

# Transpersonal Research From a Global Perspective

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## *Transpersonal Vision for Research*

We propose a transpersonal vision for research in ITP that (a) honors the world's wisdom psychologies, (b) invites all these psychologies to help us "reinvent" ourselves as a global community, (c) affirms our interdependence on one another and the natural world, (d) furthers the well-being of the natural world, and (e) encourages all people to become perfectly themselves in their own time and place. This transpersonal vision for research includes but expands upon current definitions of transpersonal psychology, which emphasize personal growth and transformation, to community and global transformation that takes place in both individuals and collectives.

We hope to expand upon current definitions of the field of transpersonal psychology to include the many ways that human experience supports *end goals*, such as health and well-being, peace and harmony, compassion and kindness, and integrity and truthfulness, through the study of and application of transpersonal principles derived from research findings. This transpersonal vision for research emphasizes a language of mutuality that incorporates within itself a language of self and other, a language of "we" that includes "me" and "you." We are already present in the needs others present.

Such a view is encapsulated in the African philosophy and way of life known as *Ubuntu*. The essence of this tradition is conveyed in the expression, "I am because we are; we are because I am." In ITP's Global Program, we have attempted to incorporate such end goals pedagogically and strategically in the Global Program's Seven Principles and Implementations. (See attached.)

To support this vision, we propose emphasizing research methods and topics that can contribute to an appreciation and understanding of our interdependence on one another and on the natural world, and also contribute to the greater well-being of the natural world (including humanity). Therefore, as complementary to more conventional approaches to research, transpersonal research incorporates one or more of the following means and topics:

1. Nonverbal (art, image, symbol, movement) and story-telling approaches
2. Inclusive and multicultural research approaches and ways of knowing
3. The study and application of local, indigenous, and spiritual wisdoms and experiences that serve positive end goals
4. Re-conceptualization of ordinary, neglected, anomalous, or pathologized experiences in transpersonal terms

### *The Intersections of Passions and Needs*

Frederick Buechner (1973) has called attention to “the place where [one’s] deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet” (p. 95). The most satisfying research projects, for both the researcher and the world at large, would seem to be topics where these two aspects—the researcher’s greatest passions (deep gladness) and the world’s greatest needs (deep hunger)—intersect.

For help in identifying some of the world’s greatest needs or deepest hungers, a researcher hoping for greater global impacts or implications for his or her work could consider the following brief listings of some of the most important world needs and of factors that could promote either their satisfaction or their frustration.

Important *world needs (deep hungers)* include adequate satisfaction of basic human needs; adequate standards of living; values and motivations that prevent or minimize conflict; effective means of resolving conflicts that do occur; peace; sustainability of the natural environment; and values and conditions that allow life to have meaning, importance, and significance. Stated somewhat differently, important world needs (deep hungers) include health, security, peace, love, clarity, compassion, wisdom, and joy.

Factors contributing to unhealthy and unsustainable world conditions include arrogance and hubris; greed and selfishness, intolerance of others (and their ways and values); fear; overly materialistic values; unequal distribution of wealth, goods, necessities; proclivities toward violence; cruelty; war-mongering; and dishonesty

Factors contributing to healthy and sustainable world conditions include humility; sharing and generosity; tolerance of others (and their ways and values) and appreciation of differences; fairness (honest, just, and equitable treatment of others); compassion and caring; respect for human and animal life and for the environment; honesty, authenticity, and truth-telling (full, accurate, uncensored, undistorted information); and thoughtfulness, discernment, and critical thinking.

From a global perspective, important research projects would be those that might increase our understanding of the nature of factors that can contribute to a healthy and sustainable world, identify and promote processes (both individual and societal, local and nonlocal) that can best satisfy the world’s greatest needs, and that can help reduce tendencies that act as barriers to the satisfaction of these needs.

The above considerations could be included in a research design that also can serve to address the researcher’s most burning questions relating to his or her passionate interests and “deep gladness.”

### *Enlarging Our View of Research*

This transpersonal vision for research recognizes the mutual, reciprocal interaction of individual and collective. Evidence and theory from areas as diverse as esoteric wisdom traditions, quantum physics, and parapsychology suggest that a view of individuals as separate and isolated from

each other is incorrect and misleading. Instead, the actual world appears to have features of deep interconnectedness and non-locality. What we know and how we act are not separate from what the collective knows and how it acts. What one learns about one can be applied to the other; what benefits one, benefits the other. Indeed, “other,” here, is simply a figure of speech. With this in mind, one does not really leave the study of the global community when one studies individual inner experience, and the latter can be useful, especially if motivated by a concern for its relevance to the collective, and to end goals and values. This view is consistent with the recognition that there are “[those] who have given their life in service to humanity by discovering that global consciousness comes from the exploration of the inner self” (Targ & Hurtak, 2006, p. xxiv).

In addition to enlarging one’s view of research to honor both individual and global aspects, one also might bear in mind the suggestions of Ernest Boyer. Boyer (1990) has suggested a view of scholarship that includes four domains or dimensions. He identified and described the four scholarships of *discovery* (conducting, and leading students in, original empirical research; an emphasis on new findings), *integration* (theoretical and interdisciplinary work; emphasis on new conceptualizations and understandings; writing), *teaching* (dissemination of knowledge, in all of its forms—teaching, mentoring, modeling, being [embodiment and intention] ), and *application* (offering professional services to others; community-based practices; addressing groups and one-on-one). These four modes also can be used to characterize *different forms of research* and *different ways of advancing the field* of transpersonal psychology.

Usually, written communications to professional audiences are privileged in “advancing the field.” In transpersonal psychology, this usual means can be expanded in two ways: (a) via written communications to both professions *and to the general public* (via semi-popular and popular books and articles), and (b) by *additional means* of expressing, communicating, and presenting one’s work and findings to both professionals and the general public (such as exhibits, public lectures, workshop presentations, media presentations, and so on).

### *Relevant Readings*

- Ashforth, B. E., & Pratt, M. G. (2003). Institutionalized spirituality: An oxymoron? In R. A. Giacalone & C. L. Jurkiewicz (Eds.), *Handbook of workplace spirituality and organizational performance* (pp. 93-107). Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.
- Beuchner, F. (1973). *Wishful thinking: A theological ABC*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Louw, D. J. (n.d.). *Ubuntu: An African assessment of the religious other*. Retrieved April 28, 2006, from <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Afri/AfriLouw.htm>
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- Maxwell, N. (1992). What kind of inquiry can best help us create a good world? *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 17(2), 205-227.
- Targ, R., & Hurtak, J. J. (2006). *The end of suffering*. Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads.

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Note: The authors will publish these ideas at their earliest convenience. If these ideas are adopted, rephrased, or quoted, Rosemarie Anderson and William Braud should be acknowledged as the authors. Both are currently Core Faculty in the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology's Global Ph.D. Program, Palo Alto, CA 94303.