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# An Embodied Spiritual Inquiry into the Nature of Human Boundaries: Outcomes of a Participatory Approach to Transpersonal Education and Research

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*Embodied spiritual inquiry* (ESI) is a radical approach to integral and transpersonal education and research offered as a graduate course at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS). Inspired by elements of *participatory research* and *cooperative inquiry*, ESI applies *interactive embodied meditations* to access multiple ways of knowing (e.g., somatic, vital, emotional, mental, contemplative) and mindfully inquire into collaboratively decided questions. This article presents the learning outcomes of an inquiry into the nature of human boundaries within and between co-inquirers, providing an example of how ESI is implemented in the classroom and can be used to study transpersonal subject matter. In particular, the study found that boundaries were experienced in terms of their dynamic effects rather than as static qualities, with a relationship between dissociation and overly firm boundaries, as well as a relationship between integration/merging and more varied combinations of firm and permeable boundaries. Other notable inquiry outcomes include the identification of (a) experiential qualities of the states of dissociation, merging, and integration; (b) a recursive relationship between fear and trust in the modulation of optimal interpersonal boundaries; and (c) the phenomenon of shared emergent experience between practitioners, which suggests the existence of an intersubjective transpersonal field.

**Keywords:** *integral education, transpersonal education, multiple ways of knowing, interactive embodied meditations, cooperative inquiry, participatory research, embodied spirituality, interpersonal boundaries*

Integral and transpersonal education<sup>1</sup> faces the great challenge and opportunity of engaging the multidimensional totality of human experience. As holistic educators Ferrer et al. (2005) stated, integral education needs to cultivate the epistemic potential of the body, vital world (i.e., the sexual, instinctive, and creative domain), heart, and consciousness in addition to the type of intellectual mind that has been typically privileged in modern education. This article presents an example of *embodied spiritual inquiry* (ESI) as an approach to integral and

transpersonal education and research that radically acknowledges multiple human faculties as sources of creative knowledge in both content and method.

ESI is both a unique approach to education and a novel research methodology that has been designed and offered as a graduate course at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), in San Francisco, California, USA, by core faculty Jorge Ferrer since 2003. ESI applies elements of Albareda and Romero's *integral transformative practice* involving mindful physical contact between

practitioners that allows access to the creative potential of multiple human faculties including body, *vital center* (i.e., the lower abdomen, associated with vitality and creativity), heart, mind, and consciousness (Ferrer, 2003; Malkemus & Romero, 2012; Romero & Albareda, 2001), to facilitate a learning experience for the whole person, inspired by elements of *cooperative inquiry*, a collaborative, experiential approach to research and learning about the human condition (see Heron, 1996; 1998; Heron & Reason, 1997). More specifically, ESI seeks to foster access to multiple ways of knowing (e.g., somatic, vital, emotional, mental, contemplative) to explore a variety of psychological and transpersonal inquiry domains. Grounded in the paradigm of participatory philosophy (e.g., Ferrer, 2002, 2011, 2017; Ferrer & Sherman, 2008a; Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013; Heron, 1998, 2006; Tarnas, 1991), ESI holds transpersonal knowing as relational, embodied, enactive, and inquiry-driven (see Ferrer, 2000, 2008, 2017; Malkemus, 2012).

In this context, ESI invites new perspectives on the human condition through a collaborative, experiential process using Albareda and Romero's *interactive embodied meditations* (IEMs; Ferrer, 2003). Mindful physical contact, an attitude of unconditional presence, and deep listening to the diverse human faculties activated by IEMs seek to facilitate access to the intersubjective and transpersonal domains potentially emerging in experience between persons—domains that have been mostly overlooked in transpersonal and contemplative education to date (see Ferrer & Sohmer, 2017; Gunnlaugson, 2009, 2011; Heron & Lahood, 2008).

In addition, rather than being passive consumers of knowledge, students are engaged as co-researchers. To this end, students select an inquiry topic or domain, actively elucidate the inquiry domain through their own multidimensional experiences, retrospectively assess the merits and shortcomings of the inquiry process, and optionally participate or even take a leadership role in the analysis and discussion of the inquiry outcomes. This case study presents an example of the applied impact of ESI in the classroom and the rich learning outcomes generated by this approach.

Since the theoretical pedagogy, epistemology, and methodology of ESI has been presented in detail elsewhere (Ferrer & Sohmer, 2017; Osterhold et al., 2007; Sohmer, 2018), here we provide a brief overview of the course, as well as the theoretical and methodological context within which inquiry outcomes are generated, while focusing on the discussion of the inquiry outcomes. By discussing these outcomes, our aim is to illustrate the experience of ESI participants and provide concrete examples of the fruits of this integral education and transpersonal research approach.

### **Methodological Overview: Course and Study Background**

The ESI into the nature of human boundaries within and between co-inquirers (i.e., intrapersonal and interpersonal boundaries) was facilitated at CIIS in 2013 by core faculty Jorge Ferrer and teaching assistant Michael Anderson. In addition to the facilitator and assistant, the group was comprised of 12 graduate students (hereafter referred to as co-researchers or participants), including the first two authors of this article. The class began with a three-hour introductory session at CIIS, followed by three weekend intensives that met every other weekend at an off-campus studio. The first weekend focused on introducing the IEMs (Ferrer, 2003) and cooperative inquiry (Heron, 1996), building a sense of community amongst participants, and identifying the inquiry focus. The following two weekends then used IEMs to explore the inquiry domain. Other class activities included multidimensional meditations (e.g., sensory exploration of space, mindful movement) and games at the start of each session, as well as integration activities after the meditations, including drawing, creative writing, symbolic movement, critical discussion in dyads and small groups, and whole group sharing. Audio recordings of group sharing, drawings, and final reflection papers were collected by the authors for data analysis, which was conducted after termination of the course. While all co-researchers were invited to offer their input on the final draft of this report, the first author conducted most of the data analysis and writing.

During the introductory meeting of the ESI course and before committing to join the class/inquiry, participants were informed about the data collection process (including audio recording of group sharing, collection of preliminary statements about the inquiry topic, photographs of drawings, and collection of final papers) and the possibility that this data would be analyzed by interested co-inquirers to generate an inquiry report. By joining the course/inquiry participants then agreed to this data collection format and knew that their contributions might be included in subsequent data analysis and reporting. However, co-researchers were able to have their sharing, drawings, or final paper omitted from the dataset for any reason and at any time. All co-researchers chose to be included in the final dataset. Note, attributions to inquiry artwork include real names with the agreement of co-researchers while quotations were left anonymous using pseudonym initials. Because of the educational nature of ESI conducted within an academic context to date, this informative/passive consent approach has been used in lieu of a formal human subjects review process. While this approach is reasonable given the very minor foreseeable risk to self-selecting co-researchers (no more than participating in other holistic education courses), future ESIs seeking to attain more robust qualitative research standards should consider HRRC review.

### **Inquiry Tools and Structure**

Albareda and Romero's IEMs (Ferrer, 2003) served as the primary inquiry tools throughout the course (for more detailed accounts see Ferrer, 2003, 2017; Ferrer & Sohmer, 2017; Malkemus & Romero, 2012; Osterhold et al., 2007). Essentially, IEMs seek to access multiple ways of knowing related to five fundamental human dimensions—the body, vital world, heart, mind, and consciousness—using mindful physical contact between two or more partners (Ferrer & Sohmer, 2017). Specific regions of the body are understood to activate the epistemic power of somatic, vital, emotional, mental, and contemplative dimensions through contact with the feet/legs, lower abdomen, center of the chest, forehead/neck/face, and top of the head, respectively (Malkemus & Romero, 2012). By acknowledging and facilitating access to these dimensions of human

experience, IEMs aim to not only foster a radically integral education experience, but also to provide avenues for exploring transpersonal experience. Each IEM cultivates a type of embodied knowledge and much care is taken after meditations to honor the unique voices of the nonmental faculties before seeking conceptual understanding (Malkemus & Romero, 2012; Osterhold, et al., 2007). In support of this movement away from *cognicentrism*<sup>2</sup> towards truly integral learning—wherein multiple human faculties are equally valued and developed—participants spend time in quiet reflection, drawing, or creative writing after meditations, before verbally sharing their experiences with their inquiry partner(s) and the whole group. In addition, participants are invited to bring creative expression in the form of drawings, poetry, or expressive movement into their sharing and final reflections.

Inspired by Heron's (1996) cooperative inquiry—in which all participants are active co-researchers involved in selecting the research topic, contributing data based on their own experiences and insights, retrospectively assessing the inquiry process, and discussing inquiry outcomes—ESI weaves IEMs into a participatory research process.<sup>3</sup> During the first weekend, IEMs are offered with the intention of open-ended self-inquiry towards the selection of an inquiry topic. The subsequent two weekends include prompts that address the inquiry domain during the meditations. Course participants are usually new to IEMs and participatory research, so the instructor and teaching assistant guide the process rather than participating in the inquiry themselves (Ferrer & Sohmer, 2017). Hence, the instructor and teaching assistant facilitate all class activities instead of participating in them and their reflections during group sharing are omitted from the research data. However, ESI strives toward achieving the nonhierarchical culture of cooperative inquiry (Heron, 1996), thus allowing co-researchers greater freedom to shape the meditations (or inquiry tools) in the final weekend as their familiarity with IEMs grows.

Adopting Heron and Reason's (1997) extended epistemology, ESI cultivates experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical knowledge, generating a variety of data. This range of data includes the

experiential knowledge participants share with the group after IEMs and in their final reflection papers; the presentational knowledge catalogued in participant drawings and poetry; the propositional knowledge gathered in participants' initial insight statements, final group sharing, and final papers; and the practical knowledge participants gained that they could apply to their lives as they described in their final papers (see, Ferrer & Sohmer, 2017; Osterhold et al., 2007 for examples). All four dimensions of knowledge were included in the data analysis conducted for this study.

ESI validity standards draw upon transpersonal validity constructs (e.g., Anderson & Braud, 2011), Heron's (1996) cooperative inquiry validity procedures, and Ferrer's (2002, 2017) understanding of participatory knowledge claims. Specifically, following Heron's (1996) validity procedures, in this inquiry we use research cycling, balanced action and reflection phases, and attended to facilitating collaborative group dynamics. In addition, in accordance with both transpersonal and participatory research standards, we paid balanced attention to both the conceptual (i.e., informational) learning outcomes as well as practical and transformative outcomes. For further discussion of validity standards in ESI as contextual, transformational, and participatory, see Ferrer and Sohmer (2017) and Sohmer (2018).

### **Methodological Context, Limitations, and Delimitations**

It is important to acknowledge the theoretical and methodological context within which the outcomes of the present study are contained. While ESI invites individual curiosity and open-ended inquiry (Almaas, 2002) through methodological features like collaborative selection of the inquiry domain, openness to individual definition of key terms, welcoming different inquiry outcomes, and co-inquirer participation in shaping inquiry practices in later stages, co-inquirers' experiences and thus learning outcomes are invariably shaped by the inquiry tools that ESI employs. That is, the IEMs (Ferrer, 2003) described above evoke certain kinds of experiences that may differ from those that would arise using alternative inquiry tools. Specifically, IEMs focus on the epistemic faculties of the body,

vital world, heart, mind, and consciousness, and cultivate these dimensions in a relational context through mindful physical contact. Alternative inquiry frameworks (e.g., drawing out the epistemic faculties of the seven chakras or not differentiating between epistemic modes) or modalities (e.g., solitary meditation, dynamic movement, or verbal dialogue) would likely offer different perspectives on the inquiry topic. In this sense, the inquiry outcomes offered here are inextricable from the ESI methodology and its theoretical underpinnings—as is, arguably, always the case in human inquiry. Although further discussion of this issue spans beyond the scope of this article, it is important to bear it in mind when considering the inquiry outcomes and conclusions discussed below. This consideration also suggests fertile opportunities for comparative future research using divergent inquiry tools and frameworks.

In addition, this ESI was, arguably, limited by the number of inquiry cycles we were able to engage due to the time constraints of the academic semester in which the inquiry took place. That is, we conducted three inquiry cycles rather than Heron's (1996) recommendation of five to eight inquiry cycles for optimal cooperative inquiries. It is likely that the inquiry outcomes would have been meaningfully strengthened if further inquiry cycles had taken place—especially cycles involving more co-inquirer autonomy to shape inquiry actions or, perhaps, inquiry actions that were conducted in daily life.

In accordance with ESI validity, the outcomes of this inquiry are delimited to participatory, transformative, and phenomenological domains. That is, these findings are understood to be context specific and co-created among this specific group of co-inquirers rather than intimating universal or objective knowledge claims. Further research with diverse groups would likely contribute alternative view points and emphases with regards to this inquiry domain.

### **Participants**

This ESI included 12 CIIS graduate students from diverse cultural, educational, and professional backgrounds. The group was comprised of 3 men and 9 women in their early to middle adulthood.



Although there was demographic diversity represented in the co-inquirer group (e.g., gender, ethnicity, professional background), CIIS students are likely to share both an intellectual background and psychospiritual sensibility that might contribute to certain inquiry outcomes and interpretations over others. In this sense, this inquiry was likely shaped and perhaps limited by the relatively homogenous population that engaged in this inquiry.

### **Inquiry Topic**

After introductory exposure to IEMs and the cooperative inquiry method, the group delimited the inquiry domain through a process of individual reflection and three-part group dialogue including small group, whole group, and email discussion. Synthesizing the prevalent themes and interests that emerged after the first weekend immersion in IEMs, the class collaboratively decided to explore the experience of human boundaries. More precisely, the group crafted the following inquiry question:

What are the experiential differences between dissociation, merging, and integration—contingent on boundary firmness and permeability—within both interpersonal and intrapersonal domains?

The interpersonal domain opened to the exploration of boundaries between persons while the intrapersonal axis addressed the experience of boundaries between different dimensions within the person (e.g., body and mind).

### **Learning Outcomes**

The terrain of the inquiry topic—the experiential differences between dissociation, merging and integration contingent on boundary firmness and permeability, within both interpersonal and intrapersonal domains—proved to be vast. While the inquiry group held the totality of the question throughout the process, the authors found it helpful to divide the topic into three parts or stages during the data analysis and conceptual reporting: (a) experiential qualities of dissociation, merging, and integration, progressing to (b) role of boundary firmness and permeability, and therefrom bringing forth (c) transformative implications and practical insights resulting from the process.

The ESI began with the exploration of experiential differences between dissociation, merging, and integration. At this stage, co-researchers entered into the IEMs gently holding the intention to become aware of these experiential states, either interpersonally with their inquiry partners and/or intrapersonally between their own fundamental dimensions (e.g., mind and body, heart and vital energy). The qualities of these states were not defined in advance so that co-researchers could stay curious to make their own discoveries in the spirit of open-ended inquiry (Almaas, 2002). Keeping with Heron's extended epistemology (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 1997), the primacy of experiential knowing was acknowledged and organically maintained. As one participant reported, "during the dyad work I was not able to inquire too much into the inquiry question at hand, rather I was immersed in the experiences" (T. I.). While others described directly contemplating the inquiry question during the IEMs, this variation captures the dynamic nature of the inquiry process, open to a breadth of experiences and focuses. From this wide net of possibilities, participants were invited to draw out insights that directly engaged the inquiry topic in their propositional expressions. The second stage of the inquiry process attended to the role of boundaries and their respective degrees of firmness and permeability in relation to dissociation, merging, and integration. Investigating the nature of boundaries, their capacity to change, and the shared-emergent experience between participants around these facets, predominated in the inquiry at this stage. The final stage of findings comprised both the transformative impact of the process and the practical knowledge gained about boundaries bearing real-life implications.

It should be noted that, as expected when exploring such experiential territory, co-researchers' engagement with the topic spanned from more individualized foci to more collective and potentially generalizable discoveries. The following presentation of inquiry outcomes focuses on the most robust and common themes generated through a collaborative thematic analysis relating to the inquiry question and is organized according to the aforementioned three parts of the inquiry

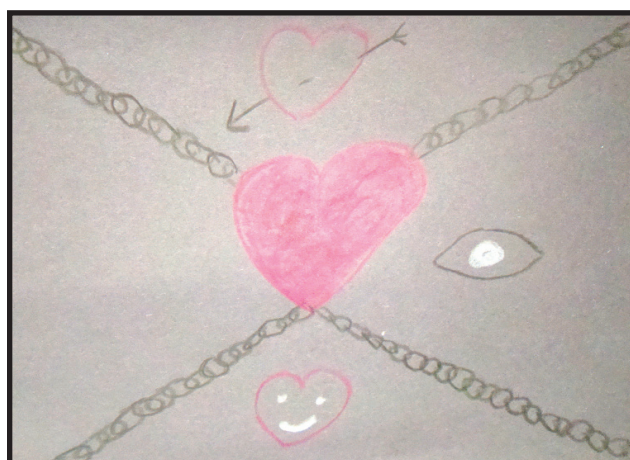
process. The themes presented here were generated in stages through a thematic analysis of the audio transcripts, final papers, and drawings. In the first stage, the first two authors of this article and one other co-inquirer analyzed the data individually, reviewing the material until we discerned thematic categories that we felt were important based on frequency (i.e., repetition by co-inquirers) and significance (i.e., directly responding to our inquiry question, apparent importance in the context of co-inquirers' accounts, and prospective theoretical value). After this step, we collaboratively identified key themes that incorporated the findings of our individual analyses. Then, the first author of this report developed the analysis further, substantiating the themes with direct examples from the data. Finally, the analysis outcomes were shared and corroborated with all of the inquiry group members over email.

### **Experiential Differences Between Dissociation, Merging, and Integration**

The launching point for the inquiry process was the question of the experiential differences between the states of dissociation, merging, and integration. *Dissociation* was broadly described as an absence or inhibition of perception or sensation. For instance, a participant described dissociation as the inability to feel her body when she was in the receptive role of an IEM, which contrasted with the quality of interoception available to her in the active role. Others pointed to a more general sense of the mind wandering at times during IEMs, pulling them out of their somatic experience. Although most did not label this phenomenon as "dissociation" in their sharing, the experience of the mind drawing attention away from the body during IEM aligns with the account of dissociation expressed by the aforementioned participant. Another co-researcher described a more subtle dissociation from her meditation partner while in the receptive role, explaining, "I had more of a sense of the other's touch than my own body... as if a protective shield was prohibiting me from fully connecting to the sensations of my body" (A. S.). Unlike the experience of the wandering mind, which includes both inter- and intrapersonal dimensions, this example hones specifically into dissociation *between* partners,

wherein the individual was fully present in her experience yet discerned a marked differentiation between her partner's touch and her own body. In contrast, the first example demonstrates equally interpersonal dissociation from the experience of the partner as well as intrapersonal dissociation between mind and body sensations. These experiential outcomes illuminate the interaction of interpersonal and intrapersonal domains.

In the intrapersonal context, dissociation between mind and the other centers (i.e., body, vital, and heart) was evident in 9 of the 12 participant reports at one time or another. One co-researcher aptly described the experience of dissociation between mind and heart, exploring the image of his heart in a cage as he sought to meditate on it. He drew the following image in response to the experience:



**Figure 1.** Drawing by Christian Robsahm.

Adding another layer to the experience of dissociation, a participant identified the presence of fear in this state, or more specifically, contemplated how fear induced this state. Combining the qualities of physical desensitization and loss of awareness with an anxious emotional tone captures the common account of dissociation during the inquiry, intimated by 8 inquirers in their group sharing or final paper.

Representations of *merging* suggested pronounced experiential differences between this state and dissociation. The common thread present in 9 participant descriptions of merging was a sense of confusion stemming from the inability to

differentiate cognitively, and at times somatically, their own experience from their partner's and/or between their own inner dimensions. Interestingly, the affective quality of the confusion was generally neutral or positive, evocative of curiosity, lulling the participant deeper into the experience. As one participant commented, this experience was like "entering through the partner's heart" towards a "feeling of unification" and away from "total separateness" (N. T.). Several participants used the word *dissolving* to describe this experience. From the reports, it appeared that most participants (addressed by 7 out of 12) either stayed with this curiosity, exploring the lack of differentiation within/in-between, or progressed into an emotionally positive state, which some described as having a healing faculty (articulated independently by 3 participants). One participant explained, "there was a joy and safety in this dissolving" and affirmed that an experience of "merging can be beautiful and can occur in healthy ways" (L. R.).

It feels important to restate at this point that these findings are derived from the consensual and structured explorations of ESI, so generalization of these experiences to other contexts in which dissociation and merging occur is not implied here. With that said, in the context of this ESI, merging was experienced with neutrality or relative pleasure and curiosity, characterized by a sense of mutual presence, rather than a sense of losing oneself, as during the IEMs.

*Integration* also emerged as an experientially distinct state and reports of its occurrence exhibited the greatest convergence amongst co-researchers. Namely, integration was described repeatedly (by 9 participants) as a state of balanced individualization and unification with the capacity to empower, harmonize, and facilitate a sense of aliveness. As one participant expressed mid-way through the inquiry process, "When I feel my heart, in its beat, I can hear every other heart in the universe. And yet, I can distinguish its unique voice" (S. E.). This statement refers to the polarity of differentiation and unity in the interpersonal context; but interestingly, the majority of references to the experience of integration were intrapersonal. One participant described her understanding of the unique roles

of the various human attributes in the following contemplation: "My body is a gateway, my vital energy is a filter, the heart is the ruler, and the mind is the processor" (B. N.). Another co-researcher described that, during an experience of integration, she was surprised to find that the centers maintained their unique faculties yet came together in service of the whole—proposing that the vital center is the power that fuels the heart, with the mind as the heart's instrument. Further emphasizing the idiosyncrasies of each center when experiencing integration, another inquirer reflected, "Having a strong sense of each center's identity and function led to my ability to integrate them into a holistic system" (T. I.).

In addition, 4 reports conveyed not only a positive emotion associated with integration but also a greater ease of communication between intrapersonal centers. For example, a participant recalled, "I experienced harmony, a surging current, contentment, warmth, health, and expansion" (P. L.). Relatedly, 3 participants described a sense of communication between centers when in an integrated state. Finally, it is noteworthy that while participants experienced integration at disparate points during the process within different IEMs, the quality of the experience rang a resonant chord, gesturing towards a common experience that was variously accessed.

Interestingly, in mapping the experiential coordinates of dissociation, merging, and integration, as expressed in participant accounts, it became apparent that each state uniquely emphasized the inter- or intrapersonal domains of the inquiry. With open-ended direction to engage either or both dimensions "within" and "in-between" as desired by the participant, it is noteworthy that the inquiry generated a preponderance of interpersonal examples about merging (7 out of 9 accounts), while experiences of integration evoked more intrapersonal examples (8 out of 9 accounts). The experience of dissociation emphasized the interrelation of both dimensions. Given the limited nature of the sample, conclusions about the cause of these distinct emphases cannot be drawn. Yet, the trend of these findings suggests perhaps that each state resonates more with the inter- or intrapersonal domains.



In sum, co-researchers reported clear experiential differences between the states of dissociation, merging, and integration through the IEMs. While participants had unique experiences of these states—and a single person could access different experiences of a similar state—the collective data delivers insights into the qualities that characterize each. With the experiential qualities of dissociation, merging, and integration elaborated, the role of boundaries in mediating such states will be considered.

### **Role of Boundary Firmness and Permeability**

The second inquiry stage addressed the nature of boundaries in relation to the experiential states of dissociation, merging, and integration. First, the experience of boundaries in general as well as the related qualities of "firmness" and "permeability" will be addressed. Then, five themes that were identified as prominent in the data analysis are discussed: (a) fluctuations of boundary qualities, (b) giving and receiving, (c) shared emergent experience, (d) exploration of interpersonal boundaries, and (e) facilitation of optimal boundaries.

As with the states of dissociation, merging, and integration, the quality or meaning of "boundary" was not predetermined, leaving participants with the task of defining this phenomenon through their own experience. One co-researcher articulated the following working definition: "Boundary is where we meet. That is where I know you exist" (M. A.). In a similar vein, another participant proposed, "It only becomes necessary to erect . . . a boundary when a person or thing challenges it" (A. S.). A third described, "a boundary is a thing that protects" (M. T.). While these statements have different emphases—including the meeting place where one can experience the other, the active capacity of boundary formation, and the self-protective function of boundaries—they locate a boundary in the encounter between distinct entities. Additionally, they suggest that boundaries come into form, or at the least into awareness, when two beings meet.

On a subtler level, from these statements two distinct "faces" of a boundary are discernible: the interior boundary of the self and the exterior boundary of the other, both of which can be accessed experientially. Intimating this experience,

co-researcher and first author of this article drew the following image:



**Figure 2.** Drawing by Olga Sohmer.

Although this dichotomy is necessarily challenged at the intrapersonal level, perceiving two varieties of boundary illustrates the multifaceted nature of the boundary experience (i.e., including the possibility to experience one's own boundary, the other's boundary, or the co-created boundary in-between). As another participant stated, "Boundaries serve the function of containment, individuation, and protection, as well as merging and integration" (S. C.). Corroborating the various functions of a boundary, this statement holds the dynamic understanding that emerged in the group through the encounter with the experience of the boundary itself.

Having explored the nature of boundaries in general, the particular qualities of firmness and permeability can be discussed. Rather than describing these potentialities of boundary expression in isolation, most participants discussed firmness and permeability within the context of particular experiences. This discussion addresses both the descriptive and normative dimensions of these qualities—their experiential hues as well as their effects. Reports of firmness branched into two categories, or perhaps two ends of a continuum: a firmness that facilitated autonomy and supported interaction across boundaries, and a firmness that inhibited communication out of reactive contraction or rigidity. Although the inquiry prompt intentionally settled on *firmness* as opposed to *rigidity*, based on the semantic associations in the group which could have inhibited the constructive

features of well-defined boundaries to be enacted, co-researchers collectively unearthed the qualities of both firmness and rigidity in their explorations. Pointing to this farthest edge of firmness that impedes contact resulting in a state of dissociation, one participant stated, “Boundaries too firm will result in unavailability and lack of connection” (A. L.). At the same time, another participant noted, “having a firm boundary helped me have a relationship with my inquiry partner” (M. T.). Given these reports, a spectrum of firmness that contains both of these poles (i.e., from inhibitory firmness to supportive firmness) seems warranted. Reports also suggested that the optimal expression of firmness is the nuanced experience of a quality that enables inter- and intrapersonal relationship by fostering individual autonomy. As a participant eloquently articulated:

[A] healthy boundary is a meeting place where there is acknowledgement of separation, yet mutual respect that allows for contact and information exchange. It is where one thing ends and another begins, yet there is the space in between where each can exist. It is an edge that is fluid, a limit insofar as it contains rather than restrains . . . in health there is differentiation. (L. R.)

This apparent paradox parallels the previously noted findings about the experience of integration, which simultaneously includes the capacity for differentiation and unity.

Like firmness, on the surface, permeability seemed to contain a spectrum of degrees of expression. Many participants understood an excess of permeability to herald potential dangers while recognizing that “enough” permeability was required for connection across boundaries. However, in the reports of IEM experiences, participants focused on the emotionally positive and constructive role of permeability. For example, one participant described her experience of permeability during an IEM as a “communication flow” that was “warm, elliptical, and soft” while earlier in her reflection she wrote about the harmful effects of excessive permeability in past professional experiences including “burnout, depletion, compassion fatigue or transference”

(B. N.). This characteristic account—addressed explicitly by 5 co-inquirers—captures that although participants discussed past experiences of the detrimental effects of “too much permeability,” the IEMs themselves generated predominantly positive accounts. This suggests that the requirements for “excessive permeability” in the detrimental sense were acknowledged as potentialities by group members but were not present during the inquiry process. Furthermore, this marks a divergence from accounts of firmness during IEMs, which included both constructive and inhibitory potentials.

The disparity between the experience of firmness and permeability during IEMs—specifically, the range of affective and dys/functional potentials of firmness versus the relative uniformity of permeability—offers an interesting insight. To be sure, participants’ reports of permeability are inextricable from their affirmation of adequate firmness described herein. In this sense, experiences of firmness and permeability are interwoven. Yet, it seems that beyond a confluence of these qualities, firmness precedes and even permits the possibility of permeability – they act as an intra-relational continuum. From this vantage, a process can be observed through which co-researchers first encountered their sense of boundaries as firm, with permeability available only after “just right” firmness was asserted. If, however, a boundary was identified as “too firm,” permeability could only be discerned in the negative (i.e., the boundary is *not* permeable). Recall participants’ reports of dissociation as manifestations of too firm a boundary, wherein the inquirer’s boundary to the other—or their mind towards their body/vital/heart—in these instances communication or sensation was impeded. In contrast, if the individual discovered a “firm enough” boundary, the quality of permeability could be enacted. Through adequate firmness and permeability, states of integration or positive merging could arise. A co-researcher affirms this process: “boundaries assist in the development of individuation, which ultimately supports the power to merge.” From this perspective, the boundary experience can be seen as a developmental process rather than a static essence.<sup>4</sup> The next section discusses additional inquiry outcomes that further explore this possibility and its implications.

## **Boundary Fluctuations:**

### **The Continuum of Fear and Love**

With boundary firmness and permeability tentatively charted, the fluctuating nature of boundary qualities emerged as one of the most common experiences within our group, described directly by 10 of 12 inquirers. It seemed that almost as often as a boundary could be observed and investigated, its nature was subject to change. As one participant aptly expressed, "The state or quality of a boundary can shift in any direction, at any moment, immediately" (L. R.). Another described, "I am like a flower. I open and close. And I am recognizing the value of staying present with all my fluctuations and variations of my boundaries" (S. C.). At times, the very act of witnessing a boundary impelled its firmness to become fortified or its permeability to be facilitated. However, this capacity to change the quality of a boundary was not purely based on intention or will. Rather, there were mediating factors that, once identified and attended to, could afford greater agency in shaping boundaries.

From this understanding, the underlying causes of boundary fluctuations—as well as avenues to consciously affect these causes—arise as vital concerns.<sup>5</sup> Consider, for example, this realization shared by a participant:

I realized that my boundary is in constant flux, always moving and changing. When I do not feel safe in any encounter, my boundary becomes firm and rigid. With people that I feel comfortable, my boundary is soft, fine and fluid. (M. A.)

Identifying safety, and by extension the experience of fear accompanying a deficiency of safety, an underlying source of a firm or permeable boundary is found.

As another participant expressed, "Boundaries relax or constrict based on the energetic continuum of trust and fear," and went on to explain that in her experience, "the heart center [processes whether feelings align] with fear or love on a continuum. And fear causes [her] to contract, [forming] really rigid boundaries. And love [helps] our boundaries become more permeable" (T. I.). This participant's words express an insight central

to the present inquiry around boundary firmness and permeability: there appears to be a recursive relationship between fear and love/trust that is interwoven with the availability of what was perceived as an optimal boundary. Stated otherwise, trust enables boundary permeability, while firm boundaries facilitate trust.

The mediating role of fear and love/trust in shaping boundaries supports our previously stated hypothesis of the boundary experience as a process. Through this perspective, it is easy to understand how firmness becomes a prerequisite for permeability, and hence why co-researchers diverged in their desires for firm boundaries or greater permeability. Looking at the process as a whole suggests that firmness and permeability do not carry intrinsic value, but correspond to an individual's contextually situated needs as they are found on a continuum of development.<sup>6</sup> As one participant put it, "When there was unconditional acceptance, it was possible to have trust in a way that allowed boundaries to become more permeable" (M. T.). In this comment there is an affirmation of the role of trust in facilitating permeability and a reminder that this capacity for trust was dynamically forged even within the controlled environment of the ESI. The ability to experience "unconditional acceptance," or trust, likely increased over the course of the entire inquiry, yet the particular focus of each IEM (i.e., evoking body, vital, heart, or mind centers respectively), the partners with whom co-researchers practiced, and the greater context of the inquirer's life (e.g., circumstances outside of ESI, mood and vital energy level) also had an impact. The boundary process is itself dynamic, enacted uniquely in each encounter, while at the same time embedded in the individual's history and current circumstances.

Furthermore, a few participants more precisely discerned the capacity for *self-trust* as the issue that they were exploring in the context of IEMs. As a co-researcher reported, "Rather than a journey focused on developing greater trust of others, it seems more appropriate that I develop greater trust of my own self so as to more substantially receive others into my space" (D. S.). This need to trust oneself refers back to the



adequacy of firm boundaries, which can contain and protect, thus fostering permeability. While trust of the other speaks more to the environment and context, positioning self-trust as a primary factor in boundary experience emphasizes individual agency (vs. external factors) in the process of boundary development. This is evidenced in the following co-researcher's assertion: "We have agency in shaping the nature of boundaries" (L. R.). The ability to form boundaries remains in the hands of each individual, albeit imperfectly—given the co-creative nature of boundaries between two people and the pre-existing developmental stage of each human attribute. As another inquirer discovered, "If I am clear in thought and action, I realize that my own rhythms link up with nature in a divine dance where my boundaries can be as permeable as water or as firm as wood depending on what each situation calls for" (N. T.). Thus, as co-researchers came to know the nature of their own boundaries, the capacity to consciously participate in their formation was enhanced.

### ***Giving and Receiving***

The polarity of giving and receiving emerged as not only intrinsic to the inquiry tools (i.e., the IEMs) but also essential to the topic. First, it should be acknowledged that the inquiry tools—recall, they are comprised of two-part IEMs in which participants experience the meditation in through a receptive and active role—engaged the total gestalt of these complementary capacities. While it was emphasized that, like the receiver, the active inquirer's focus should remain on their own experience, the active role naturally induced more associations and insights related to giving. This finding was nuanced in that both roles granted access to the inextricable giving-receiving dynamic. Still, the relationship between receiving and giving remained experientially palpable in the active role in contrast with the receiving position. Very likely related to co-researchers' personal histories of giving and receiving, all participants reported experiential differences between these roles. Interestingly, the majority of group members initially experienced more comfort in the active/giving role. One co-researcher wrote the following poem reflecting this experience:

I extend and feel us both  
 This is warm  
 This is love  
 I want to consume you  
 drink you in  
 I feel safer extending because I know my  
 intention –  
 what I want and am able to give  
 I can regulate  
 I yearn for you to soften under my touch  
 to melt into me  
 Somehow this feels okay, this feels safe  
 but because I am the holder.  
 Do I want to merge?  
 Yes  
 What then?  
 We feel like the same body  
 Same heart. (Allison Krizner)

Upon the experiential foundation of the inquiry tools, a second layer of the giving-receiving theme was engaged through the inquiry into the nature of boundaries. This interaction of IEM role and the experience of boundaries was clearly evidenced in 5 participant accounts. Paraphrasing one co-researcher's discovery, during an IEM she became aware that her heart center had firm boundaries while receiving but incredibly permeable boundaries when active/giving. Yet, during the IEM, she noticed a shift in the capacity of her heart to receive, intimating the earlier discussed boundary fluctuations as well as the transformative dimensions of the ESI process.

In addition, 7 co-researchers described that boundary firmness and permeability affect the capacity to give and receive. As mentioned in the discussion of boundary firmness and permeability, there were several reports affirming that clear and defined boundaries supported or enabled receptivity. Again, individual's ideal requirements for boundary firmness/permeability varied along the spectrum of the boundary process. Asserting the primacy of firmness, one participant stated, "When there is a clear and definite boundary, I can receive others and give more" (A. L.). Likewise, another participant noted, "Strong boundaries, allow me to receive more" (M. A.). Through the perspective of

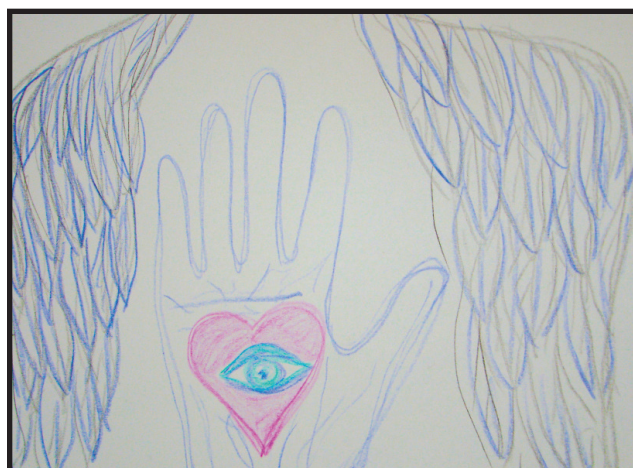


boundary as a process, these paradoxical statements are generated from the stance wherein an individual is working to assert boundaries. Resonating closer to the midpoint of the boundary process spectrum, another co-researcher described that in an optimal state of giving she experienced “boundaries that are firm, but not rigid; porous like a filter” (B. N.). She continued to recount that through this experience she was able to “give authentically . . . like a channel that was able to contain and direct [vital energy] in a way that was comfortable for both [herself and her partner]” (B. N.). Emphasizing the need for permeability, another co-researcher explained, “I perceive permeable boundaries as psychosomatic membranes that allow for natural exchange of energy, which can be expressed in the ability to give and receive love” (S. E.). While there are clear variations of the boundary qualities participants associated with giving and receiving, the prevalence of this theme suggests that inquiring into the experience of boundaries carries with it the activities that occur across boundaries. Furthermore, it suggests that giving and receiving are some of the essential “tasks” within the boundary space.

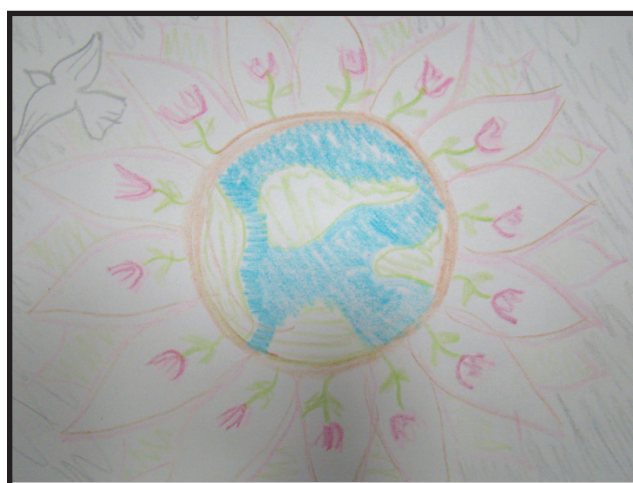
### **Shared Emergent Experience**

While co-researchers had divergent experiences within the receiving and active/giving roles, there were 8 recorded accounts of shared experiences emerging between partners irrespective of role. These shared experiences ranged across kinesthetic, imaginal, and intuitive domains. For example, one dyad reported that during an IEM both partners experienced vibrations in their arms despite being in different roles and physical positions. Similarly, another pair described shared images, both having spontaneously envisioned birds during their IEM (see Figures 3 and 4). Interestingly, during this particular meditation, there were two other accounts of bird visions in the larger group. While these examples cannot be extrapolated, they bring attention to the co-created nature of interpersonal contact. Additionally, they implicitly suggest a degree of boundary permeability required for a shared experience to arise between co-researchers.

Another pair of co-researchers looked to the boundary experience more specifically and addressed directly the simultaneous significance



**Figure 3.** Drawing by Ruta Segal.



**Figure 4.** Drawing by Olga Sohmer.

and irrelevance of role in generating a shared experience between partners. They described contacting a common boundary “in-between” during the two IEMs on the vital center and heart. Although each individual had a unique experience within the two roles, the boundary qualities of their meditations were shared. In one meditation, the boundary in-between felt firm and impermeable, while in the other the boundary was permeable and fluid. One of these participants stated, “A shared experience is evoked in a dyad regardless of boundary firmness and permeability, yet boundary firmness/permeability shapes the experiential quality of what emerges” (P. L.). By recognizing this shared dimension, this co-researcher realized at a later point that the emergence of shared experience facilitates confidence in the epistemic power of the

heart, vital world, and body, by virtue of having this lesser-understood knowledge corroborated by one's meditation partner.

Taken together, these accounts illuminate the complexity of the boundary space as experienced by two discrete yet interconnected agents. At once, it seems that some degree of boundary permeability is necessary to participate in a shared, "third-space" between partners. This may indicate, in effect, a state of merging or perhaps integration between inquiry partners. Yet, at the same time, it is possible to have a shared experience of a firm or impermeable boundary. From this standpoint, it can be inferred that both interpersonal merging and interpersonal integration can occur across firm/impermeable boundaries. However, co-researchers' accounts did not delve into the nature of the shared emergent state or whether they perceived it to be merged or integrated. So, while strict conclusions cannot be drawn about the cause or ultimate nature of shared emergent experiences, these examples raise intriguing questions about the intersubjective field between partners and within the group as a whole. There is much left to wonder; is this connection synchronistic (e.g., Combs & Holland, 1990; Peat, 1987) or sourced in an intersubjective reality that co-researchers accessed through interactive meditations (e.g., Bache, 2008; Buber 1970; Gunnlaugson, 2009, 2011)? Although such a discussion lies beyond the scope of this inquiry, this anecdotal evidence of shared emergent experience evoked through ESI suggests its fecundity for further exploration.

### ***Exploration of Intrapersonal Boundaries***

The more introverted branch of the inquiry topic—the boundaries experienced within—proved to be less dominant in co-researchers' accounts than the interpersonal dimension (addressed explicitly by only 4 of the 12 participants). It seems that the phenomena and concept of boundaries was more evocative of interpersonal themes, while inner exploration focused on the experience of the centers themselves as well as the relationships—versus the boundaries—between them. However, extending participants' accounts of their interpersonal experiences into the language of boundaries to gain further insight into boundary

qualities is reasonable. Additionally, recognizing the collaborative and social nature of group inquiry contextualizes and asserts the significance of the subdued, yet steady, presence of intrapersonal boundary exploration.

The theme of intrapersonal boundaries was accessed primarily through experiences concerning the boundary between the mind and other centers. Initially, 3 participants voiced curiosity verging on confusion about the degree to which nonmental centers can communicate independent of the mind. For many, the mind was experienced as the dominant center as well as the necessary mediator for the expression of body/vital/heart knowledge. If this perspective is accepted—that is, that the mind mediates expression of the other centers—then the ability to communicate any amount of nonmental knowledge requires the mind to have boundaries permeable enough to receive information.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, the inability to experience the other centers can be attributed to the impermeable/too firm boundaries of the mind. In this vein, several participants expressed the challenge of "hearing" the other centers and suspicion that what they did hear was imposed by the mind. One co-researcher elaborated that, in contrast with the permeable boundary she perceived between her vital and heart centers, the mind was impermeable to them both. She acknowledged that this state had a wounding quality and a negative affective tone. Reflecting a similar experience, along with the capacity for a boundary to change, a co-researcher described, "I realized that I had created too much of a firm boundary between my heart and my [mind] . . . . While practicing IEM, my firm boundary was reduced and my permeable boundary was developed" (A. S.). As conveyed in this statement, the inquiry process facilitated awareness of the boundaries between the mind and the other centers, thereby creating opportunities for those boundaries to change based on the particular level of development of the individual and/or center—that is, in the example above, the co-researcher required less firmness and more permeability to revitalize the heart-mind boundary, while another boundary/person may have required greater firmness and less permeability.

Building on prior observations herein of the intrapersonal integrated state, optimal boundaries appear to combine firmness with permeability to meet the unique needs of each situation. Firmness allows centers to be authentically experienced in their unique properties (i.e., to be adequately differentiated), while permeability enables communication between centers. Of course, the need for a boundary to move towards greater permeability and/or firmness is dependent on the center's prior level of development. A center first needs to be individuated before it can come into meaningful relationship with other centers. For example, 10 group members spoke to the way that this process involved discovering and reinforcing the autonomy of the body, vital, and heart centers while softening the reign of the mind. Balancing the sovereignty of each center and bolstering communication between them facilitated a state of integration. As one co-researcher expounded, "Integration is an experience of people having enough firm and permeable boundaries within themselves and their own human dimensions" (N. T.). The meaning of "enough" firm and permeable boundaries remained to be uniquely defined and re/created through the dynamic process of boundary development.

### **Transformative and Practical Inquiry Outcomes**

As it has been indicated throughout this presentation of inquiry themes, the experience and insights gained through the present ESI carry implications beyond the inquiry process itself. Aligned with Heron's extended epistemology (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 1997), this section addresses the transformative and practical inquiry outcomes, that is, learning that fostered participants' growth in their ways of being and acting in the world. These outcomes encompass self-transformation as well as "how-to" knowledge or skills that can be applied in life beyond the ESI. Filtering through a multitude of practical and transformative insights shared by co-researchers, this discussion focuses on the three topics with the greatest relevance for the inquiry around the nature and functions of boundaries: (a) self-knowledge and transformation of patterns, (b) discovery of inner authority, and (c) self-regulation of optimal boundaries.

### ***Self-knowledge and Transformation of Patterns***

One of the most common transformative outcomes of the inquiry process was increased self-knowledge and insight into patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior related to boundaries. The IEMs created an opportunity to practice self-observation in a structured and supportive environment. One co-researcher effectively described this process as follows: "Engagement in embodied meditations with trust and an open mind allows me to witness the fearful patterns with compassion, which in turn leads to deeper integration and intuitive healing" (S. E.).

The ability to simply witness limiting patterns that were triggered during IEMs had a transformative quality for participants, liberating new possibilities for a more conscious and creative modulation of boundaries in their lives. Paraphrasing one co-researcher's experience, through ESI she realized that she had developed a rigid boundary around her abdomen and vital center to contain emotions that were discouraged from being expressed when she was a child. Over the course of the inquiry, she explored softening this boundary, and with her new awareness, was able to increase its permeability and expression. Another co-researcher described the development of more essential awareness about himself: "I am realizing [that] I generally am empathic and function as an open channel. [ESI] afforded me the opportunity to examine this fact about my personality in a safe space" (D. S.). Although he did not extend his reflection to include the impact of this new awareness, he may have greater agency in regulating his contact with others/the world in light of this insight. In another case, a participant applied her experience during an IEM to her broader life and realized that she "oftentimes [has] the desire to give masking, [or] camouflaging, the desire to receive what [she] want[s] to give" (B. N.). Again, although the co-researcher did not elaborate the real-life implications of this realization, it has potential to impact her capacity to give and receive in relationship. These examples provide insight into the benefits of ESI and IEMs for inquiring into the nature of boundaries, and such collaborative experiences facilitate the acquisition of self-knowledge which can support personal healing



and maturation, as well as bear the possibility of producing a meaningful impact on participants' relationships with themselves and others.

### ***Discovery of Inner Authority***

On the foundation of greater self-knowledge, participants reported experiences related to the discovery of "inner authority" with regard to their boundaries. This dynamic quality was framed as a capacity for simultaneous trust in the natural expression of one's boundaries (i.e., the spontaneous, "organic" boundaries that arise without conscious action) along with recognition of personal agency to affect change. As one co-researcher noted, "Engaging in embodied practices helped me to notice the deep wisdom of my intuition," and "[brought] deep self-acceptance" (S. E.). Along these lines, another participant poetically stated:

I have learned that my body is my anchor to ground and center my being; a container to hold all the potential and wisdom; a tool to access inner resource; a source of magic medicine to heal emotional pain and trauma; and a bridge to connect us to the divine. . . . I have been reminded that we have all the answers within ourselves as long as we allow ourselves to connect within and with the body. (M. A.)

And a third co-inquirer posited the realization that, "Boundaries work as a filter, to nurture the unfolding of life's cycle" (B. N.). While the first two statements speak more broadly to the self-acceptance and trust that can be fostered through ESI, the latter points to trust in the innate intelligence of boundaries specifically.

Admittedly, this theme of self-trust/acceptance was more robust in participant reports of their deepening relationship to the body and all other centers more broadly, but we can detect a similar expression of this development in relation to boundaries themselves. Coupled with the previously described growing capacity to shape boundaries, the inquiry process instilled a quality that can be most adequately named "inner authority"—that is, the sense of knowing that one can, and oftentimes innately does, assert boundaries that are appropriate for each unique encounter. The real-life implications

of such an outcome are far reaching. Take, for example, the following participant's reflection: "I have been feeling more confident and comfortable with who I am than before, and I think that is because I connected with my internal spiritual authority" (L. R.). While an elaboration of this concept is beyond the scope of this discussion, it is important to distinguish inner authority<sup>8</sup> as a prominent theme amongst the transformative outcomes of the ESI.

### ***Self-regulation of Optimal Boundaries***

Drawing on multiple reports of increased self-knowledge and capacity for inner authority, it is apparent that the inquiry process as a whole supported co-researchers in developing optimal, conscious boundaries both inter- and intrapersonally. One participant reflected on her experience: "Embodied awareness practice helps me to contain my energy, and that naturally creates an energetic shield—an organic, permeable boundary that allows for resonance and open communication" (A. S.). As she expressed in this statement, the inquiry process had a transformative as well as a practical dimension, having both changed the way she could regulate her vital energetic boundaries (at least during the inquiry process) and afforded skills for regulating her boundaries in the future (i.e., to use embodied awareness practice). Along these lines, there were numerous accounts of how-to knowledge with regard to conscious boundary regulation. For example, one co-researcher noticed, "Discovering a previously unknown boundary weakens it and allows an energetic shift" (D. S.). Another detected, "It felt as if intentionally calling the center of consciousness into participation was the element that produced integration" (S. C.). While these findings were foremost experiential insights, they can also be applied to the process of boundary formation. That is to say, cultivating awareness and intention around boundaries supports their optimal expression (i.e., to increase or decrease expression in a participatory manner) and this study confirms that ESI as a method of self-inquiry brought attention to and fostered these skills in a way that participants can continue to draw on throughout their future explorations of boundaries, within and in-between.



## Conclusion

This study presented ESI as an integral and transpersonal education and research modality yielding fruitful insights into the nature of human boundaries experienced within and between individuals. Using IEMs in the context of a participatory research paradigm, ESI seeks to draw out the unique knowledge of the body, vital world, heart, and consciousness in addition to the mind to experientially explore the inquiry domain. Whereas further research is necessary to establish the epistemic origins of the insights catalyzed by ESI, both the co-researchers' reported experience and the nature of many of these insights strongly suggest that the IEMs allow practitioners to access nonmental ways of knowing.

To recapitulate, we stress three main inquiry outcomes. First, within both inter- and intrapersonal domains, the experience of boundaries reflected a nuanced engagement of the capacity to express both firmness and permeability—facilitating merging, integration, or differentiation as most appropriate for the given situation. States of dissociation were experienced as the result of impermeable, overly firm boundaries, while states of merging and integration included varying combinations of firm and permeable boundaries. Still, the particular combination of boundary qualities was always defined by the context, the needs of the individual, and the co-created needs of the dyad/group. These outcomes suggest that it is more appropriate to discuss optimal boundaries in terms of their dynamic effects rather than their static qualities.

Second, in an interpersonal context, the optimal state was characterized by the ability to feel safely rooted in one's own sense of self, while being able to meet the other in communication and mutual exploration. This dynamic in turn entails a recursive relationship between fear and trust in the modulation of optimal interpersonal boundaries. The authors interpret this predicament as a state of either integration or dynamic flux between merged, differentiated, and integrated states. Intrapersonally, optimal boundaries between inner attributes or centers enabled each to express its unique message and faculties, remaining autonomous yet able to

integrate into a whole. Common to both domains, an optimal boundary balances differentiation with unification and, when afforded the right conditions, can lead to the experience of integration or greater self-knowing. The specific degrees of firmness and permeability that activate these optimal states vary across individuals and situations. Hence, superseding the discovery of an ideal boundary, these outcomes suggest that developing flexibility and the capability for conscious self-regulation of firm and permeable boundaries—and therefore merged, differentiated, and integrated states—may be the greatest measure of a boundary's optimal functionality or health.

Third, another notable inquiry outcome of particular interest to transpersonal studies was the phenomenon of shared emergent experience between practitioners, suggesting the existence of an intersubjective, transpersonal morphic field (Ferrer & Sohmer, 2017). The findings of this and other ESI studies (e.g., Osterhold et al., 2007) raise fertile questions regarding the ontology of the shared experience reported by meditation partners. Ferrer and Sohmer (2017) asked in reflection, "Is this intersubjective field generated through the interaction of two or more individual subjectivities (e.g., Gillespie & Cornish, 2010; Mead, 1934/2015) or does it have a pre-existing ontological nature out of which those individual subjectivities emerge (e.g., Buber, 1970; de Quincey, 2000, 2010; Sarath, 2013)?" (pp. 28–29) and offered a "conciliatory, 'both/and' response" (p. 29). This conciliatory perspective suggests that whereas broader fields of consciousness may be foundational to participatory individual subjectivities, the specific features of any intersubjective field may be largely enacted by the particular, conscious and unconscious dispositions (e.g., vital energies, emotions, intentions) of the interactive players. Future investigations using ESI or other multidimensional and transpersonal research methodologies could provide rich insight into the nature of transpersonal morphic resonance.

In closing, it should be noted that the experiential outcomes gathered during this inquiry pave the way for future comparison with existing psychospiritual theory regarding interpersonal and intrapersonal boundaries. While this comparison lies beyond the scope of the present analysis—which is

focused on elucidating the rich experiential terrain of an ESI—it demarcates an important area for further exploration through theoretical elaboration and subsequent inquiries. Building on a growing body of experiential evidence and reflective articulation (e.g., Ferrer & Sohmer, 2017; Ferrer et al., 2005; Osterhold et al., 2007), however, this study affirms the potency and fruitfulness of intentionally incorporating multiple human dimensions in integral education and transpersonal inquiry. As demonstrated in the discussion of inquiry outcomes, cultivating the diverse intelligences of the body, vital center, and heart in addition to the mind not only brings forth rich insights regarding the inquiry domain, but also yields transformative benefits for participants. We offer this example of ESI to promote more holistic approaches to integral education and transpersonal research that can contribute novel perspectives on human experience while simultaneously fostering the growth of learner-researchers and the communities in which they are a part.

#### Notes

1. The fields of integral education (e.g., Esbjorn-Hargens et al., 2010) and transpersonal education (e.g., Rowe & Braud, 2013) are at once interrelated and distinct. Both emphasize a holistic pedagogy including intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal dimensions and transformation of learners. ESI can be considered an integral or transpersonal approach depending on inquiry emphasis; the approach is also relevant to the related fields of holistic (Miller, 1991; Miller et al., 2005), transformative (Mezirow, 1991; O’Sullivan, 1999; Taylor & Cranton, 2012), and contemplative education (Barbezat & Bush, 2014; Owen-Smith, 2017; Simmer-Brown, & Grace, 2011). Based on the affinity of ESI with all of these progressive education fields, this article uses the terms *integral* and *transpersonal* education interchangeably, also referring to the transformative and contemplative aspects of ESI when relevant.
2. *Cognicentrism* is a term used by Ferrer et al. (2005) and Ferrer and Sherman (2008b) to refer to “the privileged position of the rational-analytical mind (and its associated instrumental reason

and Aristotelian logic) in the modern Western world over other ways of knowing, for example, somatic, vital, emotional, aesthetic, imaginal, visionary, intuitive, and contemplative” (Ferrer et al., 2005, pp. 326–327). The term neither connotes that the other human dimensions are not “cognitive” (i.e., not being able to apprehend knowledge or creatively participate in its elaboration) nor reduces the mind’s powers to rational-analytical ones.

3. ESI was significantly informed by the method and ethos of cooperative inquiry (Heron, 1996, 1998; Heron & Reason, 1997). ESI was initially created with the intention to approximate the *partial form* of cooperative inquiry, in which the facilitator/initiating researcher remains outside of the inquiry process as a guide rather than a full researcher-subject like the other group members (Heron, 1996). However, in conversation with Heron (personal communication, May 2, 2017) the authors have clarified that ESI—in its present form—differs from the methodology of  $\text{€}$  cooperative inquiry in three significant ways. First, Heron emphasized that the *partial form* of cooperative inquiry is only valid insofar as the facilitator is an outsider to the inquiry culture (e.g., a facilitator who enters into a professional group to which s/he/they do not belong to impart the method), while all other cases necessitate the *full involvement* of all inquirers as co-researchers and co-subjects. Because an educator is arguably within the inquiry culture of the classroom, an ESI facilitator would need to join fully into the inquiry process to actualize the cooperative inquiry method. Second, because of the academic time constraints of this ESI (i.e., one academic semester), our group completed only two cycles of inquiry in contrast to Heron’s (1996) recommendation of five to eight cycles. Finally, Heron outlined validity procedures that span beyond the scope of this ESI, including managing research countertransference, challenging uncritical subjectivity, and monitoring of authentic collaboration. While future ESIs could be possibly offered following cooperative inquiry guidelines if appropriate, at this time ESI is better understood more broadly as a

participatory learning and research approach. At the same time, the authors want to credit Heron's cooperative inquiry as a major source of inspiration underlying the methodology of ESI as described in this study and elsewhere (Ferrer & Sohmer, 2017; Osterhold et al., 2007).

4. It is important to note that, in exploring the boundary experience as a process, we are not suggesting that there is a fixed culmination to this process that holds true across all circumstances. Certainly, different boundary qualities are optimal for different types of relationship, social contexts, and so forth. Hence, variations on the boundary process are both inevitable and appropriate. This discussion focuses on the most common experiences of the boundary space in the context of this ESI, thereby giving prominence to one particular articulation of the boundary process, which may translate to other circumstances, but by no means is representative of all. In the case of our inquiry, this understanding of the boundary process encompasses the various expressions of boundaries that are too firm contributing to experiences of dissociation, boundaries that are both adequately firm and permeable leading to experiences of integration as well as boundaries that are so permeable that the experience of merging occurs.
5. While this discussion focuses on conscious agency in forming optimal boundaries, it seems obvious that boundaries are continuously modulated both spontaneously and unconsciously. Thus, we do not think that inter/intrapersonal boundaries can or should be always consciously controlled—actually, such an attitude would reinforce the cognicentrism that participatory approaches such as ESI seek to question and counter (Ferrer, 2017; Ferrer et al., 2005; Ferrer & Sherman, 2008b).
6. The container and procedure of the inquiry approach limits this boundary exploration. It is likely that the novelty of the IEMs, coupled with the relative safety afforded through the structure of the inquiry process, swayed the co-researchers' experiences towards this particular experience of the boundary process. In contrast, a longer inquiry process or alternative setting may lead to different results.
7. Although we honor the ability of the body, vital, and heart centers to communicate and express themselves autonomously, we also believe that in the context of our inquiry it is appropriate to frame the mind's role as mediator. Because the fruits of our inquiry were mostly shared through presentational and propositional expressions, mental faculties (e.g., conceptual, symbolic, imaginal) were intentionally drawn out and emphasized. Other inquiry contexts could yield alternative understandings about the expressive capacity of nonmental dimensions.
8. While these inquiry finding regarding inner authority arose spontaneously through this ESI process, Heron's (1998) discussion "internal spiritual authority" (pp. 50–62) may be relevant for further development of this theme in reflection or future inquiry.

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