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Jenny Wade: Building the Next Generation of Scholars in Transpersonal Psychology


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Jenny Wade: Building the Next Generation of Scholars in Transpersonal Psychology

Editors' Recognition

It can be said that one of the most effective ways to measure the success of a scholar is by the number of students who follow in their footsteps. This generativity is an arena in which Jenny Wade has excelled, having chaired 54 dissertations on transpersonal topics, and currently serving in that role for an additional 13 students. Wade's doctoral students' rate of publishing dissertation-related papers and chapters is impressive, especially in transpersonal-oriented doctoral programs: So far, 16 of her students have published peer-reviewed papers based on their dissertations and three more are close to publication (e.g., Addy et al., 2015; Albert, 2017; Bintari, 2015; Brito-Pons, 2018; Bronte & Wade, 2012; Brook, 2019; Brooks, 2019; Farizo, 2022; Kolesar & Pardo, 2019; Lum & Wade, 2016; Mascaro, 2016; Merlin, 2020a; Root, 2015; Sehrbrock, 2007a; Sell, 2005; Sundberg, 2019). These impressive results mirror her reputation as a tough but fair professor who demands high quality, yet goes above and beyond to meet the efforts of students who put in the needed effort to publish their work.

Wade's own scholarship is also noteworthy, reflected in three books and dozens of papers in juried journals—works that have garnered many hundreds of scholarly citations. She is particularly known for her research on sex-related transcendent (e.g., Wade, 2021b, 2013, 2004b, 2003a, 2001a, 2001b, 2000, 1998a) and near-death experiences

(e.g., Wade, 2004a, 2003b, 1998c), but her eclectic interests include battle trance (Wade, 2021a, 2016), castration cults (2019), and even nonduality (2018). This issue presents two of her most recent papers focused on reports of pre-natal memories (Wade, 2022a, 2022b, 1998b, 1998d). Her current research includes an examination of astronomical influences in ancient semitic and Indo-European pagan religions.

Wade's important work in the transpersonal field grew out of her early life experiences. She was raised in a military family that moved often, so she experienced a mix of both diverse and homogeneous cultures, including fundamentalist, conservative, and very liberal spiritual communities. She entered adulthood just as the Women's Liberation movement was transforming the vision of what was possible for women, embracing the opportunity to advance rapidly in market communications in a variety of heavy industries. The communications work came easily, even without formal training, but by her early 30s she hit an existential crisis: she was successful, especially for a woman working in what were then traditional male industries, but her work held no personal meaning, as she felt as if she was leading a life without real purpose.

What she did take from her early career was puzzlement at why so much conflict emerged in the workplace, even when everyone was trying to solve the same problems, and why so many

of her former colleagues spent their daily lives in dysfunctional organizations that suppressed their talents and oppressed their spirits. Wade enrolled in a graduate program in human and organizational development at Fielding University (formerly The Fielding Institute), hoping to build on her prior career experience in organizational work, but she found herself consistently drawn to the human development side. She worked as an organizational development and leadership coach and consultant to pay the bills, but her dissertation reflected her deeper interest in developmental theory, including a transpersonal perspective.

She found herself frustrated by the current literature on cognitive development, ego development, and moral development because it seemed to only partially address questions she really wanted to explore. These included: How could it be that people spoke such entirely different “languages” aimed toward different priorities?; and, Why was it that people seemed to live in completely different realities that worked in different ways? She realized that looking at “reality” also involved looking at consciousness, including what someone was aware of, what they could perceive, and out of that perceptual field, what they paid attention to and valued.

Wade engaged this topic deeply in her dissertation, and in doing so built the framework for her own developmental theory of the personal evolution of consciousness from initial instances of reported biographical awareness—as early as the moment of conception—to the final ones in a lifespan, which are often similar to near-death experiences and may be transpersonal. Michael Washburn, a well known transpersonal theorist, was a member of Wade’s dissertation committee and, while he held a quite different view of transpersonal development from Wade’s, he nonetheless put her completed dissertation forward for publication by the State University of New York Press—where it was published as *Changes of Mind: A Holonomic Theory of the Evolution of Consciousness* (Wade, 1996).

A move from East to West Coast in 1999, along with conference presentations and scholarly networking, brought Wade in touch with faculty

at Sofia University (formerly the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology) in Palo Alto, California. After substitute teaching for Charles Tart during his sabbatical from Sofia, she joined its faculty, teaching a variety of courses while still maintaining her employment as an organizational and leadership development consultant. The skillsets for her two diverse vocations began intersecting in a variety of ways.

As a consultant, she taught herself qualitative research, which she used extensively for large-scale organizational assessments and for assessing leaders at both the team and individual levels. Through this applied research, she produced organizational re-designs in the form of new business and process models, produced more than 70 proprietary leadership-assessment tools and over 50 customized assessments of team and organizational functioning, and from this developed a number of validated quantitative instruments, surveys, and proprietary competency models—in addition to implementing standard 360-degree assessments customarily employed in this area. Wade applied her theory of the development of consciousness in her consulting work, and her clients included a number of educational institutions (e.g., the University of Massachusetts Medical School, the University of Notre Dame’s Leadership Master’s Program, and Johnson & Wales University), along with several library systems.

As a faculty member at Sofia University, Wade taught developmental psychology, qualitative research methods, and spirituality in business. While she was at Sofia, she also began research on altered states triggered by sex, which resulted in several journal articles, numerous academic and popular media and conference appearances, and a book, *Transcendent Sex: When Lovemaking Opens the Veil* (Wade, 2004). Most recently she served as a founding faculty member at the California Institute of Integral Studies Integral and Transpersonal Psychology doctoral program, teaching critical thinking and writing, developmental theory, qualitative methods, and transpersonal leadership.

Internationally, Wade was commissioned to design a transpersonal leadership program by His Serene Highness Prince Alfred of Liechtenstein and

his World Peace Foundation, whose members include all the living Nobel Peace Prize winners. She was also selected to serve as a research evaluator for the UNICEF project *What Makes Me? Core Capacities for Living and Learning* co-funded by The Learning for Well-being Foundation and the Fetzer Institute.

Wade serves an important role for the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, where she is now a Research Editor who supports the quality and productivity of the journal. She also serves as a reviewer on the editorial boards of *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* and the *Journal of Near Death Studies*. Along with the late Frances Vaughn, she is a founding member of the Board of Trustees of The Millenium School, a San Francisco-based experimental middle school whose curriculum and instructional design are based on Wade's transpersonal developmental theory.

Jenny Wade has made many important contributions to the area of transpersonal studies, and continues to have an important impact both through her own scholarship and the generativity of her many students.

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About the Journal

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