

REPORT ON THE TRANSPERSONAL RESEARCH COLLOQUIA OF 2016 AND 2017

Rosemarie Anderson, Ph.D.
Williams, Oregon

ABSTRACT: This article provides a brief report on the Second Transpersonal Research Colloquium held in the United Kingdom in 2016 and the Third Transpersonal Research Colloquium held in the Czech Republic in 2017. Types of research methods presented to support the study of transpersonal and spiritual phenomena and several examples of presentations are given for both colloquia. The article concludes with a brief discussion on the successes and challenges of developing a collaborative, interactive transpersonal research community through these events.

KEYWORDS: Transpersonal research, transpersonal research methods, transformation, collaboration, worldwide community

This article reports on the Second Transpersonal Research Colloquium (TRC) held in Northampton, UK, near London, on September 15-16, 2006 and the Third TRC held in Prague, Czech Republic on October 2-3, 2017. In Anderson (2016), I reported on the First TRC 2015 held near Milan, Italy.

The mission of the colloquia is to engage researchers worldwide in dialogue related to research methods and procedures that further the study of transpersonal and spiritual phenomena and to build community among presenters that supports transpersonal research worldwide. The colloquia of 2016 and 2017 were co-sponsored by the Division of Transpersonal Research within the European Transpersonal Association (EUROTAS, (www.eurotas.org), the Integral Transpersonal Institute (www.integraltranspersonal.com), and the Sacred Science Circle (www.sacredsciencecircle.org) and organized and facilitated by Rosemarie Anderson (USA), Giovanna Calabrese (Italy), Regina U. Hess (Germany), Les Lancaster (UK), and Pier Luigi Lattuada (Italy). As the TRC organizing team, we have chosen to use the word “colloquium,” meaning dialogue in Latin, to emphasize mutuality and community. To date, the colloquia have been open only to presenters and provide a collaborative format intended to invite dialogue and provide opportunities for networking and collaboration. We have not followed the usual conference format of a series of monologue presentations to a silent audience. Each year, between 27 to 35 researchers have gathered largely from Europe, North America, and South Africa.

Transpersonal Research Colloquium (TRC) 2016

The theme for the Second TRC 2016 was *Research Methods and Models for Transpersonal Research*. This theme attracted presenters representing a wide variety

rosemarie.anderson@sofia.edu

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of research methods, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. The large number of presenters from the United Kingdom, which has a long tradition of qualitative research, no doubt contributed to number of presentations using qualitative and mixed-methods approaches to the study of transpersonal phenomena. A complete list of presenters' names and abstracts may be found on the Transpersonal Research Network website, www.transpersonalresearchnetwork.com/trc/. Choosing presentations that I felt offered innovative approaches or applications of established procedures in the study of transpersonal phenomena, some examples follow:

- Nigel Hamilton (UK) reported on a *mixed-methods* study, investigating whether dreams can be used effectively to monitor psychospiritual transformation. The quantitative part of the design evaluated the amount of light and color in the dreams. Thereafter, these findings were compared with a thematic content analysis of the qualitative changes in dream content over time as a reflection of the dreamer's ongoing transformation. Similarly, Marlene Botha (UK) reported on a qualitative study of the transformative effect of working with dream colours in transpersonal psychotherapy. She combined the strengths of *intuitive inquiry* and *narrative inquiry* in her data collection and analysis.
- Fulvio D'Acquisto (UK) used a *mixed-methods* approach combining *interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)* and *focus group methods* in a study designed to evaluate the waking dream technique, a way of revisiting a dream in a waking state. Since individuals suffering from autoimmune diseases anecdotally report vivid dreams during the course of their illness, the waking dream technique is intended to support patients suffering from these diseases.
- In a joint presentation, Anne Cazemajou (France) and Magali Ollagnier-Beldame (France) reported their use of *micro-phenomenology* (AKA "explicitation" method) in a study of first encounters between patients and therapists. Micro-phenomenology combines interview techniques intended to evoke deep introspective descriptions of lived experience and a phenomenological analysis of the micro-dynamic dimensions of the experiences reported from the inside.
- Deborah Kelly (UK) employed *intuitive inquiry* in a study of therapeutic space for the dying, which drew on the Asclepian healing practices of ancient Greece in which nature, ritual, and dream incubation were an integral part of the healing process. In addition, in data collection and analysis, she employed an embodied, performative form of Memory Theatre (Angelo, 2013), which added richness to the study's findings especially as related to the embodied nature of therapeutic space in nature.
- Pier Luigi Lattuada (Italy) reported on Second Attention Epistemology. Second Attention Epistemology collects and analyses data using explicit external data, internal data known only to the individual, changing states of consciousness, and the "field" of consciousness that surrounds. Mindful attention is given to the ways these four modes interrelate.

Transpersonal Research Colloquium (TRC) 2017

The theme for the Third TRC 2016 was *Spiritual Practices as Research Methods: Integrating the Old and New*. This theme attracted presenters who tended to support

the transformative research paradigm, proposed originally by myself and the late William Braud (Braud & Anderson, 1998; Anderson & Braud (2011). Regrettably, this theme may have discouraged presenters who use more mainstream approaches to transpersonal research. Few quantitative researchers were present compared to the two earlier colloquia. Nonetheless, the research methods presented were diverse, generated discussion on the value of esoteric traditions to transpersonal research, and had a level of personal depth and disclosure, which was appreciated by those present. The program schedule itself contained four sets of methodological presentations, namely *Epistemological Challenges in Transpersonal Research*; *Embodied Inquiry and Embodying the Sacred*; *Art-based, Intuitive, and Narrative Methods*; and *Esoteric Wisdom Tradition Contributions to Transpersonal Research*. These were followed by open-group discussions with minimal moderation. A complete list of presenters' names and abstracts can be found on the Transpersonal Research Network website, www.transpersonalresearchnetwork.com/trc/. Choosing presentations that I felt offered innovative approaches or applications of established procedures in the study of transpersonal phenomena, some examples follow:

- Marleen de Villiers (South Africa) and Jacqui Linder (Canada) reported on a study that integrated *art-based* and *narrative* approaches in a study of healing from personal trauma. Marleen de Villiers created a mandala for co-researcher Jacqui Linder and recorded her own healing from trauma in the making of the mandala. In turn, Jacqui Linder interacted with the mandala through ritual and recorded her own transformation from trauma. Their presentation underscored the value of the co-researchers' shared meaning making and the ethical demand for self-reflection required by both them in the course of the study.
- Jorge Ferrer (USA) presented the theoretical foundations of a method he developed called *embodied spiritual inquiry* (ESI) in which co-inquirers actively engage contemplation through mindful physical contact with other co-inquirers in order to access multiple ways of knowing and explore a chosen topic of inquiry together. ESI incorporates many of Albareda and Romero's interactive embodied meditations (described in Ferrer, 2003; Ferrer, 2017). In turn, Olga Sohmer (USA) presented a case example of using ESI in a study conducted during a graduate course at the California Institute of Integral Studies. As the co-created inquiry unfolded, the study contained the following phases: initiating the inquiry, building community, choosing a topic of inquiry, collecting and analyzing data, and reporting findings (Ferrer & Sohmer, 2017).
- Dwight Turner (UK) reported on a *phenomenological* study of the experience of being seen as other. Following in-depth interviews about the experience of being stereotyped and othered, participants were asked to locate the experience of being other in their body and visualize an image which represents that felt experience. Participants then drew the image. Photographed images were analyzed side by side with the interview data. Findings suggest that participants unconsciously destroy aspects of themselves that made them feel other in order to fit with the majority.
- Jessica Bockler (UK) reported on her involvement and study of assisting adults with depression, stress, and anxiety via involvement in ritual and performative arts. This government-funded program offered participants

opportunities for creative expression in these arts and provided Bockler an opportunity to conduct in-practice research on the efficacy of *ritual and performative arts as research*.

- Hennie Geldenhuys (South Africa) opened discussion on the unique ethical challenges inherent to transpersonal research. Since transpersonal researchers often ask participants to engage at a deep and existential level, the traditional boundaries between research and therapy may blur. Participants may be impacted in unpredictable ways. Are transpersonal researchers prepared for these complexities? Do transpersonal research proposals sufficiently address the risks and challenges of transpersonal research? Do research ethics committees have the needed experience required to evaluate these proposals?

Concluding Reflections

As one member of the TRC organizing team, this final section briefly relays some of my own impressions about the successes and challenges of the Transpersonal Research Colloquia of 2015, 2016, and 2017. Others may disagree.

From the start, the organizing team was well aware that we had to build momentum and encourage continuity of presenters from year to year. To date, the colloquia have been successful in building community at the events, via email connections between us between colloquia, the quality of the presentations overall, and because a core group of presenters returns each year. Fortunately, the well-established transpersonal associations in Europe and North America have posted the TRC announcements and Call for Papers on their online newsletters each year. Together with the organizing team's private email lists, the Call for Papers were distributed each year to over 12,000 individuals interested in transpersonal psychology worldwide. At this point, the TRC organizers feel secure that the colloquia will continue to attract high-quality presentations and be sustainable over time. However, we did receive feedback that attending every year was too great a demand on the presenters' professional life and travel schedules. Organizing an event every year was also taxing on the organizers. Therefore, the TRC team cheerfully changed the scheduling of the colloquia from annual to biennial. Our next TRC will be in September 2019 in Paris, following the European Transpersonal Association (EUROTAS) conference there. Watch the Transpersonal Research Network website, www.transpersonalresearchnetwork.com, for announcements and the Call for Papers.

Across the three colloquia, the range of research methods presented has been extremely diverse, including action research, art-based inquiry, assessment evaluation research, autoethnography, case study, experimental research, heuristic research, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), intuitive inquiry, micro-phenomenology, mixed methods, narrative approaches, participatory inquiry, and applications from astrological principles, Zen Buddhist practice, Confucian principles, and Kabbalist hermeneutics. The range of diverse methods used by transpersonal research signals healthy development and application of research methods in transpersonal psychology and aligns well with the surge of interest in methodology and epistemology throughout the human sciences in the last 20 years. There seems to be no end to creative research methods now emerging in

quantitative, qualitative, art-based approaches, and embodied forms of inquiry. While some will find this confusing or daunting, I see these trends as healthy and necessary to meet the challenges to life on planet earth for the 21st Century and forward. Now, is the time to be creative rather than generate more do's and don'ts about what represents proper research methods. In particular, for me, the simultaneity of phenomena and events is becoming more and more apparent as personal and world events unfold. Clearly, many of the methodological restrictions and cause-and-effect epistemologies of conventional science will not meet the challenges that the simultaneity of phenomena and events present to us as a species. Among other things, we as thinkers and researchers need new and creative ways to language research methods and scholarship and human knowing in general. In so doing, we will change the paradigm of what constitutes research and scholarship to more dynamic forms of engagement and participation. The colloquia represent only one thread in this unfolding—yet one that pleases me enormously.

The format of the colloquia has and will continue to evolve rather like research in action. For example, in TRC 2017, we experimented with dedicated time for large-group, open discussions following the four sets of methodological presentation depicted above. The exchanges created a convivial atmosphere and supported community building among us. However, I felt that the discussions were scattered and did not move toward new insights or integrations. If the colloquia are to be successful over time in supporting discussions, which build toward epistemological depth and methodological connections among the various methods presented and used in transpersonal research, the TRC organizers and presenters need to find ways to strengthen and deepen these conversations. In one effort to move the conversations forward, the TRC organizing team has launched an online platform of working task groups open to all presenters across the three years. I am hopeful that the enthusiasm among presenters for this initiative will lead to meaningful conversations about transpersonal research methods and transpersonal epistemologies congruent with exploring “the farther reaches of human nature” as Abraham Maslow (1971) put it so well.

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The Author

Rosemarie Anderson, Ph.D., is Professor Emerita, Sofia University, a research consultant, and international speaker. She co-authored *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences: Honoring Human Experience* (SAGE, 1998) and *Transforming Self and Others Through Research: Transpersonal Research Methods and Skills for the Human Sciences and Humanities* (SUNY Press, 2011) with the late William Braud. She is also author of *Celtic Oracles* (Random House, 1998) and co-author with Frederick Wertz, Kathy Charmaz, Lindy McMullen, Ruthellen Josselson, and Emalinda McSpadden of *Five Ways of Doing Qualitative Analysis: Phenomenological Psychology, Grounded Theory, Discourse Analysis, Narrative Research, and Intuitive Inquiry* (Guilford Press, 2011). At the American Psychological Convention in Washington D.C. in 2017, Anderson was awarded the Abraham Maslow Heritage Award by Division 32, The Society for Humanistic Psychology. Her videos and publications are available on her YouTube channel, www.youtube.com/c/RosemarieandersonVideo, academic.edu page, sofia.academia.edu/RosemarieAnderson, and on the Sacred Science Circle e-archive, www.sacredsciencecircle.org/e-archive/.