. All of this opens up fertile territory for the next wave of participatory and transpersonal researchers to engage.

It is important to name in particular that of the studies represented in this issue, only one focuses explicitly on social or ecological activism. This representation is discordant with the values of participatory research at large, imploring greater attention to collective transformation initiatives in future transpersonal participatory efforts. Moreover, the opportunities to address the contemporary social,

ecological, and spiritual crises through participatory initiatives within the transpersonal research space are robust; and the possibilities for future inquiries across transpersonal domains are plentiful. In turn, as these opportunities are embraced, continued efforts to assess and promote research quality will further substantiate the methodological validity of participatory research in transpersonal contexts. Thus, while acknowledging a humble beginning, the contents of this monograph open promising vistas, suggesting that greater inclusion of participatory methods will foster the transformative aims to which transpersonal studies are committed.

In This Issue:

Overview of Articles

This special issue includes five original participatory research studies, an autobiographical exploration of participatory perspectives, and an interview with the founder of a prominent participatory research approach. The methods represented include community-based participatory research (Hacker, 2013; Israel et al., 2013), embodied spiritual inquiry (Ferrer, 2017; Ferrer & Sohmer, 2017; Sohmer, 2018), participatory action research (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Chevalier & Buckles, 2019), cooperative/collaborative inquiry (Heron, 1996; Bray et al., 2000), and relational inquiry (Lahood, 2013, this issue). The topics span a variety of transpersonal interests including the role of entheogenic and nature-oriented transpersonal experiences in empowering ecological activism, approaches to enhance spiritual wellness on a college campus, the experience of human boundaries within and between co-inquirers, the process and learning outcomes of a long-term relational inquiry, and the integration of transformative travel experience. In addition, Lahood offers a unique exploration of participatory perspectives in a creative synthesis of personal narrative, storytelling, mythology, and transpersonal theory. The special topic section closes with an interview with John Heron, the founder of cooperative inquiry (CI)—a participatory methodology that is particularly well suited for transpersonal studies (Sohmer, 2020a, 2020b; Ross, this issue)—discussing the interface of CI and transpersonal studies.

Beginning this issue is a community based participatory research (CBPR) initiative to promote spiritual wellness on a college campus. In this study, Regina Idoate and her colleagues employed the *Community Readiness Model* to develop an initiative to promote spiritual wellness in a Midwestern state university. Through the research process, the community's level of readiness to promote spiritual wellness increased from stage three, *vague awareness*, at baseline to stage six, *initiation*, at follow up—demonstrating the effectiveness of a community-based approach to develop appropriate strategies to promote spiritual practices in higher education environments. While findings of this study are contextual and participatory—thus, embedded in their specific context—this initiative offers a promising prototype to enhance the increasingly recognized vector of spiritual development in higher education (e.g., Dalton et al., 2006; Duerr et al., 2003; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010).

The second article presents Heather Walker's participatory action research and heuristic inquiry investigating inspirations and challenges to ecological activism with a group of 21 North Americans in the context of the contemporary ecological crises. Along with the explicit goal of empowering participants' ecological activism, the study explored the role of entheogenic and nature-oriented transpersonal experiences in ecological engagement efforts and discusses the mutually stimulating connection between psychological growth and ecological activism. Yet, as Walker emphasized: "changing one's intra-subjective experience is not enough to address the ecological crisis—and cultivation of a comprehensive, nurturing, and sustaining philosophy of life is not mutually exclusive to a critical need for collective sociopolitical responsiveness" (p. 112). The study also examined coresearchers' attitudes toward sociopolitical activism, uncovering the negative associations held by a number of them; thus, suggesting the need for supports to evoke collaborative sociopolitical transformation. This trailblazing work paves the way for future efforts of *transpersonal social engagement* (Rothberg & Coder, 2013) bridging the gap between the transpersonal concern with social, ecological, and

spiritual flourishing and applied contributions in this realm.

The third article, “An Embodied Spiritual Inquiry into the Nature of Human Boundaries: Outcomes of a Participatory Approach to Transpersonal Education and Research,” shares the process and outcomes of an inquiry in which I was a part, along with Ross Baumann (second author) and Jorge Ferrer (third author and inquiry facilitator). After providing a brief methodological overview of embodied spiritual inquiry (ESI) in general (Ferrer, 2017; Ferrer & Sohmer, 2017), we unfold the learning outcomes of our inquiry into the question: “What are the experiential differences between dissociation, merging, and integration—contingent on boundary firmness and permeability—within both interpersonal and intrapersonal domains?” (p. 121). While focusing on the specific inquiry at hand, this article explores the prospective value of ESI and related participatory research and learning approaches in the context of transpersonal and integral education.

In the fourth article, entitled “Relational Inquiry: Seven Years Practicing Seven Relationships,” Gregg Lahood offers an account from a long-term relational inquiry group in Byron Bay, Australia. Through a descriptive account, Lahood presents relational inquiry as an informal approach to new paradigm research and relationship-based spirituality that is informed by, yet distinct from, cooperative inquiry and Gestalt-practice. Drawing on coinquirer testimonies, the article outlines the inquiry practices and the five “basic fields” of inquiry engaged in this group. In addition, Lahood presents a seven relationships model as an outcome of the inquiry process and a heuristic for understanding and participating in relational inquiry. This article is of particular value for prospective initiators of relational inquiry and practitioners of relational spirituality.

In the final participatory research study, Susan Ross shares the process and outcomes of cooperative inquiry/collaborative inquiry (CI) (Bray et al., 2002; Kasl & Yorks, 2002; Heron, 1996) exploring the phenomenon of integrating transformation. Drawing on her research with a group of 10 women after the experience of life-changing travel (see also Ross, 2008, 2017), the

article focuses on CI design, data collection and analysis, and validity, with the expressed purpose to “embolden use of CI by demystifying its concepts, design, practices, and ethic” (p. 164). Ross closes the article with critical reflection of the merits and challenges of CI grounded in the literature and her personal experience.

The collection of research studies is followed by a creative exploration of participatory perspectives through storytelling and transpersonal theoretical analysis entitled, “The Mushroom, the Frog, and the Rainbow of Desire: A Participatory-Psychedelic, Spiritual Emergence.” In this autobiographical essay, Gregg Lahood applies insights from the LSD research of Stanislav Grof, the participatory cosmology of Richard Tarnas, and the panpsychism of Freya Mathews to elucidate a personal account of spiritual emergence and suggest avenues toward “recovering the participatory mind” (p. 198). The resulting weave of personal narrative, mythology, and participatory theory offers a dynamic window into the lived experience and potential implications of relational, or participatory, engagement with life.

In the closing contribution to this special topic section, I interview John Heron—the founder of cooperative inquiry (Heron, 1996, 1998), an experiential, participatory approach to research and learning that is being increasingly recognized as a promising approach to transpersonal research (Ross, this issue; Sohmer, 2020a, 2020b). After presenting a summary of cooperative inquiry, Heron and I discuss CI in the context of transpersonal studies, including past and possible future applications. Questioning the emphasis on “trans” in transpersonal, Heron unfolds the three dimensions of human spirituality that CI engages and offers a vision for transpersonal studies in light of participatory ideals. We also explore questions around cultivating authentic relationships in CI, the role of the nonhuman natural world in CI, and practices based on CI principles that can be used in daily life. Finally, we discuss the application of an extended epistemology and radical assessment in education, self-generating culture, and the role of CI in human evolution.

As a whole, this collection serves as an offering to inspire the next generation of transpersonal practitioners, educators, and researchers to broaden

their methodological palate to include participatory methods. The robust learning outcomes in these articles, as well as the meta-inquiries regarding the value of participatory methods in the transpersonal studies, lay a solid foundation on which future initiatives can build. Recalling Anderson and Braud's (2011) well-reputed definition of transpersonal psychology as, "the study and cultivation of the highest and most transformative human values and potentials—individual, communal, and global—that reflect the mystery and interconnectedness of life, including our human journey within the cosmos" (p. 9) offers a helpful orientation and guide. May we return deeply and often to reflect on this mission and draw on all of the tools at our reach in its service. It is my hope that this monograph bolsters the commitment in this direction, serving as an inspiration and practical road map to creatively align our efforts with the transformative vision of the transpersonal field.

**Olga R. Sohmer, Special Topic Editor
California Institute of Integral Studies**

References

- Anderson, R. (2018). Frontiers in transpersonal research methods: Historical overview and renewed visions. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, 50*(2), 129–143.
- Anderson, R., & Braud, W. (2011). *Transforming self and others through research: Transpersonal research methods and skills for the human sciences and humanities*. State University of New York Press.
- Barlas, C., Kasl, E., Kyle, R., MacLeod, A., Paxton, D., Rosenwasser, P., & Sartor, L. (2000, June 2–4). Learning to unlearn white supremacist consciousness. In T. Sork, V. Lee-Chapman, & R. St. Clair (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 41st Annual Adult Education Research Conference* (pp. 26–30). University of British Columbia (ED452417). ERIC. <https://files.eric.gov/fulltext/ED452417.pdf>
- Boucouvalas, M. (1980). Transpersonal psychology: A working outline of the field. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, 12*(1), 37–46
- Boucouvalas, M. (1981). Transpersonal psychology: Scope and challenge. *Australian Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, 1*(2), 136–151.
- Braud, W. (1998). An expanded view of validity. In W. Braud & R. Anderson, *Transpersonal research methods for the social sciences: Honoring human experience* (pp. 213–237). SAGE.
- Braud, W., & Anderson, R. (Eds.). (1998). *Transpersonal research methods for the social sciences*. SAGE.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Bray, J. N., Lee, J., Smith, L. L., & Yorks, L. (2000). *Collaborative inquiry in practice: Action, reflection, and meaning making*. SAGE.
- Brooks, C. (2010). Unidentified allies: Intersections of feminist and transpersonal thought and potential contributions to social change. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies, 29*(2), 33–57. <https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2010.29.2.33>
- Brooks, C., Ford, K., & Huffman, A. (2013). Feminist and cultural contributions to transpersonal psychology. In H. L. Friedman & G. Hartelius (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of transpersonal psychology* (pp. 612–625). John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118591277.ch34>
- Caplan, M., Hartelius, G., & Rardin, M. A. (2003). Contemporary viewpoints on transpersonal psychology. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, 35*(2), 143–162.
- Chevalier, J. M., & Buckles, D. J. (2019). *Participatory action research: Theory and methods for engaged inquiry*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351033268>
- Cooperrider, D. L., & Srivastva, S. (1987). Appreciative inquiry in organizational life. In R. Woodman & W. Pasmore (Eds.), *Research in organizational change and development* (Vol. 1, pp. 129–169). JAI Press.
- Cortright, B. (1997). *Psychotherapy and spirit: Theory and practice of transpersonal psychotherapy*. State University New York Press.
- Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. P. (2017). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.

- Cunningham, P. (2007). The challenges, prospects, and promise of transpersonal psychology. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 26(1), 41–55. <https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2007.26.1.41>
- Cunningham, P. (2015). Empirical rationalism and transpersonal empiricism: Bridging the two epistemic cultures of transpersonal psychology. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 47(1), 83–120.
- Cunningham, P. (2019a). Scientism and empiricism in transpersonal psychology. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 51(1), 6–27.
- Cunningham, P. (2019b). Science and unity in transpersonal psychology—Part II. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 51(2), 176–197.
- Dalton, J. C., Eberhardt, D. M., Bracken, J., & Echols, K. (2006). Inward journeys: Forms and patterns of college student spirituality. *Journal of College and Character*, 7(8), 1–22.
- Dale, E. J. (2014). *Completing Piaget's project: Transpersonal philosophy and the future of psychology*. St. Paul, MN: Paragon House.
- Daniels, M. (2013). Traditional roots, history, and evolution of the transpersonal perspective. In H. L. Friedman & G. Hartelius (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of transpersonal psychology* (pp. 23–43). John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118591277.ch2>
- Daniels, M. (2021). *Shadow, self, spirit: Essays in transpersonal psychology* (2nd ed.). Imprint Academic.
- Duerr, M., Zajonc, A., & Dana, D. (2003). Survey of transformative and spiritual dimensions of higher education. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 3(1), 177–211. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344603001003002>
- European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness. (2002). A multiple-group inquiry into whiteness. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2002(94), 73–82. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.61>
- European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness. (2009). Challenging racism in self and others: Transformative learning as a living practice. In J. Mezirow, E. W. Taylor, & Associates (Eds.), *Transformative learning in practice: Insights from community, workplace and higher education* (pp. 262–267). Jossey-Bass.
- Fals-Borda, O. (1996). Remarks on participatory research at the conference quality in human inquiry, Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice, University of Bath [Transcript]. *Collaborative Inquiry*, 19(2).
- Fals-Borda, O. & Rahman, M. A. (1991). *Action and knowledge: Breaking the monopoly with participatory action research*. Apex Press. <https://doi.org/10.3362/9781780444239>
- Ferrer, J. N. (2002). *Revisoning transpersonal theory: A participatory vision of human spirituality*. State University of New York Press.
- Ferrer, J. N. (2008). Spiritual knowing as participatory enactment: An answer to the question of religious pluralism. In J. N. Ferrer & J. H. Sherman (Eds.), *The participatory turn: Spirituality, mysticism, religious studies* (pp. 135–169). State University of New York Press.
- Ferrer, J. N. (2011). Participatory spirituality and transpersonal theory: A ten-year retrospective. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 43(1), 1–34.
- Ferrer, J. N. (2017). *Participation and the mystery: Transpersonal essays in psychology, education, and religion*. State University of New York Press.
- Ferrer, J. N., & Sherman, J. H. (2008b). Introduction: The participatory turn in spirituality, mysticism, and religious studies. In J. N. Ferrer & J. Sherman (Eds.), *The participatory turn: Spirituality, mysticism, religious studies* (pp. 1–78). SUNY Press.
- Ferrer, J. N., & Sohmer, O. R. (2017). A radical approach to second-person contemplative education. In O. Gunnlaugson, E. Sarath, H. Bai, & C. Scott, (Eds.), *The intersubjective turn: Theoretical approaches to contemplative learning and inquiry across disciplines* (pp. 15–35). State University of New York Press.
- Friedman, H. (2002). Transpersonal psychology as a scientific field. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 21(1), 175–187. <https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2002.21.1.175>
- Friedman, H. L. (2013). The role of science in transpersonal psychology: The advantages of middle-range theory. In H. L. Friedman & G. Hartelius (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of transpersonal psychology* (pp. 300–311). John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118591277.ch16>

- Grof, S. (1998). *The cosmic game: Explorations of the frontiers of human consciousness*. State University of New York Press.
- Hacker, K. (2013). *Community-based participatory research*. SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452244181>
- Hartelius, G. (2019). Is diversity possible in an integrative psychology: Transpersonal as a whole person-all person approach. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 38(2), iii–x. <https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2019.38.2.iii>
- Hartelius, G., Caplan, M., & Rardin, M. A. (2007). Transpersonal psychology: Defining the past, divining the future. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 35(2), 135–160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08873260701274017>
- Hartelius, G., Crouch, C., Adler, H., Thouin-Savard, M. I., Stamp, G., Harrahy, M., & Pardo, S. (2021). Is transpersonal psychology in its second wave? Evidence from bibliometric and content analyses of two transpersonal journals. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 53(1), 9–30.
- Hartelius, G., & Ferrer, J. N. (2013). Transpersonal philosophy: The participatory turn. In H. L. Friedman & G. Hartelius (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of transpersonal psychology* (pp. 187–202). John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118591277.ch10>
- Heron, J. (1996). *Co-operative inquiry: Research into the human condition*. SAGE.
- Heron, J. (1998). *Sacred science: Person-centered inquiry into the spiritual and the subtle*. PCCS Books.
- Heron, J. (2001). Transpersonal co-operative inquiry. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury. (Eds.), *Handbook of action research* (pp. 333–339). SAGE.
- Heron, J. (2006). *Participatory spirituality: A farewell to authoritarian religion*. Lulu Press.
- Heron, J., & Lahood, G. (2008). Charismatic inquiry in concert: Action research in the realm of the between. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 439–449). SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848607934.n39>
- Heron, J., & Reason, P. (1997). A participatory inquiry paradigm. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(3), 274–294. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049700300302>
- Heron, J., & Reason, P. (2006). The practice of co-operative inquiry: Research “with” rather than “on” people. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *Handbook of action research* (pp. 144–154). SAGE.
- Heron, J., & Reason, P. (2008). Extending epistemology within a co-operative inquiry. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 366–380). SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848607934.n32>
- Hocoy, D. (2016). Transpersonal psychology in the age of ISIS: The role of culture, social action, and personal transformation. In F. J. Kaklauskas, C. J. Clements, D. Hocoy, & L. Hoffman (Eds.), *Shadows and light: Theory, research and practice in transpersonal psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 31–44). University Professors Press.
- Hoffman, L. (2016). Transpersonal psychology, multiculturalism, and social justice activism. In F. J. Kaklauskas, C. J. Clements, D. Hocoy, & L. Hoffman (Eds.), *Shadows and light: Theory, research and practice in transpersonal psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 223–231). University Professors Press.
- Huxley, A. (1945). *The perennial philosophy*. Harper & Row.
- Israel, B. A., Eng, E., Schulz, A. J., Parker, E. A. (2nd eds.) (2013). *Methods in community-based participatory research for health*. Jossey-Bass.
- Kaklauskas, F. J., Clements, C. J., Hocoy, D., & Hoffman, L. (Eds.). (2016a). *Shadows & light: Theory, research & practice in transpersonal psychology* (Vol. 1). University Professors Press.
- Kaklauskas, F. J., Clements, C. J., Hocoy, D., & Hoffman, L. (Eds.). (2016b). *Shadows & light: Theory, research & practice in transpersonal psychology* (Vol. 2). University Professors Press.
- Kaklauskas, F. J., & Randol, L. (2016). Empirical foundations of transpersonal counseling and psychotherapy. In F. J. Kaklauskas, C. J. Clements, D. Hocoy, & L. Hoffman (Eds.), *Shadows and light: Theory, research and practice in transpersonal psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 71–100). University Professors Press.
- Kasl, E., & Yorks, L. (2002, Summer). Collaborative inquiry for adult learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2002(94), 3–11. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.54>

- Lahood, G. (2007a). The participatory turn and the transpersonal movement: A brief introduction. *ReVision: A Journal of Consciousness and Transformation*, 29(3), 2–6. <https://doi.org/10.3200/REVN.29.3.2-6>
- Lahood, G. (Ed). (2007b). The participatory turn part 1 and 2. (Monograph). *ReVision: A Journal of Consciousness and Transformation*, 29(3–4). <https://doi.org/10.3200/REVN.29.3.2-6>
- Lahood, G. (2008). Paradise bound: A perennial tradition or an unseen process of cosmological hybridity. *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 19(2), 155–189. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1556-3537.2008.00008.x>
- Lahood, G. (2010a). Relational spirituality, Part 1: Paradise unbound: Cosmic hybridity and spiritual narcissism in the “one truth” of New Age transpersonalism. *The International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 29(1), 31–57. <https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2010.29.1.31>
- Lahood, G. (2010b). Relational spirituality, Part 2: The belief in others as a hindrance to enlightenment: Narcissism and the denigration of relationship within transpersonal psychology and the New Age. *The International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 29(1), 58–78. <https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2010.29.1.58>
- Lahood, G. A. (2013). Therapeutic democracy: The roots and potential fruits of a Gestalt-assisted collaborative inquiry. *Gestalt Review*, 17(2), 119–148. <https://doi.org/10.5325/gestaltreview.17.2.0119>
- Lahood, G. A. (2016). Peer reviewed article: Love’s threshing floor: Sifting the participatory wheat from the perennial chaff in the transpersonal psychology “familiar” to Gestalt therapy. *Gestalt Journal of Australia and New Zealand*, 12(2), 17.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 163–188). SAGE.
- McIntyre, A. (2007). *Participatory action research*. SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483385679>
- McTaggart, R. (Ed.). (1997). *Participatory action research: International contexts and consequences*. State University of New York Press.
- Palmer, P., & Zajonc, A. (2010). *The heart of higher education*. Jossey-Bass.
- Paxton, D. (2003). Facilitating transformation of white consciousness among European-American people: A case study of a cooperative inquiry [Doctoral dissertation, California Institute of Integral Studies] (Dissertation No. 3078796). ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Reason, P. (1994a). Co-operative inquiry, participatory action research and action inquiry: Three approaches to participative inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 324–339). SAGE.
- Reason, P. (Ed.). (1994b). *Participation in human inquiry*. SAGE.
- Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (Eds.). (2008). *The SAGE handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice* (2nd ed.). SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848607934>
- Rosenwasser, P. (2000, June 2–4). Tool for transformation: Cooperative inquiry as a process for healing from internalized oppression (ED452417). In T. Sork, V. Lee-Chapman, & R. St. Clair (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 41st annual Adult Education Research Conference* (pp. 392–396). University of British Columbia. ERIC. <https://files.eric.gov/fulltext/ED452417.pdf>
- Ross, S. L. (2008). The integration of transformation: A CI among women after transformative travel. [Doctoral dissertation, California Institute of Integral Studies] (Dissertation No. 3306679). ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Ross, S. (2017). The making of everyday heroes: Women’s experiences of transformation and integration. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 59(4), 499–521. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167817705773>
- Ross, S., Zammit, C., & Zollinger, R. (2005, October). Living in the field of transformation. In D. Vlosak, G. Kielbaso, & J. Radford (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Sixth International Transformative Learning Conference* (pp. 407–412). Michigan State University and Grand Rapids Community College.
- Rothberg, D. (1999). Transpersonal issues at the millennium. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 31(1), 41–67.

- Rothberg, D., & Coder, K. E. (2013). Widening circles: The emergence of transpersonal social engagement. In H. L. Friedman & G. Hartelius (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of transpersonal psychology* (pp. 626–639). John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118591277.ch35>
- Skolimowski, H. (1994). *The participatory mind: A new theory of knowledge and of the universe*. Penguin Books.
- Sohmer, O. R. (2018). Interactive meditation as research practice: An introduction to embodied spiritual inquiry. *Integral Transpersonal Journal*, 10(10), 118–137. https://doi.org/10.32031/ITIBTE_ITJ_10-SO5
- Sohmer, O. R. (2020a). Addressing persistent challenges in transpersonal psychology: Cooperative inquiry as an innovative response. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 52(1), 78–112.
- Sohmer, O.R. (2020b). An exploration of the value of cooperative inquiry for transpersonal psychology, education, and research: A theoretical and qualitative inquiry. [Doctoral dissertation, California Institute of Integral Studies]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global. (Publication No. 28258221).
- Tarnas, R. (1991). *The passion of the Western mind: Understanding the ideas that have shaped our world view*. Ballantine Books.
- Tarnas, R. (2001). A new birth in freedom: A (p) review of Jorge Ferrer's "Revisioning transpersonal theory: A participatory vision of human spirituality." *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 33(1), 64–71.
- Tarnas, R. (2006). *Cosmos and psyche: Intimations of a new world view*. Viking.
- Tart, C. T. (2009). *The end of materialism: How evidence of the paranormal is bringing science and spirit together*. New Harbinger.
- Torbert, W. R. (1991). *The power of balance: Transforming self, society and scientific inquiry*. SAGE.
- Torbert, W. R. (2001). The practice of action inquiry. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *Handbook of action research* (pp. 207–18). SAGE.
- Wilber, K. (1975). Psychologia perennis: The spectrum of consciousness. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 7(2), 1–21.
- Wilber, K. (1980). *The atman project*. Quest Books.

About the Author

Olga Sohmer, PhD, is an experiential educator and holistic counselor passionate about cultivating the deepest potential of the human mind, body, heart, soul, and spirit. Drawing on her background in transpersonal and depth psychology, transformative coaching, yoga and mindfulness instruction, intergroup dialogue facilitation, and participatory inquiry, Olga offers a multidimensional approach to education, research, and counseling. She has written about the practice and outcomes of *Embodied Spiritual Inquiry* (Ferrer & Sohmer, 2017; Sohmer, 2018; Sohmer et al., this issue) a participatory approach to transpersonal education. Her doctoral dissertation in East-West Psychology at CIIS explored the value of Cooperative Inquiry for transpersonal psychology, education, and research. Born in Russia, Olga now resides in Northern California with her husband and son. Through her work and daily life, she hopes to contribute to healing the way human beings relate to ourselves, each other and the Earth, our home. Author contact: olgasohmer.com

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 Floraglates 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).