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**Book Reviews**

*Waking from sleep: Why awakening experiences occur and how to make them permanent.* Steve Taylor  
*The living classroom: Teaching and collective consciousness.* Christopher M. Bache  

**Books Our Editors Are Reading**
EDITOR’S NOTE

Welcome to our 45th year of publication for the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology. Returning to our roots, Miles Vich, former long-time editor of the Journal, opens this issue with a gracious and tender remembrance of Sonja Margulies who, among her many attributes, was a vital contributor to the launching and life of this Journal. He illuminates her soul-filled presence and unassuming demeanor not just in words, but also in an image (photo) captured immediately after her ordination.

Resonating with the significance of embracing means of communication beyond words even in the research process is John Osborne who, in the concluding article for this volume, tackles the long standing issue of researching transcendence and the associated inadequacy of language. He complements the accumulated wisdom as viewed from Buddhist practice with the writings of Wittgenstein in considering the methodological challenges as well as possibilities for the researcher.

Recognizing, moreover, how language (and the “conceptual self”) can distort experience, Steve Pashko, engages us in a discussion relevant to how shifts in self-identity from conceptual (thinking, rationale, egoic self) to the experiencing non-conceptual self (what he terms two self-identities) may be able to shed light on the placebo effect and response shift. He proposes, in addition, research strategies to test his hypothesis, furthermore suggesting that the shifting experience may explain other phenomena, as well, and has the potential to harmonize eastern and western perspectives.

Since inception, the Journal and the transpersonal movement have embraced inquiry relevant to all aspects of our consciousness and, aptly, all articles in this volume address various such nuances.

Mitchell Liester, embracing another novel perspective, demonstrates that a similar phenomenological space may be experienced by near death experiences (NDEs) and ayahuasca ingestion on perceptual, emotional, cognitive, and transcendental levels. He reasons that since NDEs cannot be experimentally induced, ayahuasca has the potential to offer a tool for further researching NDEs. Offering compelling directions and specific suggestions for future research, both quantitative and qualitative, he suggests that such inquiry might also have the potential to clarify underpinnings of other transcendent states of consciousness.

Guiding us into the psychotherapeutic realm, Irene Siegel reports on an attainable level of transpersonal interconnected consciousness between therapist and client that she terms spiritual resonance, one in which she explains the “observing” and “experiencing” selves align. Her research gives voice to selected exemplary therapists with regard to their experiences of shifts.

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in shared energy fields with their clients that lead to transformations of a subtle or dramatic nature that become permanent over time. By letting the therapists’ voices speak the reader is invited into a deeper understanding. She encourages further research along with potential training of interested therapists.

As always, we encourage communication with the authors. In addition to our articles, we continue to offer our time-honored Books Our Editors are Reading section and an array of Book Reviews. Consistent with understanding our consciousness, Susie Herrick reviews Steve Taylors’s book entitled *Waking from sleep: Why awakening experiences occur and how to make them permanent*, while Jenny Wade offers a review of John Amoroso’s *Awakening past lives: A step-by-step guide to self-exploration*. Bringing our focus to the dynamics of shared energy in a classroom, is Christopher Bache’s book, entitled *The living classroom: Teaching and collective consciousness*, which is reviewed by Christine Brooks.

Again, welcome to our 45th year of publication.

MB

Falls Church, VA USA
This *Journal*, from its beginnings in the late 1960’s to today, has attracted remarkable authors, editors and supporters. Perhaps one of its least known, and yet most influential editors was Sonja K. Margulies who died peacefully, at home, April 27, 2013 at age 82.

It was my good fortune, as one of the editors present at the first publication of the *Journal* in 1969, to help welcome Sonja to our efforts. Over the next 43 years...
working together as editors and as colleagues in various projects and events we
developed a highly productive professional relationship. As a personal friend I
was also privileged to follow her evolution as a spiritual teacher, a scholar,
a survivor, and as a poet. This narrative, however, can be only a partial
recounting of her contributions, primarily because Sonja chose the path of ‘the
non-visible’, one whose work is not identified with a public persona. As a
consequence some of what follows is known only among a circle of friends,
colleagues and her family; some of it exists in the field’s literature and related
media, and some is from my own experience and records\footnote{1}.

In 1969 Sonja attended a Stanford University workshop led by James
Fadiman, also a staff editor for \textit{JTP}, who recognized her intellectual and
organizational talents. He suggested she contact the \textit{Journal} Editor, Anthony
(‘Tony’) Sutich in Palo Alto, and volunteer for editorial work.

Tony Sutich, who had a very remarkable life (Sutich, 1976a; 1976b; Vich, 1976),
was totally disabled as a teenager and lived his entire adult life on a gurney in his
home. Largely self-educated, yet politically and culturally sophisticated, he was
bursting with ideas and projects. In the face of enormous physical and financial
limitations he had managed to become a licensed psychologist with a full
practice, and had ambitious plans for the larger field of psychology.

Sonja met him and they formed an immediate collegial bond. Tony, Sonja, and
the small working editorial group prepared and published with little or no
funding, the first issue of \textit{JTP} in 1969, thereby launching the field of
transpersonal psychology.

Sonja’s organizational skills were brought to light when she drafted the
group’s first Articles of Incorporation, and helped structure its new governing
board, to which she was elected. Simultaneously, and within a year, her
background (B.A. History) and deepening grasp of religious, philosophical
and historical issues led to intensive daily work sessions with Tony and other
editors. She reviewed and edited nearly every paper published in \textit{JTP} from
1969 to 1975. These were the foundation years when it was necessary for
Tony, Sonja and the editors in general to steer the field toward high
professional and intellectual standards. This character of the early \textit{Journal}
attracted many new authors such as Daniel Goleman, Ken Wilber, Frances
Vaughan, Stanslav Grof, and others who later made major contributions to
psychology.

In her first year at the \textit{Journal} Sonja also began exploring contemporary
spiritual paths. The practices and writings of Zen Buddhism intrigued her most,
and she entered rigorous practice and study with the Japanese-trained Zen
teacher, Kobun Chino, Sensei, at the nearby Los Altos Zendo. This meditative
practice and her interest in transpersonal psychology proved to be complemen-
tary. Eventually she published 20 book reviews on these topics in \textit{JTP}.

At the \textit{Journal} office in Tony’s home Sonja met many authors and teachers,
including Abraham Maslow, who along with Tony Sutich founded transpersonal
psychology as a field. “Abe” was delighted to see that Sonja understood his developing transpersonal theory, and he discovered that she met the subject criteria for his study of transcending self-actualizers (Maslow, 1969). By 1972 Sonja was serving as Co-Editor of *JTP*, was Vice-President of the new Association for Transpersonal Psychology, and President of a research project, the Transpersonal Center.

As the wife of a leading astrodynamics scientist and mother of two children in school, she still found time to continue her volunteer services to the expanding field. She served on the board of the Transpersonal Institute, the governing board of *JTP* and ATP, and was elected its President, 1977 - 79. Thereafter she continued as an active Associate Editor to *JTP* until 2000.

At the time of her ordination in 1975 in the Soto Zen Buddhist tradition Sonja elected not to teach publicly, or found a Zendo, or advance her career through a public persona. She chose, instead, the ancient way: ‘Not appearing in the world.’ To work in the world without appearing in a public role can be a compassionate and generous path.

On rare occasions, however, she was persuaded to present talks to various groups. At one graduate school she spoke about discovering that “through your teacher you discover that everything can teach you.” At a major museum’s exhibit of Zen Painting and Calligraphy she provided the historical background of Zen for a visiting private group. At a theological graduate school she co-taught a course with a Jesuit priest. She also granted a personal interview for publication in *Meetings with Remarkable Women*, (Friedman, 2000) and appeared in a documentary film about transpersonal psychology (Page, 2006).

Speaking at another Zendo in contradistinction to chanting the centuries-old exclusively male Zen Buddhist lineage she chanted the names of all the women who had taught her. About this time she was also persuaded to publish (Margulies, 1979, p. 11), on the occasion of her 47th birthday,

**Birthday Poem**

Today the patriarchs,
not taken in by
historical situations
grew breasts
gave birth
and stayed home
to celebrate –
[forty-seven years
of undivided life.]

At the *Journal* and elsewhere Sonja encouraged the growth of various authors and contributors. She was particularly supportive of women writers, professionals, and religious. With many contacts in the Zen and psychology circuits she was often known as a private advocate for equality, compassion and integrity in personal and organizational relations. Over the years a number of both men and women...

*Sonja Marguiles: Teacher, Editor, Poet* 3
regarded her as a mentor, an advisor, and a unique teacher. Her teaching emphasized the centrality of living in the present and connecting to what is natural. She valued ‘ordinariness’ and being ‘nothing special’ in her teaching and professional life, and she had a recommendation for those identified with this field.

Transpersonalists must be careful not to be categorized as people who are looking for a way to ‘transcend existence’. It is, of course, impossible to satisfactorily answer this kind of search. I think transpersonal leaders should stress the ‘natural’ not the ‘metaphysical’. You can have a body of theory, of course, (as is the custom of our time) but it should only exist to point to the natural (S. Margulies, personal communication, undated).

It is worth noting here that she is implying that ‘transpersonalists’ have some choice in how they see themselves and/or allow themselves to be seen. And her recommendation that theory should point to ‘the natural’ aligned her with the empirical emphasis of JTP (Sutich, 1969).

Sonja came to know the writings, attitudes, practices and careers of academics, clinicians, counselors, and other mental health professionals. She never regarded herself as a member of those professions although she often had much respect for them. She definitely did not see her work as psychological counseling or as therapy. She was, however, particularly concerned about disturbed individuals pursuing demanding spiritual paths and was critical and occasionally intervened when spiritual teachers or other professionals she knew abused students or clients. Almost always her response to these situations was private, rarely visible, and could be helpful or even corrective. One of her specific concerns was the pathologizing of the healthy spiritual/religious search. When she learned that work she had supported for publication in JTP (Lukoff, Zanger, & Lu, 1992; 1993; Lukoff, Lu, Turner, & Gackenbach, 1995) had led to a clarification in the diagnosis of Religious or Spiritual Problem in the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994), she told me, “This is the kind of thing I have worked for. Perhaps we have helped!”

In the 1974–1976 years Tony Sutich was transferring his editorial responsibilities to others and working intensively on his doctoral dissertation (he had previously completed only 9th grade, as a teenager). His health, amazingly robust despite his complete disability, was beginning to deteriorate due to medication side effects. In the spring of 1976 at age 69 a physician advised him that his damaged heart was failing. His dissertation had been recently completed and accepted (Sutich, 1976a), and at my request his doctoral committee met with him at his home and awarded him the doctorate in psychology in an early evening ceremony. He was pleased, happy, and grateful. We all were.

Tony passed peacefully in the middle of that night and his wife called Sonja for help. Arriving soon thereafter, Sonja, her husband, and Kobun Chino sat at Tony’s side, chanting the long Parinirvana Sutra into the night (Margulies, 2013a). Tony’s distraught wife, now calmed, asked “What was that strange long chant?” Kobun answered, “Buddha’s words to his people when he died.” “Well,” she insisted, “what did Buddha say?” And Kobun answered, “I’m going away now. Please take good care of yourself.”
In subsequent years Sonja had to meet a host of serious unexpected challenges: The death of her husband at age 50; her and her daughter’s simultaneously recurring breast cancer and her daughter’s death, as well as the passing of her parents, her sister and sister-in-law, and Kobun, the Zen teacher who transmitted her. There were other extreme events she faced successfully because she met them with an open mind, with clarity, and the precise focus developed in intensive meditative practice.

In later years Sonja also had wonderful experiences. In 2003 the marriage of her son expanded her family and this joyous occasion began a decade of ease and comfort for her. In 2007 Sonja’s many contributions to the *Journal* and this field were publically recognized when she was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in a ceremony at the graduate school, the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (now Sofia University).

In her last decade Sonja continued to follow her love of literature. She read much less psychology per se and maintained her reading of the English language versions of selected Chinese and Japanese Buddhist classics. She was fond of Basho’s haiku and Dogen’s teaching manuals and sampled freely among the teaching stories of the ancients and the moderns.

Thinking about her life over the decades it seems nearly impossible for me to adequately describe the subtlety and reach of her way of being in the world. In listening to others describe her I realize that we, her survivors, saw her in remarkably similar ways: As a direct, resilient, confident person and a compassionate exemplar of her chosen path. She was generous with her energy, time and resources and exercised a no-nonsense, ‘cutting-through’ method of teaching. She received the love and respect of family and friends, and also understood the suffering of the world and of so many individuals in her life. She perceived “the sacred within the secular” (Maslow, 1969). In the tradition she followed she knew ‘big-mind’ (Suzuki, 1970).

But these are my comments, and she can well speak for herself as she did in her first and final book, a collection of her poems, *Local News* (Margulies, 2013b) published a week before she passed. She had time to read from her new book to family and friends. Here I select some lines for us.

**From a stanza of ‘Mind Moments’ (p. 117)**

- Partings and reunions
- Joys and sorrows,
- Tears and laughter,
- Having had it all, I can’t complain,
- As my hair grows white.

**From the last stanza of ‘Ruins’ (p. 98)**

- Ruins are great teachers.
- Ruins tell the tale of time
- and death and change and of the need
to pay attention to each moment
while it lasts, for the present
is where our life is lived.

From ‘Zen Footprints’ (p. 127)

Unconcerned with ceremonial matters
the drifting raft
sans sails
still crosses over
to the other side

And in the last stanza of ‘Going On’ she concludes (p. 67)

Something there is that
is not born
and does not die.

NOTES

1 The author served in various capacities with the Journal Transpersonal Psychology, the Association for Transpersonal Psychology, and the Transpersonal Institute from their inception until 2000.

REFERENCES


The Author

Miles A. Vich has served in various roles, 1962–1999, in the fields of humanistic and transpersonal psychology, including Editor of the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, as a founding Board member of the Transpersonal Institute, as Editor of the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* and Executive Director of the Association for Transpersonal Psychology. Since retiring in 2000 he has consulted on various projects, pursued a longstanding interest in art, and archived many transpersonal documents in the ITP (now Sofia University) Library, Palo Alto, California, and many humanistic era documents in the University of California, Davidson Library, Santa Barbara.
SHIFTING BETWEEN OUR TWO SELF-IDENTITIES CAN CAUSE THE PLACEBO EFFECT AND RESPONSE SHIFT

Steven Pashko, Ph.D.
Wayne, Pennsylvania

ABSTRACT: Response shift and the placebo effect, by distorting assessment of treatment effectiveness, confound health-care researchers and adversely influence the entire health care sector. Diagnostic assessments, treatment plans, and evaluation of the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of therapies, for example, are all negatively affected. Recent evidence from neuroscience, transpersonal psychology, and behavioral economics suggests that every person has two self-identities, each with different viewpoints. This paper describes how the two self-identities theory may yield insight into the cause of both the response shift and the placebo effect; shifts between the dominance of one self-identity and the other can cause these phenomena. It concludes by detailing a method to empirically verify this hypothesis and suggesting that the two self-identities theory may help to harmonize the psychologies of East and West.

KEYWORDS: Transpersonal, psychology, placebo effect, response shift, theory, clinical research, behavioral economics, neuroscience, health care, psychotherapy.

The placebo effect and response shift are among the greatest scientific mysteries of all time—their cause remains elusive. Cultural influences, environmental and social conditioning, “natural” variability, and many other possible causes have been linked to these phenomena, though no cause—at least not one having significant predictive ability—has been identified as yet. The importance and extent of these puzzles cannot be overstated since by harnessing these effects the potential for a side effect-free means of lessening suffering may exist.

Valid and reliable assessments of pain, mood, and health-related quality of life are needed for accurate diagnoses and to inform the proper choice of treatment. Unreliable and misleading assessments, such as those influenced by response shift or the placebo effect (defined below), add confusion. Within the pharmaceutical research industry, one estimate has it that that 50 percent of clinical trials for psychiatric conditions result in findings where the improvement obtained by a drug does not differ from that obtained by a placebo (Kahn, Kahn, & Brown, 2002). The placebo effect and/ or response shift are strongly implicated in these failures.

Although concrete data are lacking, one can surmise that planning or initiating many new clinical trials for psychiatric drugs may have been stopped because it is difficult for a psychotropic drug to overcome the power of placebo effect and response shift. Although no one knows exactly why these effects occur, one
hallmark is a gap between a patient’s subjective report and his objective circumstances.

A “placebo” (Latin for “I shall please”) is typically an inert substance that physicians give patients to placate them. Even though a placebo is inert, a modest proportion of patients who take placebos report improvement (Harrington, 1997). Although reports of improvement without an associated cause occur with the use of placebos, they can also occur without them. When this happens, the term “response shift” can be used if the origin of the relief appears to be psychological.

Response shift has been defined as “a change in the meaning of one’s evaluation of a construct as a result of a change in one’s internal standards of measurement, a change in one’s values, or a change in one’s definition of the construct” (Schwartz & Sprangers, 2000, p. 12). Response shift can be seen, for example, in people who are in steadily declining health, such as patients with aggressive cancers. Patients who show response shift answer questionnaires about quality of life as if they felt better and happier, even though others see their continued decline (Sharpe, Butow, Smith, McConnell, & Clark, 2005).

Schwartz and Sprangers (2000) offer an insightful example of response shift in a patient. They tell of a woman newly diagnosed with osteosarcoma. At first she said that when her condition prevented her from walking, she would choose euthanasia. Later, when she did need a wheelchair, she said that only if she became incontinent or bedridden would she choose euthanasia. Still later, incontinent and bedridden, she stated that life still had meaning and she would not seek euthanasia.

Because enough patients report improvements without an obvious change in their condition or without an apparent cause, health-care researchers must separate such improvements from those caused by known, active treatments, such as by educational programs, psychotherapies, or drugs. Only then can researchers assess the impact of treatment alone. The difficulty for researchers, of course, is in deciding how much of the patient’s reported improvement is caused by the active component of a known treatment, like the decreased size of a cancerous growth, and how much is caused by response shift or the placebo effect.

**Views and Factors Relating to the Concept of Identity**

The self, that is one’s identity, is the origin of every subjective opinion we have, including those about one’s mental and physical health. As such it must be a factor in the placebo effect and response shift. After all, we are offering “our” opinion. Although identity is considered to be one thing, the difficulty has been in figuring out what that one thing actually is (or is not). Philosophers and, notably, the existential and transpersonal psychologists have long wrestled with these issues. Some varying views of scholars about the “self” include whether:

*Shifting Between Our Two Self-identities Can Cause The Placebo Effect And Response Shift*
• It exists (Metzinger, 2004);
• It is conceptualizable (Assagioli, 2000; Dikshit, 1973; James, 1890; Kahneman, 2012);
• It is personal (Kopf, 2001; Metzinger, 2004);
• It, or anything for that matter, can ever persist unchanging and unchanged (Perry, 1972);
• It might be inherently linked to a physical body (Thomson, 1997);
• The self is “just a bundle of perceptions” (Hume, 1978); or
• It is merely a collection of memories of life stories (McAdams, 1993).

The *Stanford University Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2010) describes eight factors related but restricted to personal identity as “a wide range of loosely connected questions.” These factors or questions are as follows:

1. “Who am I?” What makes me unique and different from others?
2. “Personhood.” What does it mean to be a person?
3. “Persistence.” What does it take for the same person to exist at different times?
4. “Evidence.” What evidence indicates that a person who is here now is the same person who was here at an earlier time?
5. “Population.” How many people exist at any one time (e.g., can two people share one organism)?
6. “What am I?” What are our spatial boundaries and what fixes them?
7. “How could I have been?” Which are my essential properties and which are merely contingent?
8. “What matters in identity?” Can one, for example, have a selfish reason to care about someone else’s well-being?

By the way these questions are phrased most of them encourage the view that a personal identity does exist, presumably a noun. They appear to motivate the reader to search for his/her own definition of personal identity and find the unique constellation of answers through which that definition might fulfill all these conditions and their associated questions. But one possible formulation of self-identity, as described above, can never yield answers to these eight questions, and that is the non-conceptual identity.

**Views and Factors Related to Non-Conceptual Identity**

That a non-conceptual identity may indeed exist, regardless of how impossible it is to convey, has been alluded to previously. Most recently, it has been described through a “phenomenal self model” (PSM), a purely cognitive process, in the work of Metzinger (2004). Lynne Rudder Baker (1998) describes a remarkably similar self (she calls it the “I*”) that does not require a cognitive first-person perspective, the subject, “me.” The transpersonal psychologists Roberto Assagioli and William James both describe an identity that transcends the self (Assagioli, 2000 James, 1890), and Rahula (1974) provides a good review of the non-conceptual “no-self,” the lack of a such a thing as a self, of Eastern psychology.
By whatever label, this non-conceptualizable identity appears to be dominant when inherent wisdom, knowing, and intuition replace mental activity that involves logical rules and the cognitive action of thinking. Kahneman (2012) describes the content of his non-conceptual, “experiencing self” as more oriented to percepts, the present-moment, and being bound to stimuli, with processes that are automatic, associative, slow learning, and emotional. These descriptors appear to reflect the positions of both Assagioli and James as well.

When someone pulls the covers up at night because it is cold, he does not first “think” to do that—he just does it. It is cold; he pulls up the covers. This is the wisdom of the “experiencing self” at work. The behavior of “cover-pulling” expresses its non-verbal, evaluative, decision-making—the non-conceptual experience of coldness. It does not require cognitive engagement of the thought process and the rational mind.

It is important to understand that the encounters of the experiencing self cannot be described or expressed in words. This is due to the fact that words are concepts, and, psycholinguistically, experience exists prior to its conceptualization. Concepts are no more able to convey experience than a menu is able to convey what a meal tastes like. Reflect that though we can say the color “blue,” the word cannot convey the experience of blueness to another. Nor can mere words convey to others our experience of the sound of middle C on a piano, the taste of wine, the insistence of an itch, or the smell of a rose. Every word-label descriptor of an experience can only be a highly distorted, conceptualized transformation of that experience.

Interesting questions to ask are “What is non-conceptual content?” and “What would an identity devoid of all conceptual content be like?” To the first question, it has been well argued (Evans, 1982) that all information received through perception is non-conceptual or non-conceptualized (e.g., direct sensory-perceptual experience, intuition, insight). Evans (1982) writes that:

Judgments based upon such states necessarily involve conceptualizations: in moving from a perceptual experience to a judgment about the world (usually expressible in some verbal form), one will be expressing basic conceptual skills. But this formulation, in terms of moving from an experience to a judgment, must not be allowed to obscure the general picture. Although the subject’s judgments are based upon his experience (i.e., upon the unconceptualized information available to him), his judgments are not about the informational state (with a content of a certain kind, namely, non-conceptual content) to his being in another kind of cognitive state (with a content of a different kind, namely, conceptual content). (p. 227)

Both Crane (1992) and Hanna (2005) also offer some interesting insights about the philosophical investigation of non-conceptual content, offering observations using Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason, and descriptions of types of non-conceptual content. To the second question about defining a conceptless identity there are great difficulties in doing so. Because thoughts utilize words, which are concepts, the experience-oriented non-conceptual identity is literally
indescribable and unthinkable. The non-conceptual self cannot be personal, related in any way to an ego, use time or even be the subject of a verb (i.e., a noun) since “person,” “ego,” and “time” have all been conceptually deconstructed. As such “it” is transpersonal, non-personal and related to direct perception, immediate experience, intuition and insight. The transpersonal psychologist Kaisa Puhakka (2008, p. 12) writes that “Conceptual deconstruction has no end point, for any seeming endpoint can further be deconstructed in terms of other concepts or ideas ad infinitum. This is what it means to say that there are no foundational or absolute truths, or that there are only contexts within contexts endlessly.” She goes on to suggest that with full deconstruction of experience the “…endpoint is the literal vanishing of the components or the dissolution of any and all elements that seem to possess an identity or enduring structure discernible to the conceptual mind.”

**Experimental Evidence Revealing a Non-Conceptual Identity**

Western psychology, with the exception of transpersonal psychology, only tenuously recognizes a non-conceptual identity, even though Kahneman’s 2002 Nobel Prize winning research in psychology (Kahneman, 2003) revealed its enormous influence on our decision-making. For example, the non-conceptual identity appears responsible for the “duration neglect” where the influence of how long we have been feeling poorly is minimized relative to how we feel “right now,” for the “peak-end rule” where judgments we make about our health correlate more with the greatest intensity of our symptoms and how we feel at the end of an episode (e.g., when intense pain has subsided) than to an average of how we have been feeling over time as well as for many other predictable but seemingly irrational decisions we all make. Despite the fact that this non-conceptual, experiential identity is as unthinkable and indescribable as any other state of experience, it can still be studied empirically, much like the way astronomers can only study stellar black holes indirectly by examining how they influence the behavior of nearby stars. Kahneman’s research, employing a revealed preferences methodology, is a prime example of this effort. Despite the obvious methodological difficulties, continued study of the non-conceptual self appears worthy because of the magnitude of its unrecognized influence in the fields of psychology, philosophy, religion and law where the definition of a person, a self-identity, has enormous implications with respect to free will and culpability.

**Neuroscientific Origins of How Language Distorts Experience**

The non-conceptual identity appears associated with sensory-perceptual experience so it is important to understand how subjective reports of lived experience become distorted through language. To do so, it is useful to review the neuroscientific research on split-brain patients. These patients typically require brain surgery because they have had seizures that continue even after repeated attempts to control them through medication. The surgery primarily involves completely severing the corpus callosum, the major route of neuronal
connectivity between the left and right hemispheres. After surgery, little if any communication goes on between the two sides of the patient’s brain. Because connections between the two sides of their brains have been cut, these patients are uniquely suited for neuroscientific research that examines the distinct functions of the separate halves of the brain.

Because of the way neuronal circuits of the eyes reach the brain, it is possible to design an experiment in which an image on a patient’s left visual field will be seen by him only on the visual area on the right side of the brain. Similarly, this experiment can do the same for the right visual field, in which the image will reach only the left visual area of the brain. In these experiments, a split-brain patient has a brain in which each of its two halves is completely unaware of what the other side has seen. Obviously a patient who has not undergone this surgery would not experience this lack of awareness.

In an experiment with split-brain patients, Gazzaniga (1989) flashed the word “bell” to a patient’s right hemisphere and the word “music” to his left. The patient reported seeing only the word “music.” Next, when asked to pick one picture among many relating to the general theme of music, the patient chose a picture of a bell. The patient plausibly but untruthfully explained that he chose a bell because the last time he heard music, it came from the bells outside the research lab. Although when asked, the patient could have said, “I don’t know why I chose the picture of the bell,” the left-brain’s interpretive function invented that story to fit the situation harmoniously.

In another experiment (Gazzinaga, 1989), split-brain patients were shown a series of forty pictures telling a story of a man waking in the morning, eating, going to work, etc. These patients were subsequently asked to review a group of pictures to determine which were in the original group and which had been added. Results indicated the right hemisphere could readily differentiate the original ones from those newly added, but the left hemisphere could only distinguish added pictures that did not easily fit within the story line. The left-brain would erroneously accept added pictures as originals if they fit within the general line of the story.

These studies suggest that the right hemisphere does not make inferences but offers a more exact rendering of direct experience, whereas the left hemisphere accepts the conceptual gist of a story and then fills in gaps by confabulation. Gazzaniga suggests the left hemisphere has the function of interpreting experience, while the right hemisphere accepts and reports more realistically.

A RECENT THEORETICAL MODEL OF TWO SELVES

Within the field of clinical psychology, it is also informative to review Seymour Epstein’s cognitive-experiential self-theory (CEST) of identity, which seeks to supplement or replace Freud’s view of the unconscious (Epstein, 1994). This theory arose from his theoretical insights suggesting, “that most information processing occurs automatically and effortlessly outside of awareness because...”
that is its natural mode of operation, a mode that is far more efficient than
conscious, deliberative thinking” (Epstein, 1994, p.710). Epstein outlines two
interactive information-processing systems, the rational and the experiential. The
rational is largely characterized by analysis; by logical rules and
connections; by slower processing; by an aware, conscious experience of
reasoned thought; by conscious appraisal of events; by good integration across
contexts, and by justification by logic. The experiential, by contrast, is
characterized by affective sensibility; by associative connections; by encoding
reality in images, metaphors, and narratives; by rapid processing for more
immediate action; by crude integration with more context-specific processing,
and by self-evident validity, among other factors.

Some every-day activities can illustrate Epstein’s two ways of knowing. Most
people know, for example, that it is safer to fly than drive; they can cite
statistical probabilities to make that rational case. Some of these same people,
however, yield to intuition and nevertheless make a trip by car in order to
“feel” safer.

This decision process—choosing whether to fly or drive—highlights the
characteristics of both systems, the rational and the experiential. The rational
system intellectually understands the risk of injury or death associated with
both flying and driving, as well as the respective travel times and the associated
inconveniences of each mode of traveling. The experiential system can “feel”
various experiential sensations: differences in the comfort of airplane and car
seats, the frightening view from altitude, the demands of heavy traffic, the
threat of the respective speeds involved, etc.

Epstein’s CEST theory appears to predict that the dominance of a rational self-
system results in a decision to fly, whereas the dominance of an experiential
self-system results in a decision to drive. The CEST helps us understand that
decision-making produces results that depend on the particular self-system,
rational or experiential, that dominate the processing.

Notice that Epstein’s theory fits well with the functional differences of the left
and right hemispheres of the brain as reported by Gazzaniga, above. Language,
logical interpretation, and use of symbols are characteristics of
Epstein’s rational-processing self and Gazzaniga’s left-brain processing. In like
fashion, experiential-orientation, use of intuition, reliance on images, and
facility with metaphors describe Epstein’s experiential processing and
Gazzaniga’s view of how the brain’s right side functions.

**Behavioral Economic Research Supporting the Two Selves Theory**

Kahneman’s research into behavioral economics also seeks to understand
distortions that exist in the psychological relationship between someone’s
objective circumstances and what someone subjectively reports (Redelmeier &
Kahneman, 1966; Redelmeier, Katz & Kahneman, 2003). In an oft-cited
experiment, human subjects undergoing a colonoscopy were asked to rate their
level of pain on a minute-by-minute basis during the entire procedure. When a subject who said he had experienced more discomfort towards the end of the procedure was then asked to reflect on his total discomfort, the subject said the entire procedure was more uncomfortable than his summed minute-by-minute reports would predict. The subject appeared to draw on his memory of the experience more than on his present-moment experience for his overall assessment. In another experiment assessing the role of evaluative memory versus present-moment experience in decision-making, randomized human subjects immersed their hand into cold water in two different conditions (Kahneman, Fredrickson, Schreiber & Redelmeier, 1993). In one condition, they immersed their hand into water at 14°C for 60 seconds. They reported experiencing substantial pain. The other condition was exactly the same except that it lasted a total of 90 seconds, 30 seconds more, and the temperature of the water was raised by 1°C during those final 30 seconds. When both the short and long hand immersion conditions were completed, the subjects were asked to choose which of the two they would prefer to undergo again (NB: which they did not actually undergo). Interestingly, a significant majority chose to repeat the longer trial and so, oddly, to experience more pain. Kahneman concluded that although the direct experience of pain is worse in the longer trial condition, the misguided preference most have for the longer trial originates from the memory that the pain was less during the final 30 seconds.

Such findings, as well as an appreciation of Epstein’s CEST, led Kahneman to characterize individuals as having two selves, an “experiencing self” and a “remembering self” (Kahneman & Riis, 2005). His research indicates that the “experiencing self” reports only what it apprehends in the immediate, experiential moment. Subsequent reports are made anew in the next experiential moment. In contrast, the “remembering self” offers reports based on memory, conceptual description, and retrospection. The remembering self’s reports tend to be relatively stable and consistent over time. Kahneman’s Nobel Prize winning research used the theory of two selves as a way to understand the psychology processes underpinning human decision-making. In addition, the research of Gazzaniza (1989) as well as the theoretical insights of Assagioli (2000), Baker (1998), Epstein (1994), James (1890), and Metzinger (2004), point to substantial scholarly agreement that two selves can exist.

HYPOTHETICAL CAUSE OF THE PLACEBO EFFECT AND RESPONSE SHIFT

Drawing on the research related to self-identity and on the distortions created by using language to express experience, I propose a hypothesis to explain the placebo effect and response shift, which I call “Shifting Between Two Selves.” To understand what causes the placebo effect and response shift, as proposed here, one needs to distinguish between the two selves. I prefer the term “conceptual self” for the conceptualized identity that others appear to refer to as the “self,” the “remembering self,” or the “Relative Identity,” and the term “non-conceptual self” for the identity commonly referred to as “no-self,” the “Self,” the “experiencing self,” the “Absolute Self,” or the “Higher Self.”
Although my preferred term “conceptual self” may differ slightly from terms like “self,” “remembering self,” and “Relative Identity,” it is simple and reasonably accurate. I am of the position that all these terms refer to “selves” that have much in common: use of conception, knowledge, memory, language, and time, so they may be grouped together for the purposes of this discussion. Similarly, my simple term “non-conceptual self,” one devoid of all conceptualization, even about “itself,” refers to the same sort of self that others appear to describe as “no-self,” the “Self,” the “Absolute Self,” and the “experiencing self.” Although terms may differ, I am of the position that all the selves just named rely on percepts, are stimulus-bound, rely on wisdom (e.g., insight, intuition), cannot be captured by language, and are constrained to an awareness of no more than the present moment.

This new, and testable, hypothesis posits that when individuals report their experience through concepts and from memory, they significantly distort their direct experience (e.g., how their symptoms affect them). Less distortion occurs when they report their present-moment experience without drawing on concepts or falling back on memory.

As hypothesized here, the cause of the placebo effect and response shift relates to a gap between a patient’s subjective report and their objective circumstance such as one that might be observed when a patient shifts from conceptualized opinion to direct perception. A placebo-responder or a response-shifter, for example, may report a low quality of life at one time and then later report a much higher level without experiencing anything that objectively would explain the improvement. According to this hypothesis, the subject can do so honestly if his initial view originates from the concepts and conscious thoughts of his conceptual self (e.g., “This shortness of breath must mean there IS more lung cancer!”), while his later view arises from his non-conceptual self, that is, from his direct perception of the experiential moment and no more (e.g., “I just have some shortness of breath right now”). Only if a person is able to discard their opinions in favor of reporting their direct experience can he make such a shift. When the identity shifts in this manner, the beliefs supporting feelings of anxiety, depression, pain, and “poor quality of life” are abandoned, and scores on standard assessments of these problems improve.

Consider this small example: One’s left hand hurts. The sufferer voices his conceptualizations, saying, “I’m sure to need surgery” or “maybe it IS arthritis” or “now I’m sure to miss a few days at work—and I really need the money.” If by contrast such opinions and beliefs are diminished or disappear because the person responds to his hurt hand in a non-conceptual or experiential way, perhaps saying “My left hand hurts quite a bit more than usual today,” he then has much less to complain about since the conceptualizations related to the presumed surgery, the diagnosis, and the ramifications about the loss of income have not amplified the plain fact of the direct experience of the pain itself. This switch between selves may be the same mechanism that causes the placebo effect and response shift.

In sum, each person appears to have two fundamental selves that vary in dominance. According to the hypothesis offered here, a shift between these two
selves causes the placebo effect and the response shift. The conceptual self is based on language, time, memory, and cultural standards. It distorts reality because of those influences. The non-conceptual self is the more truthful reporter of the present moment, though it is interrupted when direct experience is over-ridden by concepts, such as memories, beliefs, and opinions. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that the placebo effect and the response shift occur in people (a) who have a higher degree of flexibility in shifting between conceptual thinking and direct experience and (b) who reflect one view at one time and another view at a later time.

The shift of self from the conceptual to the non-conceptual, may well explain other phenomena besides the placebo effect and response shift. Habituation to pain or discomfort (Kahneman & Krueger, 2006), the efficacy of Rogerian psychotherapy (Rogers, 1961), and the acceptance stage of death or grief (Kubler-Ross, 1997) may similarly be explained. More research into the shift phenomenon as a possible cause of these and other psychological effects appears warranted.

Most of the time our information-processing system (i.e., “us”) runs on automatic pilot, effortlessly, efficiently, and outside our conscious awareness (Epstein, 1994). This is another way of saying that the non-conceptual self dominates most moments of our lives. Yet if we are asked our opinion, for instance, about the quality of our life during the past 30 days, the conceptual self is the only one of the two selves that can provide an answer. The non-conceptual self can respond only to questions about present-moment, emotional-intuitive percepts—and even that it finds difficult to do because it must use words, as inadequate as they are, to convey experience. The very asking of a question often selects which of the two selves can provide an answer.

This is a key to understanding the placebo effect and response shift. In healthcare research, when a questionnaire asks about how we have felt in the past, we are being asked to make a logical response from memory. The conceptual self, with its unique aspect of reliance on memory dominates the non-conceptual self under this type of questioning. Once the questions are answered, our non-conceptual self naturally re-emerges and continues the effortless, present-moment orientation of our life.

In order to block the placebo effect or response shift from occurring, one useful strategy may be to prevent shifting between the two identities. Another strategy might be to identify people who lack the propensity to shift, so that reports can originate from only one of their two selves. It is also possible to design a questionnaire for either of the selves, for example the non-conceptual self, by using questions that strongly anchor respondents to the present-moment judgments—such as with the experience-sampling method (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1987). Other questionnaires can be targeted to the conceptual self, relying, for example, on memory-based opinions and through instructive wording such as “reflecting on your opinions over the prior 7 days....” Experimenters should remain aware, however, that some research participants may be unable to heed such instructions even despite repeated prompting to do so.

Shifting Between Our Two Self-identities Can Cause The Placebo Effect And Response Shift
It also appears possible to devise a method for *a priori* identification of people who will respond to placebos or shift their responses on psychologically-oriented questionnaires based on their speed, ease, or extent of shifting between the experiencing and the conceptualizing self. People most commonly report their experience from memory, using the viewpoint of the conceptual self. In this author’s clinical experience, even when specifically instructed to report from present-moment experience, individuals often incorrectly resort to their memories for answers to questions about how they feel *right now*. In order to distinguish people with the potential to respond to placebos or shift their responses on questionnaires, it is necessary to know with certainty when people are in the viewpoint of the non-conceptual, experiential self.

**Experimentally Shifting the Perceived Location of Self-Identity**

The recent cognitive-phenomenological research into identity from the laboratories of Henrik Ehrsson at Karolinska University (Petkova & Ehrsson, 2008) and Olaf Blanke at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (Leggenhager, Mouton, & Blanke, 2009) indicates that perceived self-identity can, in experiments that include a sensory conflict between touch and vision, be made to shift location to that of a mannequin. In one set of experiments, participants wore a helmet with a video display inside. The display showed the view from downward-pointed cameras that mounted on the head of a retail store mannequin standing nearby. The participant’s view from inside the helmet was that of seeing the torso, arms and legs of the undressed mannequin. Using a blunt stylus, the experimenter stroked the participant’s torso in synchrony with the torso of the mannequin. By seeing down the torso of the mannequin, seeing the stroking of the mannequin, and actually feeling the touch of the synchronous stroking combined with seeing the stroking of the mannequin, the participant’s senses were conflicted. The result was that within just a few seconds participants said that the mannequin’s body became their own. Not fully trusting the verbal reports of the participants, the switch of self-identity to that of the mannequin was confirmed by the investigators through objective measurement. While the participant indicated the mannequin’s body was perceived to be their own, the experimenters threatened cutting the mannequin with a knife. Skin conductance responses taken from the participant’s fingers showed significant increases during the threat with the knife thereby indicating an emotional and physiological connection between the mannequin and the participant’s self-identity (Petkova & Ehrsson, 2008). That a shift of perceived location of self-identity can occur harkens back to the question of Thomson (1997) as to whether identity must be inherently linked to a physical body. The answer from empirical research suggests that because the link to the body is tenuous and can be so quickly and completely broken, much more investigation into the origin, nature and location of identity is warranted.

I am of the position that the seemingly impossible shift of identity to another object, like a mannequin, occurs only when the subject’s conviction of the truthfulness of his direct experience exceeds that of his conceptualized opinions. Identification with a mannequin appears to occur when the research
subject believes more in what he sees (i.e., the torso of a mannequin and the stroking of the mannequin’s abdomen) and in what he feels (i.e., the strain in his neck as he looks down and the stroking of his torso in synchrony with stroking the mannequin) than in his memory of having a physical body.

Believing in experience more than memory meets the criteria for the predominance of the non-conceptual self. As such, the subject’s non-conceptual self must be dominant when the identity shifts to (and remains with) the mannequin.

MANIPULATION OF THE SELF-IDENTITY IMPROVES PAIN TOLERANCE AND RELIEVES STRESS

Additional recent research suggests that a sufferer’s pain may be alleviated by the shift of identity to a mannequin (Hansel, Lenggenhager, von Kanel, Curatolo, & Blanke, 2011). In a perceptual-conflict study generally similar to that described above, healthy adult study volunteers wore head-mounted visual displays and pressure meters on their index fingers. Pain thresholds were obtained under various conditions (i.e., synchronous or asynchronous stroking of the back of a mannequin or a human-sized white cardboard box and the subject’s physical body) either encouraging or discouraging psychological “drift” of self-location to or towards a mannequin. The study showed that synchronous stroking of the mannequin led to an increased identification with the mannequin, but not stroking of the cardboard box. Notably, identification with the mannequin, the sign that the non-conceptual self has become more dominant, positively correlated with higher pain thresholds. The study results suggest that increased pain tolerance was produced by a purely psychological phenomenon. Given these findings, I also wonder whether the effectiveness of the treatment results of Hunter Hoffman and David Patterson (Hoffman et al., 2004) who use “SnowWorld,” for pain control in burn patients, or others who use a variety of immersive virtual reality treatment programs, may also be caused by the shift of identity from the conceptual self to the non-conceptual self given the similarity of their methods to that described above. Further research into this phenomenon appears to be warranted.

NATURAL SHIFTS BETWEEN TWO SELVES

If people naturally shift between conceptualized and non-conceptualized selves then this same mechanism may also be capable of producing the placebo response and response shift. It is worthy to note that such shifts from the conceptual self to the non-conceptual self are encouraged and do occur during stress-reducing mindfulness practices. Instructions for mindfulness practice all generally relate to continually paying attention and bringing one’s attention back to the experience of the present moment when and if it has been pulled away by thought (Buddhadasa, 1997; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Pashko, 2005). The ability to remain in the non-conceptual view of direct experience is available at any time – providing one remains disinterested in the thoughts of the mind (i.e.,
mindful). Perceptual-conflict techniques like those described by Petkova and Ehrsson (2008) and Hansel, et al. (2011), which appear to artificially encourage shifting between a conceptual self and a non-conceptual self may be adapted for identifying people who can more quickly or entirely switch from their physical body to that of the mannequin. Perceptual conflict methods such as these that encourage shifts of identity may yield a practical and fruitful method for a priori prediction of research subjects who will become placebo responders or response shifters. The hypothesis offered here would be empirically supported by data indicating that people who are already known to show a placebo response or response shift can, in a dramatic challenge to their cognitive flexibility, more quickly and/or completely shift their identity to inanimate objects than others.

**IS ONE OF THE TWO SELVES MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE OTHER?**

An interesting question to ask is which of the two selves is the more valid reporter of subjective experience? Is it the one used most frequently for reporting experience, the one easiest to access (i.e., the conceptual self) since it is able to answer questions through its facility with language? Of course, there is a downside to using the conceptual self as the reporter of experience. Because it is not dominant during most of the time we are alive, why should its viewpoint represent us? Further, its view always significantly distorts experience through use of an inherently error-prone process, that of translating experience into the concepts of language. Recall how impossible it is to convey the experience of the sound of middle C to someone who is deaf? Further, as Gazzaniga’s work described earlier, since the conceptual self merely attends to the gist of any situation, it is also prone to markedly distort experience through the use of fabricated information when pressed for details.

Alternatively, perhaps the self that is more dominant during most of our lifetimes, the non-conceptual self, is the more valid reporter of our experience. Although it requires more effort to obtain its opinions and understand its preferences, they are accessible behaviorally by observing the choices it makes (i.e., using “revealed preferences” methodologies). Further, its views are less prone to the distortions of experience caused by language or confabulation. Perhaps it is time to reexamine the methods used to obtain the opinions of patients and other subjects, since the trade-off between methodological ease and accuracy of report currently appears to be unbalanced in favor of methodological ease.

**HARMONIZING THE PSYCHOLOGIES OF THE WEST AND THE EAST**

The points highlighted above not only may lead to a way to understand the placebo effect and response shift, but they appear to offer a way to harmonize the psychologies of the West and the East. The conceptual self has striking similarity to the unconscious’s secondary processes as defined by Sigmund Freud. That process maintains the neurotic timeline and story of our self-identity through our role at work, our place in the family, our relationship to society, etc., through what Freud terms “the reality principle.” In the psychology of the East,
it is also called the “Relative Identity” (or the “self” when used with a lowercase “s” [Dikshit, 1973]). In contrast, the non-conceptual self, known in the East as the “Absolute Identity,” the “Self” with an uppercase “S,” or “no self,” has characteristics akin to the non-conceptual experience of “space” (Yen, 2006).

Western psychology has yet to fully acknowledge or understand the view of a non-conceptual identity, but a few psychologists have written about something quite similar. William James (1890), among other noteworthy psychologists, wrote and spoke of such an identity distinct from the classical ego of Freud. The transpersonal psychologist, Roberto Assagioli, may have come closest, however. In *Psychosynthesis*, Assagioli described a “Higher Self” that correlates well with the non-conceptual self and the experiencing self as described above by Epstein and Kahneman. Because the ego appears and re-appears, Assagioli wrote that it must do so within a context (Assagioli, 2000). This is how his Higher Self is inferred. Attempting to integrate his view of the conceptual self and his “Higher Self,” the non-conceptual self, within a more holistic framework, Assagioli (2000, p.17) wrote,

> There are not really two selves, two independent and separate entities. The Self is one; it manifests in different degrees of awareness and self-realization. The reflection appears to be self-existent but has, in reality, no autonomous substantiality.

Although using the dichotomy of two selves artificially demarcates levels of self-realization along a continuum of what we call identity, there are benefits in doing so. Most importantly, a continuum requires opposing end points and there was little or no support in the psychology of the West for an identity completely devoid of conceptualization until very recently. Only with the establishment of this other end of the continuum of identity can one envision and discuss levels of differential realization along it. With the poles increasingly better described, it becomes ever easier to understand how the two selves, as described here, may actually relate to degrees of realization along a single axis.

Within the field of health-care research and the psychotherapies, however, we are now left with difficult decisions. Given that each person has two self-identities with very different points of view, the conceptual (e.g., egoic) self having a strong sense of individuation and separateness with the non-conceptual self (e.g., Higher Self) having a strong sense of universality and wholeness, how shall we best work to understand or experience each, uncover how they interact with one another, and determine their importance to the lives of us all? That the placebo response and response shift occur and that their cause is as yet unproven points out the fact that our current psychologies are lacking. The implications of this lack may well relate to how we view the world and our place in it. Continued research into the theory of two selves, and whether the placebo effect and response shift are caused by switches between them, could have benefits beyond those related to health care provision and the development of new drugs and therapies. Stuck in a conceptual world, each of us may suffer more than we must. As a result, we may over utilize the limited amount of health care resources that are available and live lives neurotically while honestly

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believing our quality of life needs significant improvement. By focusing almost exclusively on the conceptual self, the traditional psychologies of the West may have lost sight of the proper balance between our two selves that supports more healthy and happy living. By refocusing on the non-conceptual self, a more balanced understanding of what it means to live a happy and harmonious life may come about. In the process, there is hope that other psychological confounds, like the placebo effect and response shift, may also be unraveled.

NOTES

1 The author submitted a patent application in May of 2012 under the Patent Cooperation Treaty for approval of a method similar to what is described above in the hopes of developing a way to predict people who will respond to placebos or shift their responses on questionnaires about psychological well-being.

REFERENCES


Non-conceptually, there’s the experience of an exuberant “Yea!” originating from a place quite difficult to locate. The conceptual Steven Pashko has trained and works in the fields of the psychology of well-being, clinical central nervous system pharmacology, and outcomes research/evidence-based medicine.
NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES AND AYAHUASCA-INDUCED EXPERIENCES - TWO UNIQUE PATHWAYS TO A PHENOMENOLOGICALLY SIMILAR STATE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

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ABSTRACT: Individuals who survive a close brush with death often experience a profound altered state of consciousness known as a “near-death experience.” Individuals who drink a South American medicine, known as “ayahuasca,” experience an altered state of consciousness with numerous similarities to near-death experiences. These similarities, which occur on perceptual, emotional, cognitive, and transcendent levels, suggest near-death experiences and ayahuasca-induced experiences may involve a similar state of consciousness. This article compares and contrasts the phenomena of near-death experiences and ayahuasca-induced experiences. Common features of these experiences suggest ayahuasca may be useful as a research tool in the investigation of near-death experience phenomena. Further research is suggested to expand our understanding of human consciousness and near-death experiences.

KEYWORDS: near-death experience, ayahuasca, consciousness, transcendent experience.

NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

Individuals who survive a close brush with death often experience a profound altered state of consciousness. This has been termed a “near-death experience” or “NDE.” Dr. Bruce Greyson at the University of Virginia defined a near-death experience as “a profound subjective event with transcendental or mystical elements that many people experience on the threshold of death” (Greyson, 1994, p. 460).

Dr. Raymond Moody first coined the term “near-death experience” in 1975 (Moody, 1975). After interviewing fifty people who had experienced a close brush with death, Moody identified fifteen recurrent “elements” he felt characterized their experiences. Later, he condensed these into nine elements (Moody, 1989). (These elements are discussed in the next section of this article.)

The first written account of a NDE predates Moody’s description by more than two thousand years. The Republic, published around 380 B.C.E., tells the story of a soldier named Er who was killed in battle. Twelve days later, he awoke on a funeral pyre and recounted his experiences while in the “otherworld” (Rouse, 1956).
In the modern era, the earliest written account of a NDE came from the Swiss geologist Albert Heim. While climbing a mountain, Heim’s hat was blown off by a strong gust of wind. As he reached for his hat, Heim lost his balance and fell more than 60 feet. He survived and later described his experience. He explained while falling, his thoughts were clear, time slowed down, and he saw images from his entire life. He saw a “heavenly light,” but felt no anxiety, grief, or pain (as cited in Noyes & Kletti, 1972, p. 50). Heim went on to gather accounts from others who had experienced close brushes with death. These included individuals who had fallen while climbing mountains, soldiers wounded in battle, workers who fell off scaffolds, and individuals who nearly died in accidents or near-drownings. His findings were published in the Yearbook of the Swiss Alpine Club in 1892. Eight years later, psychiatrists Russell Noyes, Jr. and Ray Kletti published a translation of Heim’s research (Noyes & Kletti, 1972).

The next major advance in our understanding of NDEs occurred when an undergraduate student at the University of Virginia named Raymond Moody attended a talk given by the university’s psychiatrist, Dr. George Ritchie. During this presentation, Ritchie described an experience that happened to him during World War II. In 1943, Ritchie developed severe pneumonia while undergoing army basic training at Camp Barkeley, Texas. His condition deteriorated rapidly and while awaiting a chest x-ray, he grew weak and collapsed. After regaining awareness, Ritchie flew through the air, “traveling faster, in fact, than I had ever moved in my life” (Ritchie, 2007, p. 46). He tried talking to others, but they ignored him, as if he were not there.

After returning to the hospital, Ritchie met a being of light that emanated unconditional love. He then went on a second journey, this time with the being of light. Communication between Ritchie and the being of light occurred “by thought instead of speech” (Ritchie, 2007, p. 63). They traveled to distant cities together and witnessed people going about their daily lives. Ritchie then returned to the hospital a second time. When he opened his eyes, he discovered the bed covers had been pulled over his head. Although alive, Ritchie suffered from delirium. Several days later, when he regained clarity, he learned that after collapsing in the radiology department, he had grown increasingly ill. The ward boy had found Ritchie without a pulse. He summoned the doctor, who pronounced Ritchie dead. Nine minutes later, Ritchie was checked again and for a second time was pronounced dead. Then, following an injection of adrenaline, Ritchie’s heart began beating again. Ritchie made a full recovery. He later attended medical school, became a physician, and then worked as a psychiatrist at the University of Virginia, which is where Moody heard his story.

After graduating from the University of Virginia with a doctorate in philosophy, Moody accepted a teaching position at East Carolina University. One day, a student mentioned he had been in a serious automobile accident about a year earlier. Although his doctors told him he had died, the student claimed he had remained aware during this time. The student further explained that following his accident he saw a tunnel of light. From this tunnel came a man made of light, who showed him his entire life. The student traveled high
above the wreck site and saw cities of light. After his accident, he was permanently changed. He believed life continues after death and love is extremely important. Moody heard similar stories from other students, then adults in his community too. He began collecting these stories, which he referred to as “afterlife stories” (Moody, 2012, p. 77). In 1972, Moody was accepted into the Medical College of Georgia. Just seven months later, he was invited to speak to the local medical society about his research into what he now referred to as “near-death experiences” (Moody, 2012, p. 78).

**Moody’s Nine Key Elements of Near-Death Experiences**

By 1974, Moody was aware of 150 reports of NDEs. He interviewed 50 of these people, then identified fifteen separate elements which recurred in their descriptions (Moody, 1975). Later, he condensed these into the following nine elements (Moody, 1989):

1. A sense of being dead - despite the label of this first element, Moody pointed out that during NDEs, many people do not realize their experience has anything to do with death. They may find themselves floating above their body, looking back at it, and feel fear or confusion. They may not recognize the body as their own. When they try talking to people, nobody hears them. They may try touching people, but discover their hand goes through them, as if nothing was there. They may experience cognitive dissonance when they recognize they are conscious, but their experiences are not characteristic of their usual “alive” state. Eventually, fear turns to bliss and understanding.

2. Peace and painlessness - while these individuals are in their bodies, they may experience intense pain associated with their illness or accident. However, once separated from their bodies, this experience changes to feelings of painlessness and peace.

3. Out-of-body experience - individuals frequently feel themselves rising up and viewing their bodies below. At this point, they describe having a body of some sort, although they are no longer in their physical body. Some describe this incorporeal body as “a cloud of colors, or an energy field” (Moody, 1989, p. 10).

4. Tunnel experience - following separation from their body, individuals realize their experience has something to do with death. They may see a tunnel or dark space before them. They travel through this dark space until they come to a bright light. Some people go up a stairway or through a doorway. Moody explained, “I have heard this space described as a cave, a well, a trough, an enclosure, a tunnel, a funnel, a vacuum, a void, a sewer, a valley, and a cylinder” (Moody, 1989, pp. 30–31).

5. People of light - after traveling through a passageway or tunnel, people meet beings of light. The light is described as different from ordinary, earthly light. This light is warm, vibrant, and alive. It is much brighter than any light ever experienced on earth, yet it does not hurt the eyes. It seems to permeate everything and fills the person with love. Once they enter this light, people
often encounter friends and family members who have already died. These deceased loved ones are filled with light. Some report scenes of landscapes filled with light or cities of light. At this point, communication occurs through thoughts rather than words.

6. The being of light - people often meet a “Being of Light” (Moody, 1989, p. 13). Depending upon their religious background, individuals may describe this being as a religious figure from their tradition. This being radiates love and understanding. Most people want to remain with this being forever. However, they are told they must return to their earthly life. First, however, they are shown a review of their life.

7. Life review - Moody described the life review as a “full color, three-dimensional, panoramic review of every single thing the NDEers have done in their lives” (Moody, 1989, p. 14). It is as if the person’s entire life is presented all at once. Not only do people see the events of their lives, they also perceive the effects of their actions upon others. The being of light is with them during this review and asks them what good they have done with their lives. People come through this experience feeling the most important thing in their life is love and the second most important thing is knowledge.

8. Rising rapidly into the heavens - some individuals describe a “floating experience” in which they rise up from the earth and into the cosmos (Moody, 1989, p. 15).

9. Reluctance to return - many individuals find their experience so pleasurable, they do not want to return to earthly life. Some express anger at those who resuscitate them. This anger is generally short-lived as the person is later glad to be back with loved ones.

Other Changes Associated with Near-Death Experiences

In addition to these nine key elements, Moody also described changes in time and space during NDEs. Time is described as being “nothing like the time we keep on our watches” (Moody, 1989, p. 17). When asked how long her NDE lasted, one woman responded, “You could say it lasted one second or that it lasted ten thousand years and it wouldn’t make any difference how you put it” (Moody, 1989, p. 18).

Physical space is altered during NDEs also. While out of their physical body, individuals need only think about a physical location and they find themselves there. Individuals also may describe events occurring in other rooms of the hospital where they are being resuscitated.

Research into NDEs Expands

As research into NDEs expanded, more physicians began viewing NDEs as a legitimate field of inquiry. Psychiatrists Bruce Greyson (1983, 1994, 1998, 2009) and Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1999), pediatrician Michael Morse (1990),
and cardiologists Michael Sabom (1982) and Pim van Lommel (2010) each contributed important research findings regarding NDEs. One of the most important advances in the field was Greyson’s development of a NDE scale, which helped identify individuals who had undergone a NDE (Greyson, 1983).

With public interest in NDEs expanding, more and more individuals began publishing accounts of their NDEs in the popular literature. Anecdotal accounts from children (e.g., Burpo, 2010) and adults (e.g., Brinkley, 2008; Piper, 2004; Storm, 2005) added to our understanding of NDEs. Several physicians offered accounts of their own NDEs including orthopedic surgeon Mary C. Neal (2012), neurosurgeon Eben Alexander III (2012), and psychiatrist Raymond Moody (2012).

AYAHUASCA

Ayahuasca is a medicinal plant mixture that has been utilized throughout the Amazon River basin for at least four thousand years (Grob, 2002). When ingested, ayahuasca produces a profound altered state of consciousness. At least 72 different indigenous groups in South America currently use ayahuasca for healing and spiritual purposes (Beyer, 2009).

In South America, ayahuasca is known by many different names including: caapi, yaje, and housca (Schultes, Hofman, & Ratsch, 2001, p. 124). The term ayahuasca is derived from the Quechua language. The root aya means “dead person, spirit, soul, or ancestor” and huasca means “rope or vine” (Metzner, 1999, p. 1). Translations of the term ayahuasca include “vine of the soul,” “vine of the spirit,” and “vine of the dead” (Grob, 2002, p. 185; Metzner, 1999, p. 1). These translations refer to ayahuasca’s purported ability to transport individuals beyond time and space.

Ayahuasca is prepared by boiling two or more plants found in the Amazon rain forest until a concentrated liquid remains. The two plants most commonly used are Banisteriopsis caapi and Psychotria viridis (Grob, 2002; Metzner, 2006; Shanon, 2010). The tea derived from these plants is then drunk (Schultes, Hofman, & Ratsch, 2001). The plants used to prepare ayahuasca contain a combination of N,N-dimethyltryptamine (DMT) and several monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs). When ingested together, these medicines produce profound alterations in consciousness.

In indigenous cultures, both the patient and the healer ingest ayahuasca simultaneously. The patient and the healer then experience visions, which provide helpful information and guidance. The potential uses of this medicine include diagnosing health problems, determining therapeutic interventions, seeing into the future, and finding lost items (R. Yamberla, personal communication, March 27, 2012).

Europeans first became aware of ayahuasca when explorers traveled to the Amazon rain forest in the 16th century. Accompanying these explorers were
priests charged with converting the indigenous populations to Christianity. When these priests met indigenous people drinking ayahuasca, they believed the medicine had evil effects. In the seventeenth century, witch-hunts were pervasive in Europe and the Americas. Priests of this era believed ayahuasca was the work of the devil. Such beliefs contributed to the Holy Inquisition condemning ayahuasca in 1616 (Grob, 2002). Subsequently, individuals who continued utilizing ayahuasca risked accusations of heresy and witchcraft. These were serious charges that often resulted in hideous tortures and death (Grob, 2002).

The first written documentation of ayahuasca use in the modern era occurred in 1851 when the British botanist Richard Spruce encountered indigenous people drinking ayahuasca in Brazil (Schultes, 1983). In 1858, the first published report of ayahuasca use occurred when the geographer Manuel Villavicencio wrote about this medicine’s use in the Rio Napo region of Ecuador (Metzner, 2006). In the 1920’s, Brazilian churches began incorporating ayahuasca into their religious ceremonies. Today, three Brazilian churches use ayahuasca as their primary sacrament (Labate, de Rose, & dos Santos, 2008; Metzner, 2006). These churches have spread throughout the world. In 2005, ayahuasca churches were found in 23 countries throughout North America, South America, Central America, Europe, Asia, and Africa.

In the last two decades, numerous scientific articles examining ayahuasca’s potential benefits have been published (Anderson, 2012; Bouso et al., 2012; Grob et al., 1996; Trichter, 2010). Researchers have examined a wide range of potential therapeutic applications for this medicine including treatment of mental illnesses and substance abuse. One of the earliest studies was initiated in the 1990s by a team of researchers headed by UCLA professor Charles Grob. This pioneering study examined ayahuasca’s biochemical and neuropsychological effects on members of the UDV church in Brazil. Grob and colleagues found that substance abuse and mental health disorders remitted without recurrence following the regular use of ayahuasca in the church setting. Also, UDV church members scored higher than controls on neuropsychological tests (Grob et al., 1996). A more recent study, performed by researchers in Canada, found improvement in problematic substance use among an indigenous population following treatment with ayahuasca (Thomas, Lucas, Capler, Tupper, & Martin, 2013).

**Phenomenology of Ayahuasca**

Psychologist Benny Shanon provided one of the most extensive accounts of the phenomenology of the ayahuasca-induced experience (AIE) in his book *The Antipodes of the Mind: Charting the phenomenology of the ayahuasca experience* (Shanon, 2010). Shanon interviewed 178 people who ingested ayahuasca an estimated 2500 times. In addition, Shanon ingested ayahuasca himself more than 130 times over a span of ten years. Based upon his personal experiences as well as the experiences of the individuals he interviewed, Shanon described a variety of changes associated with the use of ayahuasca.
Perceptual Changes. Shanon described three types of perceptual changes associated with AIEs: hallucinations, heightened sensory perception, and visualizations.

1. Hallucinations - a hallucination is defined as a “False perception with a characteristically compelling sense of the reality of objects or events perceived in the absence of relevant and adequate stimuli” (Morris, 1980, p. 595). Some individuals experience hallucinations after drinking ayahuasca. Shanon experienced visual hallucinations of dead people hanging from trees, a jaguar in a tree, and a cow in a truck (Shanon, 2010).

2. Heightened sensory perception - sensory awareness may become hyperacute under the influence of ayahuasca. Shanon explained, “One is aware of perceptual variations that normally one cannot detect” (Shanon, 2010, p. 190). This may lead to “night vision” in which one is able to see more clearly in the dark or “X-ray vision” in which individuals report seeing the insides of others’ bodies (Shanon, 2010, p. 74).

3. “Visualizations” - a third type of perceptual change associated with ayahuasca is “visualizations.” Shanon applied the term “visualization” to all ayahuasca-induced visual effects. Such effects may occur with the eyes either open or closed. Shanon (2010) describes six categories of visualizations: (a) visualizations without any semantic content (e.g., grid patterns, zigzagging lines, multi-colored concentric circles), (b) primitive figurative elements (e.g., large blobs of color from which emerge shapes looking like people or animals), (c) images (e.g., fast moving kaleidoscopic images, faces, images changing shape), (d) scenes, (e) virtual reality (i.e., “the ayahuasca drinker is transposed to another realm of existence, one which he or she feels to be very real”) (p. 92), and (f) visions of light.

Content of Ayahuasca Vision. What do people see during ayahuasca visions? Shanon divided the contents of ayahuasca visions into the following categories:

1. Personal and autobiographical material - scenes from the individuals’ personal past may appear, as illustrated by the following example:

   I once saw myself engaged in a conversation with an elderly English lady I met on a bus ride while travelling through the island of Malta. The event took place about ten years before I had the vision in question. During the entire intervening period, I never had any recollection of this episode nor had I thought about or reflected upon it. Yet, inspecting it in my ayahuasca induced vision, I realized that I was gaining new insights regarding my own self. (Shanon, 2010, p. 114)

2. Human beings - individuals may come in contact with other humans. These individuals are believed to be reincarnations of their past lives, or individuals who are identified as guides or teachers. Shanon explained:

   A special category of human beings often reported is that of guides, guardians, teachers, and other wise men and women...The seeing of such
figures is usually associated with the reception of knowledge. Most notably, shamans have told me that they determine how to cure a patient on the basis of information presented to them by wise persons they encounter in their visions. (Shanon, 2010, pp. 115–116)

3. The natural world - animals, plants, and mythological figures may be seen. Shanon (2010) explained:

Animals are the most common category of content…the animals most frequently seen are serpents, felines, and birds. This is even though, obviously, both my own personal and cultural background and those of my non-indigenous informants is so different from that of the Amerindians studied in the anthropological literature. (p. 117)

4. Mythological and phantasmagoric beings and creatures - mythological creatures seen during ayahuasca sessions include little green men, gnomes, elves, fairies, and monsters. Hybrid creatures (i.e., half-human and half-animal) are also seen. Creatures with multiple faces, extraterrestrials with spaceships, angels, and other celestial beings are also commonly reported. Shanon (2010) explained:

The term “angels” refers to winged humanlike beings made of light. Indeed, several informants have explained to me that the wings consist precisely of this - powerful light. Other, very common, supernatural humanlike beings are transparent figures. These are usually perceived as beings made of exceedingly delicate white webs of energy. Often they are explicitly described as “beings of light.” (p. 122)

Semi-divine beings (i.e., divine beings that are not God) are often seen. These have been identified as Jesus, the Virgin Mary, Buddha, as well as various Hindu and pre-Columbian deities. One woman had a vision of a goddess she described as the Great Mother:

She was the mother of all atoms and the matrix of all forms. All the atoms were dancing and the Mother was pure joy. She looked like an Egyptian Goddess who was covering, and protecting, all of creation with her body. “Why do you look like an Egyptian?” I asked the Goddess. “Actually, I do not have any form, but I appear as Egyptian because the Egyptians were the first to comprehend my secret,” she replied. (Shanon, 2010, p. 123)

Additionally, demons, monsters, and beings of death may be experienced. Shanon (2010) described an experience of his own:

The Angel of Death presented itself in front of me. I knew that if I did not hold on to my life energy, he would take me. I also knew that as long as I sustained an unwavering will to live he could do me no harm. In other words, this angel will take me only if I manifested and/or conveyed a weakening of the will to live. “But I do wish to live!” I reflected. With this, I summoned all my vital energies and the menacing figure in front of me retreated. (p. 123)
5. The cultural world - visions of buildings, cities, works of art, vehicles of transportation, musical instruments, books, scripts, and symbols are common. Shanon (2010) describes: “The cities seen in visions are usually exotic and most fabulous…Most of the cities I have seen seemed to belong to ancient civilizations whereas others were futuristic or magical, whose identity I could not determine” (p. 124).

Music may be heard, or may be the theme of the ayahuasca session. Songs heard by healers are said to be “received” during AIEs (Shanon, 2010, p. 105). At times one is instructed to sing the song. Such songs are referred to as icaros (Metzner, 2006, p. 14).

6. Places and landscapes - cities, landscapes, and even places of entertainment such as amusement parks and circuses may be seen during ayahuasca visions.

7. History and evolution, religion and myth - scenes from different historical periods are common. Religious rites, scenes of biological evolution, and mythological scenes are reported.

8. Visions of the divine - ayahuasca visions often have a spiritual or divine theme. These may involve heavenly or celestial scenes, divine beings, or visions of light. Shanon (2010) explained: “The Indians say that ayahuasca allows them to see God” (p. 131). Visions of light, which are frequently the most powerful part of an ayahuasca vision, occur in a variety of forms. Objects may appear to shine and radiate energy both with eyes open and closed. Colors seen during ayahuasca sessions are different than colors ever seen before. Part of the visual field may be illuminated, as if a flashlight were shining on it. Also, objects may appear as if covered with glitter or gems. Halos around people’s heads, auroras and rays of light radiating from bodies, and cones or clouds of light hovering above people may be seen. The experience of light is not solely a visual experience. The light may also be felt emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. Individuals may be enveloped by light or radiate light. Such experiences are frequently accompanied by feelings of bliss.

Beings of light may be seen as well. These beings are translucent and transparent. They are made of light. Typically, they have human features. Some may be viewed as angels.

Individuals may experience lines of light connecting objects in the physical world. These lines are typically viewed as “manifestations of cosmic energy” (Shanon, 2010, p. 280).

It may be possible to interact with the light experienced in visions. Individuals may even transform themselves into light. Shanon (2010) reported that some individuals encounter a “supreme light,” which is described as a powerful, ineffable spiritual experience (p. 281–282). Shanon (2010) described his own personal experience with this light:

And then I encountered the primordial point of light. The point from which all has been created. The point which is the guarding flame of all of
creation, of life, of intelligence whatever form intelligence takes. In religious traditions this point of light has been called “God.” (p. 282)

9. Other categories of special import - several other types of experiences are reported to occur during ayahuasca experiences. These include traveling high above the Earth, interplanetary voyages, or journeys to the sun. Individuals may describe the ability to see the inside of their bodies, as well as others’ bodies. Visions involving archetypes or mathematical formulae are reported. Scenes involving themes of birth and death are described. Visions of disembodied eyes, detached faces, open mouths of animals, and scenes of people dancing are also reported (Shanon, 2010).

**Emotional Changes.** Ayahuasca tends to heighten or intensify emotions. A wide variety of emotions may be experienced, ranging from ecstasy to terror (Shanon, 2010).

1. Fear - a belief that the individual is about to lose his/her mind or go insane may create fear. Alternatively, the person may believe he/she is about to die. The belief in one’s imminent demise is quite common, according to Shanon.
2. Ecstasy - a wide range of positive emotions including joy, wonder, marvel, bliss, or exhilaration may be experienced. These emotions may be associated with deep feelings of gratitude.
3. Peace - feelings of profound contentment, serenity, or well-being are reported. People also describe feeling cleansed and healed.
4. Love - increased empathy, compassion, affection, and love for others are described. These feelings are not limited to human beings, but may extend to animals, plants, and all existence.

**Cognitive Changes.** Cognitive changes may occur during ayahuasca sessions. These include changes in the content and process of thoughts. Improved cognitive functioning is commonly noted. Shanon (2010) explained:

Many individuals with whom I conversed said that under the effect of ayahuasca they find themselves thinking faster than normal and that they become more insightful. Many further say that the brew makes them more intelligent and that it bestows upon them special lucidity and mental clarity. (p. 63)

Cognitive changes during ayahuasca sessions include:

1. Personal concerns and self-understanding - people tend to reflect upon their lives and develop an enhanced psychological understanding of themselves. Many individuals say they learn more in a single ayahuasca session than in years of psychoanalysis. Also, individuals may feel they gain a deeper understanding of other people.
2. Cosmic Consciousness - individuals tend to view reality as made up of a non-material substance identified as “Cosmic Consciousness” (Shanon, 2010,
p. 164). Associated with this view is a belief that all of reality is interconnected and has a deep meaningfulness. Shanon pointed out that this view is consistent with Aldous Huxley’s “perennial philosophy” (Huxley, 1945). Ayahuasca also induces individuals to believe in the existence of a force that is the basis of everything. Shanon (2010) explained:

Often, this force is characterized as embodying love and its permeation as cosmic joy. Typically, it is interpreted to be the Godhead or the anima mundi and is characterized as being the source and fountain of everything good - life, wisdom, health, as well as intellectual and artistic creation. (p. 164)

The view that all physical reality is permeated by a force or intelligence is sometimes referred to as “animism” (Shanon, 2010, p. 167). Under the influence of ayahuasca, individuals frequently experience an animistic worldview.

3. Intuitive knowledge - knowledge gained during ayahuasca sessions is obtained through direct experience rather than deductive reasoning. Shanon referred to this direct form of knowledge as “clairvoyance” or “noetic feelings” (Shanon, 2010, p. 113, 205).

4. Expanded knowledge - ayahuasca often leads to a feeling that one has become all-knowing:

Under the effect of ayahuasca...drinkers feel...that they gain special privileged access to knowledge. Indeed, many informants have reported to me that under the ayahuasca intoxication they felt that their level of intelligence increased considerably and that they gained “comprehension of everything.” (Shanon, 2010, p. 64)

5. Synchronicity and syntony - individuals experience a special, meaningful relationship between events described as “synchronicity” (Shanon, 2010, p. 245). Syntony is defined as “the co-ordinated occurrence of two seemingly unrelated events” (p. 245). An example from Shanon involved seeing large butterflies whose wings flapped in coordination with music that was playing during an ayahuasca session (p. 245).

Transcendent Experiences. Ayahuasca may trigger transcendent or mystical experiences. Characteristics of such experiences during AIEs include:

1. Unity - a sense of unity may occur in two distinct forms. First, individuals feel that a oneness exists behind the multiplicity in the world. Second, individuals feel their individual boundaries dissolve, and they become one with everything.

2. Transcendence of space and time - individuals may experience themselves existing outside of space and time.

3. Noesis - this refers to the experience of gaining direct or intuitive knowledge.

4. Positive feelings of blessedness, joy, peace, and happiness - these feelings are common.
5. A sense of sacredness - this refers to experiences of the divine.

6. Paradoxicality - seemingly contradictory experiences may be resolved into a transcendent unity.

7. Ineffability - individuals frequently state their experiences are beyond verbal description.

**Similarities Between NDEs and AIEs**

Many of the phenomena reported to occur during NDEs also occur during AIEs. Eight of Moody’s nine key elements of NDEs are found in Shanon’s descriptions of AIEs. These are:

1. Sense of being dead - Moody reported that many people do not realize their experience has anything to do with death (Moody, 1989). He described the NDE as a state in which people, “find themselves floating above their body, looking at it from a distance, and suddenly feel fear and/or confusion” (Moody, 1989, p. 7). Individuals who have ingested ayahuasca may similarly feel separated from their body, which may trigger fear or confusion. This is particularly true for novice drinkers (Shanon, 2010).

2. A feeling of peace - feelings of profound contentment, peace, or serenity are reported during both NDEs (Moody, 1989) and AIEs (Shanon, 2010).

3. Out-of-body experience - individuals frequently describe leaving their body during NDEs (Moody, 1989). Ayahuasca similarly induces “flights of the soul” during which individuals experience their consciousness leaving their body (Shanon, 2010, p. 113). The sensation is described as one of floating or flying (Shanon, 2010).

4. Tunnel or void - passage through a tunnel, portal, or void is common during NDEs (Moody, 1989). Individuals who ingest ayahuasca may similarly experience a darkness or void (Shanon, 2010).

5. People of light - during NDEs, individuals frequently come in contact with deceased loved ones. An unearthly light may be encountered that permeates everything. Beautiful cities of light may be encountered. Communication occurs via thought transfer rather than words (Moody, 1989). Ayahuasca is said to “enable one to meet with the spirits of the dead” (Shanon, 2010, p. 218). A very bright light may be encountered during ayahuasca sessions. Cities may be seen during ayahuasca sessions. Communication via thought transfer is reported to occur with ayahuasca as well (Shanon, 2010).

6. Being of light - during NDEs, individuals often meet a “being of light” who radiates love and understanding (Moody, 1989, p. 13). During AIEs, individuals may come in contact with others who are identified as guides or teachers (Shanon, 2010). They may experience “visions of the Divine,” which are described as visions with a spiritual or divine theme (Shanon, 2010, p. 154).
7. Life review - during NDEs, people often describe seeing a review of their life (Moody, 1989). During AIEs, individuals may similarly experience a life review. Shanon (2010) explained, “one can see one’s own life” with ayahuasca (p. 114).

8. Rising rapidly into the heavens - during NDEs, some individuals float above their bodies and rise above the earth. They may observe the universe from the perspective of an astronaut or satellite (Moody, 1989). With ayahuasca, individuals may leave their body and float above their bodies. Furthermore, they may rise high above the earth into the cosmos (Shanon, 2010).

9. A reluctance to return to life - during NDEs, people often reach a border or limit beyond which they cannot return. They often describe a reluctance to return to their physical life (Moody, 1989). Shanon’s description of AIEs includes no similar reports involving a reluctance to return to everyday consciousness following the AIE.

One can now examine Shanon’s description of AIE phenomena and compare these with NDE phenomena. Although Moody’s initial description of NDE phenomena was groundbreaking, it was not intended to be an exhaustive examination of all NDE phenomena. Rather, Moody (1975) attempted to provide a “preliminary, general idea of what a person who is dying may experience” (p. 23). Much additional information has been gleaned about NDEs in the 38 years since Moody published his initial research. Thus, the following discussion includes accounts of NDEs from other authors as well.

The phenomena associated with AIEs can be grouped into 4 categories: (a) perceptual changes, (b) emotional changes, (c) cognitive changes, and (d) transcendent features.

**Perceptual Changes During AIEs and NDEs**

1. Hallucinations - perceptual changes during AIEs may include hallucinations (Shanon, 2010). Moody did not list hallucinations as a common feature of NDEs. However, hallucinations have been reported in close association with NDEs (e.g., Alexander, 2012).

2. Heightened sensory perception - individuals frequently describe heightened sensory perception during AIEs (Shanon, 2010). This phenomenon is also reported to occur during NDEs. Howard Storm, for example, reported that during his NDE: “All my senses were extremely vivid...How bizarre to feel all of my senses heightened and alert, as if I had just been born” (Storm, 2005, p. 10).

Anita Moorjani (2012) explained that during her NDE:

> Although I was no longer using my five physical senses, I had unlimited perception, as if a new sense had become available, one that was more heightened than any of our usual faculties. I had 360-degree peripheral vision with total awareness of my surroundings. (p. 67)
3. Visualizations - visions are frequent during AIEs and NDEs. Although Moody did not separate out visions as a distinct phenomenon of NDEs, he did describe visions as an aspect of NDEs (Moody, 1975). Moody also made an important distinction between visions and the hallucinations that may occur during delirium. He explained from his own NDE: “Delirium is patchy and confused, and the imagery is surrealistically distorted. This was not like that. The imagery was more real and coherent that the ordinary physical reality we live in” (Moody, 2012, p. 218).

The contents of the visionary experiences that occur during NDEs are often similar to the contents of the visionary experiences that occur during AIEs. These include:

a. Scenes from the person’s past - Moody termed this characteristic “The Review” and described it as a “panoramic review” of one’s life (Moody, 1975, p. 64). Brinkley (2008) described his life review as follows:

The Being of Light engulfed me, and as it did I began to experience my whole life, feeling and seeing everything that had ever happened to me. It was as though a dam had burst and every memory stored in my brain flowed out. (p. 9)

b. Mythological creatures - Moody’s account of NDEs does not include descriptions of little green men, gnomes, elves, fairies, or other mythological creatures. However, as many as 70 percent of children and 50 percent of adult NDErs encounter beings they refer to as “angels” during their NDEs (Atwater 2011, p. 22).

c. Monsters - although Moody did not describe monsters in his depiction of NDEs, others have encountered monsters during their NDEs. Storm (2005) wrote about humanoid creatures with long, sharp fingernails and teeth that were longer than normal who bit and scratched him, tearing off pieces of his flesh and eating it.

d. Landscapes - Moody made only a slight reference to landscapes in his description of NDEs. He said NDErs may encounter a field with a fence across it or a body of water (Moody, 1975). However, others offer more detailed descriptions of landscapes. Alexander (2012) experienced a “countryside” that was “green, lush, and earthlike” (p. 38–39). He explained:

I was flying, passing over trees and fields, streams and waterfalls, and here and there, people. There were children, too, laughing and playing. The people sang and danced around in circles, and sometimes I’d see a dog, running and jumping among them, as full of joy as the people were. (Alexander, 2012, p. 39)

e. Divine beings - Moody (1975) described a “being of light” as one of the key elements of an NDE (p. 58–64). Other luminous beings
were described as well including “guardian spirits” and “spiritual helpers” (Moody, 1975, p. 57). Brinkley (2008) met 13 “Beings of Light” and Alexander encountered “flocks of transparent orbs” (Alexander, 2012, p. 45).


It seemed to me that I was high up in space. Far below I saw the globe of the earth, bathed in a gloriously blue light. I saw the deep blue sea and the continents...My field of vision did not include the whole earth, but its global shape was plainly distinguishable and its outlines shone with a silvery gleam through that wonderful blue light. (pp. 289–290)

g. Archetypes or mathematical formulae - Moody did not report the experience of archetypes or mathematical formulae as typical of NDEs. However, other NDErs have reported such experiences. For example, while floating above the earth during his NDE, Carl Jung saw an image approaching. He realized this image was his doctor in the form of a “basileus of Kos” (i.e., king of a Greek island). Jung (1989) described:

Aha, this is my doctor, of course, the one who has been treating me. But now he is coming in his primal form, as a basileus of Kos. In life he was an avatar of this basileus, the temporal embodiment of the primal form, which has existed from the beginning. Now he is appearing in that primal form. (p. 292)

Ring (1985) described a man named Tom Sawyer who experienced mathematical formulae following his NDE:

He was beginning to be aware during the day of what seemed to be fragments of equations and mathematical symbols. One of them...was the Greek letter psi (Ψ), a symbol widely used in psychology, parapsychology, and physics and that often denotes “the unknown.” (p. 116)

4. Meeting teachers or guides - just as individuals frequently encounter teachers or guides during AIEs, individuals often meet teachers or guides during NDEs as well. Moody (1975) explained:

Quite a few have told me that at some point while they were dying...they became aware of the presence of other spiritual beings in their vicinity, beings who apparently were there to ease them through their transition into death, or, in two cases, to tell them that their time to die had not yet come and that they must return to their physical bodies. (p. 55)

5. Visions of cities - during AIEs, individuals may experience visions of cities. Moody made no mention of such visions in his initial description of NDEs.
However, in subsequent writings, he described “cities of lights” as an additional element of NDEs (Moody, 1983, p. 15). Numerous NDErs describe visions of cities. Ritchie (2007) visited a “glowing, seemingly endless city...the city and everything in it seemed to be made of light” (pp. 84–85). Brinkley (2008) visited a luminous city while traveling with a Being of Light during his NDE: “We swept into a city of cathedrals. These cathedrals were made entirely of a crystalline substance that glowed with a light that shone powerfully within.” (p. 27)

6. Visions of the divine - a common experience during AIEs are visions of divine beings. Moody (1975) reported that NDErs frequently describe meeting a being of light. Storm (2005) encountered a “luminous being” during his NDE (p. 25). Ritchie (2007) met “a Man made out of light” (p. 58).


It was the most beautiful and pleasant sound I’ve ever heard, and it didn’t stop. It was like a song that goes on forever. I felt awestruck, wanting only to listen. I didn’t just hear music. It seemed as if I were part of the music - and it played in and through my body. I stood still, and yet I felt embraced by the sounds...melodies and tones I’d never experienced before...Every sound blended, and each voice or instrument enhanced the others. (pp. 29–30)

**Emotional changes during AIEs and NDEs**

Four types of emotions are reported to occur during AIEs (Shanon, 2010): Fear, ecstasy, peace, and love. These emotions are also experienced during NDEs.

1. Fear - Moody made only a slight reference to fear occurring during NDEs. However, Nancy Evans Bush (2009) reviewed studies of NDEs looking for reports of frightening or distressing NDEs. She found 12 studies involving 1,369 NDErs in which 23% described frightening or distressing NDEs.

2. Ecstasy - Moody (1975) reported NDErs experience “intense feelings of joy, love, and peace” (p. 22). Similarly, he wrote: “Many people describe extremely pleasant feelings and sensations during the early stages of their experiences” (Moody, 1975, p. 28). Individual accounts from NDErs include: “My heart filled with the deepest joy I’ve ever experienced” (Piper, 2004, p. 31) and “Love, joy, ecstasy, and awe poured into me, through me, and engulfed me” (Moorjani, 2012, p. 65).

3. Peace - people describe feeling cleansed, healed, calm, or serene during AIEs (Shanon, 2010). Moody (1975) reported similar feelings of healing, tranquility, or peace during NDEs. Storm (2005) explained, “I became whole and well in the light” (p. 25). Heim described feeling a “divine calm” after falling off a mountain (quoted in Noyes & Kletti, 1972, p. 50). Brinkley (2008) wrote that his experience changed after being struck by lightning, “From immense pain I
found myself engulfed by peace and tranquility...It was like bathing in a glorious calmness” (p. 3).

4. Love - Moody (1975) described that individuals undergoing NDEs commonly describe strong feelings of love, particularly when they meet a “being of light” (p. 59). Ritchie (2007) felt love from the “Man made out of light” he encountered: “I knew that this Man loved me. Far more even than power, what emanated from this Presence was unconditional love. An astonishing love. A love beyond my wildest imagining” (p. 58). Brinkley (2008) wrote that the being of light he encountered was “like a bagful of diamonds emitting a soothing light of love” (p. 25).

Cognitive changes during AIEs and NDEs

Cognitive changes during AIEs are similar to those reported during NDEs. These include:

1. Personal concerns and self-understanding - Shanon (2010) described enhanced psychological understanding, a deeper understanding of other people, and cognitive enhancement during AIEs. Moody did not specifically mention these characteristics. However, he did make passing reference to them. In his description of the experience of being out of the body, he wrote that some NDErs “begin to think more lucidly and rapidly than in physical existence” (Moody, 1975, p. 50). Also, some NDErs can “see other people and understand their thoughts completely” (Moody, 1975, p. 53). Anecdotal reports of enhanced cognition during NDEs include Alexander’s (2012) description:

   To experience thinking outside the brain is to enter a world of instantaneous connections that make ordinary thinking (i.e., those aspects limited by the physical brain and the speed of light) seem like some hopelessly sleepy and plodding event. (p. 85)

Moorjani (2012) described how her thinking changed during her NDE:

   I seemed to just know and understand everything - not only what was going on around me, but also what everyone was feeling, as though I were able to see and feel through each person. I was able to sense their fears, their hopelessness, and their resignation to my situation (pp. 61–62).

2. Cosmic consciousness - Shanon (2010) described “Cosmic Consciousness” as a special state of consciousness in which all reality is experienced as interconnected. A deep meaningfulness is perceived along with a belief in the existence of a force that is the basis of everything. The closest Moody came to describing a similar experience was when he wrote that some NDErs feel they are “pure consciousness” once they depart their physical body (Moody, 1975, p. 42). Alexander’s (2012) description of “Cosmic Consciousness” is more expanded:
Consciousness is the basis of all that exists. I was so totally connected to it that there was often no real differentiation between “me” and the world I was moving through. If I had to summarize all this, I would say first, that the universe is much larger than it appears to be if we only look at its immediately visible parts...Second: We - each of us - are intricately, irremovable connected to the larger universe. (pp. 154–155)

Moorjani (2012) described a similar experience during her NDE, “I started to notice how I was continuing to expand to fill every space, until there was no separation between me and everything else. I encompassed - no, became - everything and everyone” (p. 64).

3. Intuitive knowledge - Shanon (2010) reported that individuals obtain knowledge through direct experience rather than deductive reasoning during AIEs. Although Moody did not describe intuitive knowledge as an aspect of NDEs, many NDErs report obtaining intuitive knowledge. Alexander (2012) explained:

The knowledge given to me was not “taught” in the way that a history lesson or math theorem would be. Insights happened directly, rather than needing to be coaxed and absorbed. Knowledge was stored without memorization, instantly and for good. (p. 49)

During his NDE, Jung (1989) obtained intuitive knowledge regarding his personal physician:

Suddenly the terrifying thought came to me that Dr. H. would have to die in my stead. I tried my best to talk to him about it, but he did not understand...I was firmly convinced that his life was in jeopardy. In actual fact I was his last patient. On April 4, 1944 - I still remember the exact date - I was allowed to sit up on the edge of my bed for the first time since the beginning of my illness, and on this same day Dr. H. took to his bed and did not leave it again. I heard that he was having intermittent attacks of fever. Soon afterward he died of septicemia. (p. 293)

4. Expanded knowledge - a feeling that one has become all knowing may occur during AIEs (Shanon, 2010). Moody did not describe this as an aspect of NDEs in his first book, but later he related:

Several people have told me that during their encounters with “death,” they got brief glimpses of an entire separate realm of existence in which all knowledge - whether of past, present, or future - seemed to co-exist in a sort of timeless state. Alternatively, this has been described as a moment of enlightenment in which the subject seemed to have complete knowledge. (Moody, 1983, pp. 9–10)

Individual accounts of expanded knowledge include Alexander’s (2012) who explained: “It will take me the rest of my life, and then some, to unpack what I learned up there” (p. 49). Brinkley (2008) related that during his NDE:
In the presence of these Beings of Light, I would become knowledge and know everything that was important to know. I could ask any question and know the answer. It was like being a drop of water bathed in the knowledge of the ocean, or a beam of light knowing what all light knows. (pp. 29–30)

5. Synchronicity and syntony - the perception of a special, non-accidental, meaningful relationship between events, known as synchronicity, is reported by Shanon (2010) to occur during AIEs. Syntony, or “the co-ordinated occurrence of two seemingly unrelated events,” is also reported (Shanon, 2010). Moody did not discuss synchronicity or syntony as characteristics of NDEs.

Transcendent features of AIEs and NDEs

Shanon (2010) described seven transcendent features of AIEs. Each of these has been reported in association with NDEs.

1. Unitive consciousness - two forms of interconnectedness that may occur during AIEs: First, a oneness may be experienced behind the multiplicity in the world; second, the boundaries of the self may dissolve so that the person becomes one with everything.

Moody did not describe unitive consciousness in his discussion of NDEs. However, many NDErs have described experiencing unitive consciousness. Alexander (2012) explained, “What I discovered out beyond is the indescribable immensity and complexity of the universe, and that consciousness is the basis of all that exists…We - each of us - are intricately, irremovably connected to the larger universe” (pp. 154–155).

2. Transcendence of space and time

Transcendence of space and time occurs during both AIEs and NDEs. Moody (1975) described this as a sense of “timelessness” (p. 47). Alexander (2012) explained: “Time in this place was different from the simple linear time we experience on earth” (pp. 39–40). Jung (1989) related: “I can describe the experience only as the ecstasy of a non-temporal state in which present, past, and future are one” (pp. 295–296).

3. Noesis - the direct experience of knowledge is reported during AIEs.

Moody did not describe noesis, but Alexander (2012) did:

The knowledge given me was not “taught” in the way that a history lesson or math theorem would be. Insights happened directly, rather than needing to be coaxed and absorbed. Knowledge was stored without memorization, instantly and for good. It didn’t fade, like ordinary information does, and to this day I still possess all of it, much more clearly than I possess the information that I gained over all of my years in school. (p. 49)
4. Positive feelings of blessedness, joy, peace, and happiness - these emotions are reported to occur during AIEs.

Moody did not list these emotions as a feature of NDEs, but did offer examples of these emotions from NDErs accounts. From an individual who was hospitalized with a severe kidney infection, “the most wonderful feelings came over me - feelings of peace, tranquility, a vanishing of all worries” (Moody, 1975, p. 75). Another individual who had a heart attack described, “It was such a wonderful, joyous feeling; there are just no words in human language to describe it” (Moody, 1975, p. 76).

5. A sense of sacredness - Shanon described experiences of the divine as being common during AIEs.

Moody mentioned experiences of the divine only in reference to encounters with a being of light. He pointed out that while descriptions of a being of light are invariable during NDEs, the interpretation of the identity of that being varies depending upon one’s religious background, training, or beliefs. For example, Christian individuals tend to identify the being of light as Christ whereas Jewish individuals identify the being as an angel (Moody, 1975). Similarly, Hindus describe meeting Yamraj, the god of death (Masumian, 2009). When Ritchie, who was a Christian, encountered a being of light, he thought, “You are in the presence of the Son of God” (Moody, 2007, p. 58). Alexander (2012), who was raised Christian, experienced a spinning melody of light that transported him to another reality and a “divine wind” that immediately answered any question he posed (p. 38, 46). He described an “orb” of light, which translated between himself and an “extraordinary presence.” He identified this orb as “God, the Creator, the Source who is responsible for making the universe and all in it” (Alexander, 2012, p. 47).

Some individuals ascribe an identity to the being of light that is inconsistent with their belief system. For example, Storm (2005), who was a self-avowed atheist prior to his NDE, identified the being of light he encountered as “King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Christ Jesus the Savior” (p. 26).

6. Paradoxicality

The resolution of seemingly contradictory experiences into a transcendent unity is reported during AIEs and NDEs. With NDEs, this may take the form of resolving contradictory beliefs into a new, transcendent belief. For example, Ritchie experienced cognitive dissonance during his NDE. After traveling out of his body, he returned to find a dead man in his bed:

It was the first time in this entire experience that the word death occurred to me in connection with what was happening. But I was not dead! How could I be dead and still be awake? Thinking. Experiencing. Death was different. (Ritchie, 2007, p. 56)

Eventually, Ritchie came to view death as the separation of consciousness from the physical body rather than a cessation of consciousness.
7. Ineffability

Experiences that occur during AIEs and NDEs are difficult to put into words (Holden, Greyson, & James, 2009; Moody, 1975; Ring, 1985; Shanon, 2010). Moody (1975) explained:

The events which those who have come near death have lived through lie outside our community of experience, so one might well expect that they would have some linguistic difficulties in expressing what happened to them. In fact, that is precisely the case. The persons involved uniformly characterize their experiences as ineffable, that is “inexpressible.” (pp. 25–26)

Alexander (2012) experienced difficulty describing the spinning melody made of light he encountered during his NDE, “If I tried for the rest of my life, I would never be able to do justice to this entity that now approached me…to come anywhere close to describing how beautiful it was” (p. 32). Jung (1989) said of his NDE, “This cannot be described; it is far too wonderful!” (p. 293).

Differences between NDEs and AIEs

Despite the numerous similarities between NDE and AIE phenomena, differences exist as well. For example, individuals do not typically look down upon their physical bodies during AIE’s as NDErs do. Also during AIEs, individuals do not find that others cannot hear them or that their hand goes right through others when they try to touch them.

Geometric patterns and other unformed visualizations are common during AIEs, but not NDEs. Mythological creatures such as little green men, gnomes, elves, or fairies are reported during AIEs, but not NDEs. The experience of a tunnel, which is reported during NDEs, is not reported during AIEs. A preponderance of visions with a jungle theme is common during AIEs, but not NDEs.

During AIEs, individuals report seeing the insides of bodies, disembodied eyes, faces, and open mouths of animals. Such visions are not reported during NDEs. Experiences of synchronicity and syntony are described during AIEs, but not NDEs.

During NDEs, individuals frequently encounter deceased loved ones. This is not common during AIEs. A reluctance to return to earthly life is another characteristic of NDEs that is not common with AIEs.

Summary

During the last half-century, improvements in life saving technologies such as cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and advanced cardiac life support (ACLS) have resulted in increasing number of individuals surviving a close brush with death (Sasson, Rogers, Dahl, & Kellerman, 2010; Sodhi, Singla, &
Shrivastava, 2011). Paralleling this increased survival rate is a growing number of individuals reporting near-death experiences. Studies examining the frequency of NDEs have reported incidence rates between 9–18% (Greyson, 1998) and 17–35% (Zingrone & Alvarado, 2009). One factor contributing to the variability in incidence rates is differences in study design, with higher incidence rates reported in retrospective studies than in prospective studies. Despite the large number of individuals experiencing NDEs, many questions remain about the etiology and neurophysiological correlates of NDEs.

A wide range of hypotheses has been proposed to explain NDEs (Blackmore, 1996; Greyson, 2009; Mobbs & Watt, 2012). Greyson et al. (2009) published a comprehensive review which examined the following hypotheses regarding the etiology of NDEs: (a) psychological hypotheses, such as expectation (i.e., NDEs are the products of the imagination to defend against the fear of death) and depersonalization (i.e., feelings of detachment and unreality protect one in the face of death), (b) physiological hypotheses including hypoxia and hypercarbia, (c) neurochemical hypotheses including the release of endorphins or endogenous NMDA receptor agonists, (d) neuroanatomical hypotheses, which suggest abnormal activity in the limbic system or temporal lobe is responsible for NDEs, and (e) REM intrusion.

Each of these hypotheses has proponents and detractors, yet none has been able to muster a consensus within the scientific community. This lack of consensus is indicative of both the wide range of belief systems that exists regarding altered states of consciousness as well as the dearth of replicable studies in this area.

More than a decade ago, Strassman (2001) postulated another hypothesis regarding the etiology of NDEs. He suggested N,N-Dimethyltryptamine (DMT) is released from the pineal gland when individuals die or come close to death. This release of DMT, he suggested, “mediates naturally occurring NDEs” (p. 221). Strassman subsequently abandoned this idea when he observed that themes of death and dying were infrequent during DMT sessions. However, many individuals who experience NDEs do not initially associate their experience with death or dying either (e.g., see Ritchie, 2007). Furthermore, as this article demonstrates, NDEs and ayahuasca-induced experiences share numerous phenomenological similarities. These similarities suggest several areas of potential future scientific inquiry.

Previous research exploring NDEs has been hampered by the spontaneous nature of these experiences, which makes it difficult to carry out studies in real time (i.e., at the time the NDE is occurring). Furthermore, technological problems (i.e., imperfect resuscitation methods) and ethical considerations (i.e., the dangers of inducing near-death states) have further impeded the study of NDEs (Holden, Greyson, & James, 2009). Most published studies of NDEs are therefore retrospective, which introduces the possibility of sampling bias (Greyson, 1998) and memory modification.
Because they are inducible and may be reproducible, ayahuasca-induced experiences provide unique opportunities to study biochemical, neurophysiological, psychological, and neuroanatomical changes in real time. Increased understanding of these changes and the state of consciousness in which they occur, may shed new light onto the phenomena that occur both during ayahuasca-induced experiences as well as during NDEs. Based upon the unique effects of ayahuasca, further research with this medicine is suggested.

Possible areas of future inquiry include (a) qualitative and quantitative studies examining the phenomena associated with NDEs and ayahuasca-induced experiences - such studies could further clarify the phenomenological similarities and differences between NDEs and ayahuasca-induced experiences, (b) psychological studies comparing the after-effects of NDEs and ayahuasca-induced experiences, (c) neuroimaging studies such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), positron emission tomography (PET), and single-photon emission computed tomography (SPECT) have the potential to not only increase our understanding of the mechanisms of action of ayahuasca, but also increase our understanding of the neurophysiological correlates of NDE phenomena such as out-of-body experiences, visions of light, transcendence of space and time, etc., and (d) electrophysiological studies such as electroencephalogram (EEG) and magnetoencephalography (MEG) could be used to examine electromagnetic changes induced by ayahuasca and search for similar changes during NDEs.

It is hoped that future research will lead to a greater understanding of the numerous similarities between NDEs and ayahuasca-induced experiences, as well as help clarify the biological, physiological, psychological, and transpersonal underpinnings of other transcendent states of consciousness.

Notes

1 Mr. Yamberla is a fourth generation practitioner of Natural Medicine from Iluman, Ecuador. He has extensive training and experience with the traditional use of ayahuasca. He now lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico

References


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ABSTRACT: In this qualitative exploratory study the heuristic research method was used to define and explore spiritual resonance as applied to psychotherapy. Twelve exemplary psychotherapists were recruited: 6 engaged in a single interview and 6 engaged in a three-stage process of group and individual semi-structured interviews. Data from the interview transcripts were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Results indicated that any subtle shifts in therapists' and clients' shared energy field may be perceived by therapists using intuitive tracking skills to sense resonance with clients to finer vibrations of expanded awareness. Spiritual resonance was further defined as vibrational patterns of greater cosmic wholeness experienced through soul awareness; inclusive of all other forms of resonance; not component based; and transmitted multi-directionally in the energy field between therapist, client, Divine source, and Earth. Client transformation ranged from symptom alleviation to profound emotional, physical, and spiritual development, changing their world view and perception of themselves.

A variety of cultural spiritual practices throughout the world’s spiritual traditions have included the use of an energy force originating from what might be referred to as Spirit. The teachings and use of these spiritual energies are understood differently within each tradition and cultural context. Generally, spiritual energy called upon and received by a skilled practitioner has been the source of healing and spiritual awakening for eons, oftentimes transmitted from a master to initiate, disciples, or persons suffering from dis-ease. Specific to traditions within varying cultural groups, there are usually spiritual masters of some kind who are known and recognized by the community. Among these spiritual masters are indigenous shamans and healers, Hindu gurus of India, Qi-gong masters and Taoist priests of China, to name a few. Often without
retaining the cultural and religious context in which the traditions originated, many of these practices have nonetheless made their way into the Western world. The healing and transcendent capabilities of these practices are being taught to Western individuals who have felt the call to be healers and spiritual teachers. I was among the called, and have incorporated those healing and transcendent techniques into my psychotherapy practice. However, describing what I do, and its effect, has been a challenge.

The loss of cultural and religious context for interpreting the effects of spiritual practices poses many difficulties, especially for scholarship. Therefore, this study was exploratory in nature. I hoped to collect data that might increase the understanding of the topic of inquiry; the phenomenon of an energetic interaction between practitioner and client that I refer to as spiritual resonance. Because the English language lacks the terms to describe experiences based in common spiritual traditions, data were collected via self-reporting of the participants’ experiences. I designed this study in order to explore spiritual resonance among psychotherapists who self-report instances of this phenomenon between them and their clients, the therapist’s range of experiences, and the impact of the psychotherapy on their clients. In addition, I investigated the clinician as the potential activator of a shared resonant field with the client.

One clarification of this field has come from Laszlo (2009), a systems theorist who has also written books accessible to the mass populace. He endorses the theory that there is a universal interconnecting field, suggesting that this field has been accessed by shamans and mystics throughout the ages. He described this field as a biofield that extends beyond the body and into the environment, transcending time and space, holding memory, and influencing evolution. “Through quantum effects, cells create a coherent field of information throughout the body. This ‘biofield’ supplements the ordinary flow of information with the multidimensional quasi-instant information needed to ensure the coordinated functioning of the whole organism” (Laszlo, 2009, p. 246). My supposition that this is the field in which spiritual resonance occurs.

The term, spiritual resonance, is not common to psychology and is absent in the literature related to psychological research. The term resonance is used in the natural sciences of physics, biology, and neuroscience and is referred to in psychology with a variety of names such as sympathetic resonance, emotional resonance, embodied resonance, and emotional attunement. Anderson (2000) was the first to present the concept of sympathetic resonance within the context of transpersonal research giving the analogy that when a cello string is played on one side of the room, the same string of a cello on the opposite side of the room will begin to vibrate, producing a sound in resonance with the original string. As one strikes a musical note from a distance, the vibration travels. “The resonance communicates and connects directly and immediately without intermediaries (except for air and space)” (Anderson, 2000, p. 33). This is the principle of resonance.

Kossak (2008), in his exploration of attunement through rhythmic improvisation, defined the concept of sympathetic resonance as “a vibratory
phenomenon produced by reflective merging created when energy (pulsation) moves between two or more bodies” (p. 37). Through mindful inquiry, Nagata (2002) explored the deep embodied experience of being in resonance with another individual in a multicultural interaction. She defined embodied resonance as “the bodymind’s experience of energetic vibration from both internal and external sources” (p. ii). Therefore, when two or more come together, a sympathetic resonance develops that becomes interpersonal. There is a shared experience of the same emotional vibration that becomes intensified as they resonate together.

When this study began, I initially defined spiritual resonance as harmonizing and aligning with the frequency of the energy pattern of expanded consciousness, beyond ego identification, in the attunement between therapist and client. This initial definition came out of my personal clinical experience as a felt sense of deep connection to a Divine force emerging during psychotherapy sessions. Daniel Siegel (2010), unrelated to this author, noted that “attuning to ourselves within mindful states, we have the observing and experiencing self in resonance” (p. 56). This alignment fosters an expanded awareness that, for the purposes of this study, represents a nonspecific state of consciousness in which boundaries diffuse, ego identification is diminished, and a cosmic interconnectedness to all things can be experienced. This term is not reflective of the stages of consciousness depicted through a particular spiritual tradition or lineage. This term merely presents a language that can be used to indicate the existence of an attainable level of consciousness that is transpersonal, beyond the egoic mind.

Because of the observations of Anderson (2000), Kossak (2008), Laszlo (2009), Nagata (2002), and Siegel (2010), one may reason that in the psychotherapy session an energetic joining between therapist and client can exist. This energetic joining fosters the expanded awareness that changes the resonance within the shared field. This changed resonance may lead to greater growth and transformation for both client and psychotherapist. Blackstone (2006) emphasized the role of relationship, within the context of a transpersonal model, between psychotherapist and client in creating a healing field within which the psychotherapist can put aside strategies and experience and respond to the experience of each moment. Within a clinical context, as investigated by Blackstone, there is an immediate knowing of emotional qualities from therapist to client within a therapeutic container. Blackstone’s exploration of the transsubjective field (an unfragmented nondual relational field) within the clinical setting supports the understanding of the healing effects achieved within a shared environment. Blackstone wrote from a mindful Buddhist perspective that “nondual consciousness is experienced as the basis of contact, the most intimate contact one could have with oneself and others” (p. 30).

Siegel (2010) emphasized the importance of being mindful. He addressed the role of mindfulness within the psychotherapeutic container, pointing out that in the safety of the experience a mindful presence develops where there is a flow of movement from two sides of reality. He referred to a process that he called mindsight, describing how individuals internally sense and shape energy and the
flow of information. According to Siegel, focused presence allows individuals to move from probable action, to a peak of activation within which individuals have a freedom of choice. This peak of activation leads to a range of unexplored possibility as awareness shifts from the internal to the external world. Attaining this stage of focus may create an environment in which peak experiences are reached.

In this focused environment, the client has an opportunity to view his or her emotional experiences and traumas from a larger spiritual context, and from a range of awareness that fosters compassion, self-acceptance, and an ability to potentially observe oneself from an expanded range of consciousness. An intention to resonate with this vibrational energy pattern may be invited by the psychotherapist and the client within the clinical container.

**Method**

The foundation of this qualitative study was built on personal and transpersonal elements; therefore, I chose to use heuristic method. Moustakas (1990) related that the heuristic process is a way of “creating a story that portrays the qualities, meanings, and essences of universally unique experiences” (p. 13). Therefore, the method fit well with my unique intent for this research to fluidly move from an egoic frame of reference to a range of expanded states of awareness during each phase of the study, creating a synthesis of experience for myself and the participants. Tart’s (1993) criticism of studies of altered states was that they are viewed through the perception of the egoic state of awareness, and that research has not been state specific. Studies utilizing a heuristic method support the process of synthesizing the data from egoic and expanded states of awareness. Moustakas (1990) described how the heuristic researcher does not look for cause and effect as in a traditional paradigm. Rather, the method provides an illumination of a process shared by firsthand accounts of participants who have an understanding of a meaningful phenomenon as a result of deep personal experience and an internal frame of reference. Six phases of the heuristic research process were utilized as described by Moustakas (1990): “Initial engagement, immersion into the topic and question, incubation, illumination, explication, and culmination of the research in a creative synthesis” (p. 27). Skills of alternative ways of knowing (Braud & Anderson, 1998), such as direct knowing, intuition, inner hearing and seeing, and bodily sensations, provided valid ways of understanding the topic of this study from multidimensional perspectives. My own experience of shamanic journeying was a helpful skill to access alternative ways of knowing. Through a meditative state the shaman consciously journeys into the sacred space of nonordinary reality awakening intuitive skills of inner vision, hearing, knowing, and bodily senses to retrieve an ancient body of knowledge from the world of Spirit (Harner, 1980; Villoldo, 2000; Villoldo & Krippner, 1987). The shaman then brings this knowledge back into the ordinary material world for teaching and healing.

Because of the design of this study, I explored not only the multidimensional process of the practitioner, but the participants’ perceptions and observations.
of the relationship of their experience to their clients’ process of transformation. Through this study I attempted to define a new term, spiritual resonance, within a clinical application using skills which integrated alternative ways of knowing with the ability to fluidly and subtly shift awareness. Therapists were sought who had cultivated the skills of perceiving thoughts of the egoic mind and sensory and intuitive experiences of expanded awareness through their own spiritual practice. (Selection criteria and process are discussed in the next section.) Welwood (2003) referred to this subtle shift in awareness as *double vision*, creating a balance of perception between the freedom of transcendent truth and the limitations of the immanent truth of the human domain. These skills of double vision allow the therapist to provide a way of maintaining the resonance of expanded awareness based in spiritual consciousness, and ground it with egoic thought within what Blackstone (2006) identified as the shared transsubjective field.

**Participants**

Psychotherapists licensed or certified by their state education department in the disciplines of psychology, social work, marriage and family therapy, mental health counseling, and clinical nursing were considered for participation. The number of participants from each discipline was not predetermined. Age, sex, and ethnicity were not factors for recruitment consideration. Letters of invitation were offered to transpersonal psychotherapists with whom I was already acquainted, knowing they met the criteria for the study. Additional recommendations and volunteers were solicited from other psychotherapists as well as meditation teachers and health care practitioners. Recruitment was accomplished via a letter of introduction that was mailed to potential participants. The letter provided an overview of the research and invited the potential participants to volunteer to join the study. All interested potential participants were prescreened via a telephone conversation. Those considered for participation must have indicated they experienced fluid perceptual shifts from egoic to expanded awareness in psychotherapeutic sessions and related to the term, spiritual resonance, based on their personal experience in their clinical work.

In order to determine whether the potential participants had the personal qualities of a transpersonal therapist, further qualification was determined by their scores on Butlein’s (2006) Nondual Embodiment Thematic Inventory (NETI). The NETI is a 20-item non-standardized Likert scale assessment of qualities of spiritual awakening. NETI data were not analyzed or saved, and were used only as an adjunct to the guidelines for qualification of participation in the study. All psychotherapists who met the initial criteria for inclusion in this study were willing to take the assessment.

Initially 16 psychotherapists were invited to join the study from which 12 were chosen to participate. These 12 exemplary licensed psychotherapists (three men and nine women ranging in age from 49 to 71 years) were recruited because they met the criteria for participation, were accessible for the study, and
accepted the invitation. This sample included seven licensed clinical social workers, three clinical nurse specialists, and two marriage and family counselors from New York, New Jersey, Colorado, and California. One of the participants was Asian and the remaining eleven were Caucasian, with varying cultural backgrounds. The participants had various spiritual backgrounds such as Buddhism, Shamanism, Catholicism, Judaism, Yoga, Western Kabbalistic mystery schools, Reiki, and other spiritual healing programs based in Eastern wisdom. Clinical approaches varied including Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), hypnotherapy, imagery, psycho-synthesis, meditation technique, and Tai Chi. Participants were not compensated for their participation. The demographic information for the participants is displayed in Table 1 and Table 2. They are divided into two groups as described in the design in the next section. All of the participants were given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym for purposes of confidentiality. For those who did not have a preference, I provided them with a pseudonym.

### TABLE 1
Demographic Information for Participants in the Three Stage Interview Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Years in practice</th>
<th>Spiritual preference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marissa</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Licensed Clinical Social Worker</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Yoga, Kabbalah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Licensed Clinical Nurse Specialist</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Belief in Higher Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Licensed Clinical Nurse Specialist</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Belief in Higher Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leya</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Licensed Clinical Social Worker</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Creative Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wu Wei</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Licensed Clinical Social Worker</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Buddhism, Sufism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Licensed Clinical Social Worker</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Shamanism, Mysticism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 2
Demographic Information for Participants in Single Interview Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Years in practice</th>
<th>Spiritual preference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Licensed Clinical Social Worker</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Catholic, Eucharistic minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Licensed Clinical Social Worker</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Buddhism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Licensed Clinical Nurse Specialist</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Licensed Clinical Social Worker</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Yoga, belief in Higher Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Licensed Marriage And Family Counselor</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Eastern wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flo</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Registered Marriage And Family Therapist</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Western mystery school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Design and Procedure

Once recruitment was complete, the 12 participants were divided and assigned to one of two groups. The six participants in the first group received an in-person interview as a group. This initial group process was used to create a focus group experience with semi-structured questions in order to develop consensus around the definition of what was being studied (Mertens, 2005). A second interview was conducted with each of the 6 participants individually, allowing for their story to unfold in face to face dialogue. Then, a final group interview was conducted which allowed the participants to reflect on their own personal and professional growth during the study, and the respective observed changes in their clients.

Each of the six participants in the second group was interviewed once individually. Group interviews were not conducted with the second group. The purpose of this research design was to compare the data from both groups for consistency and validity, and to determine if there were any biases that arose from a group process. In addition, participants from both groups were asked to keep a journal and to draw a picture of their interpretation of spiritual resonance within the context of their therapy session.

Data Analysis

The drawings were collected as data and also analyzed along with the verbal interview. Data analysis was not run on the journal entries. Interviews were transcribed, and the data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis in order to identify emergent themes within individual responses as well as common themes that ran across all the participants’ interview responses.

In heuristic research, the first step in treatment of the data is to gather and organize the data from one participant at a time (Moustakas, 1990); therefore, data were initially processed separately for the individuals within each group to insure that there were no biases due to group format, and then common themes were combined and differences were addressed. Equal weight was given to the importance of the analysis and interpretation of data from each group of participants. The participants involved in the three-stage process provided additional data about their learning experiences in a group setting over the course of their participation in the research project. Themes mentioned by a minimum of 3 participants were included in the list of themes. Themes were grouped and categorized.

Results

The resulting themes were organized for the purpose of greater understanding. However, the themes did not unfold in a linear fashion, and often were so interrelated that they appeared to coexist simultaneously. The themes are organized under four categories: (a) participants’ understanding of spiritual resonance,
which contains three themes; (b) inter-dynamic client therapist experience, which contains 10 themes, (c) client transformation, which contains six themes; and (d) therapist transformation, which contains one theme. These themes add to an evolving definition of spiritual resonance. The categories and each of their themes are displayed in Table 3.

### Participants’ Understanding of Spiritual Resonance

In the interviews the participants shared their experiences and noted how spiritual resonance begins with the attunement to a Divine force or Presence integrated through ongoing spiritual practice. They described the experience as one of blending the outer world with the inner spiritual world, leading to personal healing and transformation. The higher self, or soul, is present in the process. Anne stated, “Spiritual resonance is related to higher power. There is almost this blending between the outer reality and the inner reality that facilitates a process of transformation.” For Susan, spiritual resonance is related to “the Presence of All That Is.” The attunement was always present within the participants, and influenced all that was around them. It is through the cultivation of the attunement to a Divine spiritual force that the participants integrated a range of higher frequency or spiritual vibration within their energy field. Mary reported, “The spiritual resonance for me, it’s a feeling, it’s a knowing, it’s an energetic connection, it’s what connects every living thing on a vibration or an energy or frequency level.” This became a key factor of what the participants and clients brought into the shared energy field. As they maintained a clear expanded range of spiritual frequency, then their client across the room could choose to resonate with that frequency. Participants reported that spiritual resonance is not component-based, is a central core element to life, and not just healing. It is enveloped in a philosophy of wholeness, and encompasses all other subsets of resonance and healing. According to the participants, as stated by
Robin, “Spiritual resonance is the fabric from which all other healing emerges. It is all inclusive and provides the substance, or vibrational fabric, from which energy healing and nonlocal healing can happen.”

**Inter-Dynamic Client Therapist Experience**

According to the participants, a blending within the resonant field ultimately creates a unified field between therapist and client. Half of the participants reported experiencing an expansion beyond the body into a large and shared resonant field through meditation and imagery. Flo’s experience is an example:

I invite in “super-consciousness” and ask it to let me be a clear vehicle through which it can work. I set the intention for super-consciousness to be the director or the doer. It is not personal to me. I don’t label or define it. I leave myself open to how ever super-consciousness wants to express through me. The practice that I usually do is that I breathe into the center of my head, and I get that energy center (chakra) lit up, and then I go down to the center in my chest. I do this really quickly. This is all done in the space of about five minutes while the client is meditating. Then I ground it down into my core, which is my navel energy center. Once I bring awareness to all those centers along my spine, then the vertical core in me is resonating and I perceive light along my spine. It’s a continuum of energy that flows and vibrates along the spine. There is a physical tingly that spreads out and fills my whole body, and a great joy overtakes me… You start to resonate with your spiritual core, and then you do something. You find your client energetically. It’s a visceral knowing.

The other half of the participants reported a focused attention taking them deep within the body to a place of stillness and presence, while being aware of a shared resonance. Patricia described her experience as “a focus of attention and concentration without effort.” Both doorways into the experience lead to a heightened sensitivity to subtle shifts in the shared field. The participants and their clients are just being together in the moment.

The participants reported using intuitive skills of alternative ways of knowing such as inner knowing, inner hearing and seeing, and kinesthetic senses in order to monitor subtle shifts in the energy field as their clients process information within the silent space of expanded awareness. The participants use internal cues to determine interventions verbally, nonverbally, and vibrationally based on their clients’ resonance or nonresonance, as the participants maintain a state of centeredness and tranquility.

Participants reported that client assessment and healing blend into one fluid process which appears to be experienced simultaneously in a nonlinear fashion as they flow and evolve with the experience of what is happening in the moment within the shared energy field. According to the participants, they can determine spiritual resonance or nonresonance on the part of their client, and wait for vibrational shifts to determine when to engage the egoic mind. Susan
reported, “Often my eyes are closed and I’m watching them (clients) with my inner senses. I’m not seeing anything physically. It’s an energetic feeling. It’s a sensation that is definitely in my body.” She described the body sensation as “a buildup of intensity, and I can almost register it as an energy vibration.” Peter described his process with clients as one where he is in touch with his own resonance to Spirit, and feels inner tranquility. He intuitively matches this experience against the resonance of his client to assess whether they are in resonance or in non-resonance, then Peter can help name what is happening for the client. The assessment and the actual healing, which takes place as a realignment to spiritual resonance, happens almost simultaneously from Peter’s perspective. Participants agreed that it is within the nonlinear spaces of expanded awareness that the clients’ issues become resolved within the spiritual resonance itself as the participants and their clients attune to one another.

The focus of attention is internal for both therapist and client. Through modalities such as hypnotherapy, imagery, meditation, EMDR, and body movement, the participants can reportedly lead the client into the silent spaces of internal processing realizing the connection to their own essence. Robin reported:

I do EMDR and I have my clients close their eyes while they are processing (listening to music with headphones for bi-lateral stimulation). I’m holding an energy, I’m holding a spiritual frequency in the field and I feel myself in resonance with them. It’s a sensation of blending energetically with their field…I feel expansive, and bright, and light, and at peace. It feels as if I am bathing in a bright light. The way I defined it for myself is that in that range of frequency, they (clients) can start to process from a higher level of consciousness than they could without it...There’s been, in the moment, a transcendent experience that changes them, and they take that with them as they walk out of the door.

According to the participants, they and their clients have a foot in both worlds, that of expanded conscious awareness, and the egoic mind. There is a fluid dance between active mind and passive awareness as both clients and participants may have periods of time where their eyes are closed as they dwell in the internal spaces, meeting in a range of conscious awareness that is continuously unfolding.

Throughout the interview process it became evident that participants with training in spiritually-based energy healing practices such as Shamanic healing, Reiki, and Eastern philosophy energy healing programs reported experiences of directing transmissions of energy to chakra centers, or energy centers, within the client. These energy transmissions from the participants assisted in releasing energy blockages in the clients that were created by trauma and negative belief systems. The release of these blockages established a balance of energy flow within their clients’ fields, and maintained a shared experience that is resonant with the expanded frequencies of spiritual awareness. Heart to heart energy connection was a common reference. Joe creates a heart loop from his
heart to the client’s heart, shining his light on the client as a way of assisting in releasing energy blocks and establishing resonance. Mary related her experience in which she sets the intention for a heart to heart connection:

When my client enters my office, I open to that spiritual, soul connection. I draw on that energy. There’s a feeling around what we call the heart chakra, the center of the sternum, of almost like a quickening. It’s a wonderful feeling. I experience a gentle feeling as if we’re being held by this loving presence. It’s a sensation, an inner knowing, as love opens in me… I feel that I’m in touch with a deeper place. I’m just experiencing the connection, the resonance… Two fields come together and cross over in communication with one another. It’s an absolute co-creation. We are both holding the field together. It’s that energy, that sensation. I can feel it in my body as a validation, a quickening when the client starts to resonate in that space with me.

Other therapists, primarily reporting Buddhist training within the interview process, indicated that transmission is multi-directional, mutual, and happens based on the consciousness that they have established within themselves. They have no intention to send energy. Wu Wei had studied Sufism and Buddhism and believes that the energy is always in him and accessible. He stated, “I just feel the energy. I don’t really have to do anything. It’s just there. I’m just light, and the light shines. I’m present, and they relax.” Participants reported a common belief that they are a vessel or vehicle for spiritual resonance or the channel through which spiritual resonance flows. Ultimately, as spiritual resonance is achieved, the transmission becomes multi-directional for both participant and client, and one unified field emerges.

The most commonly reported feelings of the participants during the sharing of spiritual resonance with their clients were inner peace and spaciousness. The experience of spaciousness was commonly described as a sense of expansion of their energy field, with open and flowing energy. It was a difficult term for participants to quantify. Kinesthetic sensations of lightness, tingling, expansion, flow, or quickening were felt. These different words communicated a common awareness of a flow of energy occurring within their field, which included a bodily component. Some participants reported the tingling or quickening as energy running throughout the body as spiritual truth was recognized within the session. Half of the participants, of Buddhist and Kabbalistic orientations, reported experiences of presence as they dropped deeper into the body. Others described feelings of expansion beyond the body. Participants reported that as the resonance intensifies the experience in the shared field, they may feel joy, bliss, compassion, and unconditional spiritual love. Often these experiences are happening within them at the same time. Judgments and preconceived ideas fall away. The participants expressed being still within a state of not knowing, where deep inner knowing may emerge.

The participants reportedly step out of the egoic mind, and function from the consciousness of the higher self, or soul consciousness. The therapy itself is
detached from linear time and space as intuition and sensory experience guides the process. Marissa explained:

It starts out as a physiological experience. I think that what starts to happen is that I may just feel my heart opening first. You know it’s an energy. It just starts to open my shoulders. It’s almost an automatic response when I sit down and I’m opening up to somebody and I’m listening. That’s exactly what I’m doing. I’m opening my body. I’m opening my heart. I’m opening my shoulders and my spine gets straight and it feels like the energy is moving up my spine up through the top of my head. And what also happens is that in my head there’s a vibration that feels like a spiral, and that’s what happens to me when I meditate. So it may start at the top of my head and comes down, maybe into my third eye, and my whole head feels like it’s spiraling. It feels like a vibrational energy. It makes my eyes twitch and if I again allow it, it’ll come down through my neck, sometimes it will open the neck, which is one of the most exquisite feelings that I have ever experienced. And I feel very peaceful. There’s no effort. It’s receptive. It’s spacious. And so when people talk I’m listening, but I’m listening with my whole body. I’m not necessarily listening to their words.

The participants teach their clients to step back from their egoic perceptions and experience an expanded awareness where they can detach from ego in order for inner wisdom to emerge. As therapists detach from ego, they are also not attached to the goals, expectations, and outcome for the client, according to the participants. The therapy is a moment-to-moment process for the participants that allows their clients to make the choice as to whether or not he or she chooses to be in resonance with expanded spiritual consciousness.

Participants consistently reported that the concepts of transference and countertransference do not apply the same way as within a psychodynamic model. As the therapist detaches from false ego and is nonattached to outcome, the client is taught to do the same. The participants have observed that the silent internal process of therapist and client allows the client’s spiritual wisdom to emerge, and deters the projection onto the therapist as being the idealized or devalued representation of personal family dynamic. The participants reported that this process discourages the codependent role of the therapist needing to fix the client, as spiritual wisdom becomes internal and personal to the client. Participants experienced that transference and countertransference issues emerge if they do not stay balanced and in a state of nonattachment.

Using skills of alternative ways of knowing, on a deep intuitive level the participants continuously sense shifts in the field through their internal feedback mechanisms. As the energy within the field intensifies, peaks, and harmonizes, the participants reported that they can sense when to stop the internal processing and bring the client’s awareness back to the egoic mind in order to understand and integrate their process. According to Joe, it is important to engage the egoic mind after the vibrational shift, and not before. He uses his intuitive knowing, inner vision, and kinesthetic senses to determine
the vibrational shift and then initiates dialogue. This process helps the client to ground and integrate his or her internal process, observing what had emerged from inherent spiritual wisdom. According to participants, this process leads to a leap in awareness, as well as emotional, cognitive, and behavioral changes.

Client Transformation

Participants reported that their clients show developmental changes indicating that spiritual consciousness is developing as they wake up and observe themselves from a larger spiritual context, begin to read spiritual books, attend meditation or Yoga classes, and become aware of what they termed as their higher power or higher self. The terms higher self, higher power, and higher consciousness had been used interchangeably by participants of this study without a definition based in any particular spiritual tradition. However, they were referring to a part of themselves that experiences a connection to a Divine force through an expanded level of consciousness, outside of their egoic state of consciousness. Some defined it as soul consciousness. According to the participants, some of their clients reported that their true parent is God, and let go of their attachment to their anger towards their family of origin. Their frame of reference about their place in the world and their identity became related to their spiritual essence. Flo’s client expressed great joy to her as he learned to just be in another way through a nonlinear process that created a leap of consciousness and awareness. It was through this observed leap in consciousness that transformation unfolded. Wu Wei stated, “As I connect to my essence, the client connects to his.”

Participants commonly observed and heard their clients report that they begin to feel safe and at peace within the session, and then begin to integrate that feeling within themselves, experiencing these emotions outside of the session. Other emotions such as trust, faith, love, joy, forgiveness of self and others emerged. Anxiety, fear, and depression were alleviated. Participants reported that their clients gave up future thinking and the fear attached to it. Their minds quiet and their self-judgments subsided as their self-esteem improved. Flo reported that her client learned to “differentiate when he was getting caught in his habitual thinking and then find that place of spiritual resonance within himself.” This ability to become the observer, self-aware of old patterns, helps the client to make different choices based in knowing the experience of peace, tranquility, and joy. According to the participants, this cognitive and emotional shift allowed their clients to become observers of their beliefs and thought processes from a place of expanded consciousness and spiritual wisdom.

Subtle body changes such as relaxation, alleviation of stress and pain, posture change, and breathing pattern changes were noticed by the participants and their clients within the session as spiritual resonance was shared. These changes became permanent over time. More dramatic physical changes occurred that surprised the client and the medical community such as with Angel’s client who began to walk with a cane after being paraplegic. According to the
Participants, as clients observed themselves from a level of spiritual awareness they developed new tools to function more effectively in their world, improving their quality of life.

Participants observed that their clients opened their hearts more to those around them and reached out in ways that differed from the ways they connected in the past. Clients began to set clearer boundaries in their world and disengaged from dysfunctional family patterns. Old habits were given up, such as drug or alcohol use, and were replaced by spiritual practice.

The participants reported that their ability to sense subtle shifts within the energy field allows them to notice the vibrational changes in the client. These vibrational changes sensed in the client accompany changes in emotions, beliefs, and evolving spiritual consciousness. Flo reported that she would see the illumination in the energy field of her client who lit up vibrationally as he reflected on the joy of his inner experience. The participants have experienced their clients as being spacious, luminescent, bright, radiant, etc. The participants' observations are not necessarily accompanied by external cues. Clients reported to their therapists that as their inner light became brighter, it was noticed by others.

**Therapist Transformation**

According to the participants, spiritual resonance is a mutual process of transformation. Joe recognized his own transformation when he reported, “When I’m in that higher place I’m right there for them. But afterwards I might recognize I could sense a part of me receiving that same love and healing.” Mary reported, “When their light goes on, it’s always on, but as it brightens and you see that, through however you see it, through their movement, through their eyes, through their expression, through their words, your light automatically starts to brighten.” Participants reported feelings of joy and gratitude for being a vessel for this higher range of consciousness, which is brought into their work as their own spiritual development continually unfolds. Leya expressed, “I’m grateful to be aware of Spirit in my life, and that I’m part of it. It’s a beautiful thing. When I treat people, that gratitude spills over. It becomes easier to treat people. It’s such a natural process.”

**DISCUSSION**

The findings of the study provided answers to the three research questions looking for the range of therapists' experiences, the ways therapists activate the energetic field in the therapy session, and the impact of the sessions on the clients. The transpersonal qualities of the therapist who participated in the study were highlighted during the research and are briefly discussed. This section ends with a more expanded definition of spiritual resonance that developed as a result of the research.
Therapists’ Ranges of Experiences

By engaging in this exploration, the participants were required to search within themselves in order to find their personal meaning of spiritual resonance based in their deep experience of this phenomenon. The participants commonly related to the framework of spiritual attunement, which was vibrational in nature. Their internal sensing of vibration within the field appeared to be a deep intuitive knowing and sensory experience of what has been scientifically explored and explained by Tiller (1997), McCraty (2003), and Siegel (2010). In their psychotherapy practices, the participants utilized their skills of alternative ways of knowing through their intuitive internal cues, creating an innate sense of perceiving vibration. Their frame of reference was what they referred to as their higher power, or soul consciousness. It is within this range of vibration that they experienced transcendent experiences reflective of an expanded awareness of soul consciousness. In this state, ego identification diminished, boundaries diffused, and consciousness became expanded within an experience of focused attention, inner peace, cosmic connection, and joy.

The majority of participants related somatic and visual events that anchored the experience, as a balance to the purely intuitive knowing. Similar to the focusing techniques of Gendlin (1996) and the skills of mindsight, described by Siegel (2010), an internal focus of deep intuition, inner knowing, inner vision, kinesthetic and proprioceptive sensation take the therapist into an expanded state of awareness. Half of the participants described an expanded state of awareness related to focused attention without effort, experiencing Presence as all there is, reflecting a Buddhist orientation. Others reported a sense of expansion beyond the body, connecting and blending into all that is around them. However, either experience was accompanied with spaciousness, deep inner peace, physical relaxation, deep and slow breathing, and experiences of energy running through the body identified by tingling sensations. These sensations were interpreted as acknowledgement of emerging deep inner truth. A common theme was the experience of the body illuminating with light, as constricted boundaries and awareness of body weight dissolved. The focus is in the body and not outside of the body. Gendlin’s (1996) work addressed key components of the therapist and client experience as it was described by the participants. Gendlin wrote that when a deep felt sense emerges from within the body, it is experienced as an intricate whole, and changes the entire constellation of experience. He believed that the experience borders between the conscious and unconscious. However, the therapists’ descriptions of their experiences with their clients add an additional element beyond Gendlin’s model. Participants described body consciousness as not only holding open a doorway for conscious and unconscious material to emerge, but for experiences of expanded awareness to be known. This point of convergence between the conscious, unconscious, and expanded conscious awareness is where psychological healing and spiritual development can unfold side by side. This expanded awareness, described by many participants as soul consciousness, resonates within the shared transsubjective field. The presence of spiritual resonance brings a transcendent quality to the experience within the shared
field, which has the potential to dramatically shift experiences of emotion and cognition.

McCraty and Childre (2010) offered a neurobiological explanation of participants’ reported experiences of resonance, described as a flow of shared energy based in a centered state of inner peace and loving spiritual attunement. The authors stated, “When coherence is increased in a system that is coupled to other systems, it can pull the other systems into increased synchronization and more efficient function” (p. 11). Participants’ reporting of inner peace, joy, unconditional love, spaciousness, empathy, and compassion are consistent with qualities of transpersonal therapists as described by Butlein (2006) and Phelon (2001). Blackstone (2006) suggested that “the love that they experience within their own body resonates with the love in the other person’s body. The mutual stimulation of this resonance is healing in itself” (p. 36). The participants were all able to sense harmony in the field as their clients attune to spiritual resonance. The harmony and flow of energy are determining factors in the therapist’s assessment of spiritual resonance. Intuitive knowing, inner vision, and kinesthetic sensations such as lightness, tingling, expansion, relaxation, steady deep breathing, flow, or quickening may be used as internal feedback mechanisms. The integration of intuitive knowing with an immediate experience of sensation provides the therapist with the internal feedback mechanisms to assess resonance within the shared field.

These internal feedback mechanisms are consistent with the skills of mindsight as described by Siegel (2010). This internal step-by-step tracking of the client, as the therapist stays present, helps the client “free up the drive for integration” (Siegel, 2010, p. 149). Siegel stated, “This is the way a solitary system expands its complexity by dyadic states of awareness that promote more highly integrated configurations” (p. 149). Siegel’s understanding, based in interpersonal neurobiology, takes the Buddhist skills of mindfulness and mindsight into the psychotherapeutic container. He provided scientific meaning to the participants’ experience of moving with the client from an egoic perception, to one of expanded awareness where boundaries diffuse and integration is enhanced.

The 12 participants in this preliminary study experienced themselves as opening to the energy of spiritual resonance within the session, and vibrationally inviting the client to share that coherent resonant field. Half of the participants believed that they radiate this frequency and the client can choose to resonate or not. The other half of the participants use skills of nonlocal energy healing to transmit energy from heart-to-heart, or to intentionally work with the client’s energetic system—the chakra system—from a distance, establishing a balance and greater flow of energy between them and the client. These techniques of energy healing, although from a different reference point, are compatible with the study of McCraty et al. (1998) where they found that the electromagnetic signals of the heart are the strongest signals emanating from the body. The heart-to-heart connection leads to greater coherence of internal systems, and resonance between individuals.
The participants found that this vibrational field becomes one expansive field of radiant light where the transmission of spiritual radiance, whether intentional or not, ultimately becomes multi-directional, corroborating Blackstone’s (2006) theoretical model. Blackstone (2006) reported that in her experience transmission of energy is multi-directional between therapist and client. The participants indicated that psychotherapists may choose to integrate the skills of inner vision, inner knowing, nonlocal healing techniques, imagery, and meditation into the therapeutic process within this shared field of multi-directional energy flow.

**Activating the Field**

In deeper exploration, each participant believed that the attunement to a Divine cosmic force is always within them, and they bring this force with them wherever they go. Although the client also has a range of vibration that is emanating within the field, more often than not the client has not done the degree of spiritual or personal work as the psychotherapist. Therefore, the client’s range of frequency may not be as refined. For example, a client who is angry and depressed can have a resonance to energy that is tangibly denser than the energy of spiritual resonance. Both therapist and client bring a range of energy, which contributes to the experience of this dynamic ever changing field. However, if in the session the therapist is centered and balanced, then he or she is able to maintain a range of vibrational frequency, with which the client may or may not choose to resonate.

**Observed Client Transformation**

The participants in this study reported that the responses of clients within their therapy sessions seemed to indicate potential for nonlinear leaps in conscious awareness and developmental strides. Many clients learned to move fluidly from egoic awareness to an expanded range of consciousness with diffused ego identification. This is very different from a psychodynamic framework where the goal is to teach the client to develop an observing ego from which point the client’s maladaptive behavior and belief systems could become ego-dystonic. In so doing, the client becomes aware and uncomfortable with the old patterns that had been woven into his or her personality structure. Within a transpersonal model, the context shifts from ego identification to a more expanded transpersonal frame of reference. In this transpersonal frame of reference the client can explore the transpersonal domain and dis-identify with the ego (Vaughan, 1993).

Participants consistently reported experiences with clients who were learning to observe themselves from the perspective of what many of them termed to be a higher consciousness within an experience of expanded awareness. This term was not connected to a particular spiritual tradition, but was used to explain their connection to a part of themselves that felt connected and guided by a Divine force. Other clients did not necessarily report connection to a Divine
cosmic force, but their attachment to their ego identity began to deconstruct as they were held in the loving space of spiritual resonance, without the therapist’s attachment to judgment or outcome. This observation is consistent with reports of how other psychotherapists have seen their clients transform within a framework that they refer to as a nondual therapy approach (Blackstone, 2006; Krystal, 2003). This transformational process was observed by therapists that actively introduced meditation technique, and those that only provided silent space within a shared field of spiritual resonance.

Participants reported that the context of many of the clients’ personal issues were changing within the sessions to reflect greater spiritual awareness. Depression and anxiety lifted as they began to feel safe, peaceful, joyful, and forgiving of themselves and others. Future thinking, which was fear-based, was diminished as the clients learned to stay focused in the moment. Blackstone (2006), Helen, Shake’ and Kimberley (2007), and Phelon (2001) all reported that the healing presence of the therapist is an essential factor in the clients’ ability to feel safe and self-accepting. However, the current study offers the additional variable of spiritual resonance as an ingredient for transformation.

As pointed out in the results, the participants noted that their clients reported evidence they were developing spiritual consciousness as they attended meditation and Yoga classes, read spiritual books, and positively changed their relationships with their family and friends. Patricia reported, “The client feels inner guidance to pursue spiritual books or classes. Spiritual life blossoms. The client integrates spiritual principles. There is self-acceptance, joy, spiritual emergence, flow.” Study participants revealed that their clients reported setting clearer boundaries in their world, while their internal boundaries became more diffuse and open to their own spiritual attunement. Their frame of reference became related to their spiritual essence over time, recognizing that this resonance was within them. This was evident with one participant’s client who naturally created a healthy and loving interaction with his daughter as he opened to the essence of love within himself.

Some clients had dramatic peak experiences during the session, while others had dramatic healings occur over time. For two study participants, their clients went through significant physical transformation, beyond what the medical community could create or understand. Another participant’s client transformed her perception of the meaning of her accident and death of her boyfriend through a peak experience within the session. As some clients reported a sudden awareness of their connection to a Divine force within the session, their belief systems changed in that moment. Although clients may regress, evidence has shown that once they have had an experience that is peaceful, joyful, and expansive, they can return to that experience, which they had not previously known. Wilber (2000) stated:

"In the archeology of the Self, deep within the persona lies the transpersonal, which takes you far beyond the personal: always within and beyond. Experienced previously only in peak experiences, or as a back-ground intuition of immortality, wonder, and grace, the soul begins to emerge more..."
permanently in consciousness. Not yet infinite and all-embracing, no longer merely personal and mortal, the soul is the great intermediate conveyor between pure Spirit and individual self. (p. 106)

This integration as described by Wilber (2000) does not occur over night; however, participants have reported this integration unfolding during the process of treatment. As the client’s energy field blended together with the therapist’s in the deep connection of spiritual resonance, the client ultimately learned to be separate and whole, recognizing that the spiritual wisdom of the healer lies within. The range of spiritual resonance appeared to be integrated vibrationally within the client. Participants noted that their clients began to integrate a more expansive and transpersonal awareness of themselves and their issues as they showed evidence of replacing old addictive patterns with meditation and spiritual practice. The clients reported that the intermediary became their higher self or their soul, corroborating with Wilber’s point of view.

Siegel (2007) supposed that one explanation for this level of complex integration within the client may have to do with the mirror neurons within the brain. While there are not definitive neural correlates at this time to attunement and resonance, mirror neurons may offer a new pathway in the understanding of attunement. Mirror neurons allow one individual to mirror and integrate the behavior of another as his or her own. This theory of attunement through the activation of mirror neurons has been substantiated in terms of how outer world behavior is mirrored, but Siegel thought that attunement to internal states may activate the mirror neuron system as well. This may be evidenced as the participants stayed centered in spiritual resonance. Their internal feedback mechanisms helped them to track ongoing transformation as they tuned in to the client’s vibrational field, paying attention to the resonance or non-resonance between the two of them, as clients learned to experience attunement within themselves. Siegel (2010) thought this step-by-step joining with the client in the moment, without expectation or attachment to outcome, leads to greater and more complex levels of integration. Siegel described that the combination of mindfulness, brain function, and relationship creates triception (triangle of well-being). He stated:

Triception is the way we perceive the flow of energy and information in the triangle of well-being. We perceive this flow as it moves through the nervous system (brain as mechanism of flow), as it is monitored and modified (mind as regulation), and as it is communicated among people (relationships as sharing). As this is a triangle of not just energy and information flow, but of well-being, triception is the way we perceive our states of integration and then move the system from chaos and/or rigidity toward the harmony of integrative flow. This triangle is of an integrated brain, empathic relationships, and a coherent, resilient mind. (Siegel, 2010, p. 122)

The author reported that the encouragement of the client to stay with his or her internal process provides validation for the client and acceptance of this
moment-to-moment flow of energy and information. Siegel’s finding was consistently corroborated by the participants’ experiences as reported in the current study. As the therapist is present for the client in the moment without expectation or ego involvement, the space is created for the client’s own spiritual wisdom to emerge. The question arises of how the therapist’s ability to maintain spiritual resonance may influence higher brain integration and functioning within the framework of triception.

The participants observed that their clients felt safe and at ease in the process, and their resistance and body tension faded. The feeling of safety helps the client to relax into silent reflection bathed in the frequency of shared spiritual resonance. This process allows for the emergence of a deep inner wisdom and understanding to integrate within the client’s consciousness. There is potential for the client’s new understanding of his or her issue and identity in the world to come from an experience of integrated wholeness and cosmic connection, which cannot be analytically reduced to the sum of its parts.

Transpersonal Psychotherapists

The skills of the participants were consistent with Butlein’s (2006) definition of the awakened therapist, a therapist who lives a transpersonal life, rather than just exhibits the qualities of a transpersonal therapist. Half of the participants reported fluidly moving from egoic awareness to expanded awareness within a meditative state, indicative of Butlein’s awakened therapist and the double vision as described by Welwood (2003). At times, the participants experienced a range of levels of awareness simultaneously, having a foot in both worlds all at once. The other half of the participants described a focused presence that was based in an expanded awareness, but they did not think their experiences were that of a meditative state. Presence is all there is in those moments for them, as in Buddhist practice. All participants felt that this model of psychotherapy was a moment-to-moment practice, without expectation, and without ego attachment.

Although the participants could not accurately evaluate their state of consciousness, they all knew that their work was being done in an experience of expanded awareness, beyond egoic thought. The participants’ experiences were consistent with Blackstone’s (2006) transpersonal clinical framework. Her explanation of working within an experience of what she referred to as nondual realization, all inclusive of egoic thinking as well as expansive awareness of a unified whole, provides common ground and perhaps a context for the focus of awareness of the participants. The flow of information within a relaxed and focused presence, without interruption, contained in the shared transsubjective field, holds meaning for this study. The focus on the impact of spiritual resonance within the psychotherapeutic container from experiential accounts may add another dimension to the field of transpersonal psychotherapy as further research is implemented based on this preliminary study.
Spiritual Resonance

Through the findings of this exploratory study, the definition of spiritual resonance expanded as follows: Spiritual resonance is described to be a vibrational pattern of greater cosmic wholeness, which is experienced as being accessed by soul awareness. Spiritual resonance is a central core of life, and not just healing. This type of resonance is the vibrational fabric from which healing and life emerge, and is not component based. Spiritual resonance is inclusive of all other forms of resonance. Spiritual resonance is perceived as a gift to the receiver who is consciously aware of the experience, but the potential for realization is present in all of us. Spiritual resonance is realized through an experience of expanded awareness, usually brought about through spiritual practice, and is nonlinear in nature transcending time and space. In the experience of spiritual resonance, the therapist and client may become transmitters of this range of energy within the therapy session, and contribute to the mutually created and shared energy field. Within the vibrational range of spiritual resonance, the client has the choice to resonate with that range of frequency, dis-identifying with ego, changing perception, and transforming within the unified experience of cosmic wholeness. Ultimately, the transmission of spiritual resonance is multi-directional between therapist, client, a Divine cosmic source, and Earth.

The experience of the expanded awareness of soul consciousness creates the frame of reference for spiritual resonance. The deep internal process of intuition, inner knowing, sensory experience, or listening to the whispers of the soul, as described by Wilber (2000), provides a spiritual context for the experience of the therapist. Khan (1994) wrote that as one turns within and listens to the cosmos, a vibration can be found inside each individual that is resonant with what is being picked up from the spheres of the universe. These cosmic spheres are vibrationally finer than the everyday earthly world of our egoic perceptions. Since there are many types of resonance, this perception of cosmic connection provides an important context within which to understand the experience of spiritual resonance, as explored in this study.

All of the participants in this study had a doorway into a deeper intuitive part of themselves that fostered their cultivation of spiritual consciousness. One doorway into the experience was steeped in a deep internal intuitive and bodily knowing with an experience of expansion. This knowing exists as the vertical core running through the body. From a spiritual frame of reference, this is the channel within which subtle energy runs from the base of the spine through the crown chakra above the head (Blackstone, 2006). This subtle energy, often referred to in Hindu terms as Kundalini, moves along this vertical core, which awakens us to fundamental consciousness based in an experience of expanded awareness (Blackstone, 2006). It is activated through imagery and meditation, with sensations of tingling energy running up the spine and throughout the body. Spaciousness and expansion beyond the limits of the physical body were common reports. A second doorway was described by therapists where they dropped deeper into the body, to a place of silence, peace, and presence.

Therapist as a Container for Spiritual Resonance
Spaciousness and expansiveness permeated their senses, and their hearts opened.

These doorways lead to the deeper intuitive knowing. As one participant pointed out, the intuition is not everyday intuition. This intuition, based on cosmic spiritual connection, is intuition with a big “I,” and perceived as direct connection to a Divine source. The participants experienced this intuition as a gift and commonly reported that he or she is a vehicle or vessel for the expression of spiritual resonance. The experience and perception of this framework contributed to the participants’ perceptions that spiritual resonance is the central core of a philosophy of wholeness, is not component-based, is nonlinear in nature, and is the fabric between the spaces from which all healing and life emerge. This description of understanding of the phenomenon reflects a deep personal and experiential inner knowing of what has been described as the energy field.

These energy fields connect the present to the past. The phenomenon may be likened to sensing the interconnecting morphogenic field as described by Wilber (2000), from which development of consciousness unfolds. Sheldrake (2009) described that we enter into the morphogenic field. This field is an organizing field of biology, behavior, social systems, and consciousness. Sheldrake supposed that one may at times enter into different morphic fields. Doing so would account for the experience of egoic consciousness versus a consciousness related to expanded awareness. Even though this experience is associated with body and brain function, it is not synonymous with the self. The consciousness of self maintains awareness of external environment and body perception, but interacts with morphogenic fields where subjective experience “is not directly concerned with the present environment or with immediate action—for example, in dreams, reveries, or discursive thinking—need not necessarily bear any particular close relationship to the energetic and formative causes acting on the brain” (Sheldrake, 2009, p. 195).

In the study, participants had frequently referred to their higher self, or higher power as the part of them that is present in the experience of spiritual resonance. Sheldrake (2009) supposed that if one approaches morphogenetic fields from a metaphysical perspective, as Wilber (2000) has, and if there is a hierarchy of conscious selves that exist which are immanent in nature, it is then possible the higher self may express itself through the human consciousness. Under the right circumstance, such as in meditation, one can enter into this morphic resonance and feel embraced by this higher part of themselves within a transcendent experience of being one with nature and the cosmos. The question of hierarchical development has been continually debated from different perspectives by Wilber (2000), Grof (1993), and Washburn (1998). However, the language of the participants in this study was hierarchical in nature, but the therapeutic interventions, experienced within multiple levels of awareness, were nonlinear, and at times reported as being transcendent in nature.

Valle and Mohs (1998) made a clear distinction between transpersonal and transcendent awareness. They defined transpersonal as “any experience that is
transegoic” (p. 99), while transcendent “refers to a completely sovereign or soul awareness without the slightest inclination to define itself as anything outside itself” (p. 99). They suggested, “this distinction between transpersonal and transcendent may lead to the emergence of a fifth force or more purely spiritual psychology” (p. 99). It is questionable whether the participants and their clients were experiencing transcendent states as described by Valle and Mohs, since there was not a clear and agreed upon definitions of terms. However, the results of this exploratory study may be an initial attempt to support the premise that we are closer to recognizing a previously unexplored element of spiritual psychology, with direct applications to psychotherapy.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The choice of participants was limited by my ability to identify those psychotherapists who may have been appropriate for the study from a small group of potential candidates. Due to the intimate face-to-face conversational nature of the study, the limitation of location was a factor. Group participants needed to be in geographic proximity to one another. As a result, issues of gender, age, and length of clinical experience were not the focus. However, recruitment outcomes showed that it was the more clinically experienced practitioner that had developed the skill of integrating spiritual resonance into the therapeutic process. Therefore, the age range of the participants did not include younger therapists with less clinical experience. The location factor also influenced the lack of racial and cultural diversity of the participants.

The participants did not share a consistent language for their experience, and used terms that have evolved from their personal experience. As a result, terms were used that were not consistent with the meaning given to them by the traditions from which they originated. This factor had been addressed throughout the study. Interpretive skills were used to find common meaning among the participants of varying clinical and spiritual orientations.

Qualitative research does not demonstrate causality, but describes the experiences as reported by the participants. The definition of spiritual resonance and the supporting experiences are based in the subjective views and interpretations of the participants’ experiences. While this process provides a deeper understanding of human experience and the relationship to transpersonal interpersonal interaction, conclusions of causality cannot be made.

A limitation of the study is that the report of client transformation was based on the subjective view of the practitioner in his or her observation of the client. For ethical reasons of confidentiality and client protection, it was not appropriate to interview the clients themselves. In a clinical setting a continuous assessment of the client’s experience, growth, treatment goals, and interventions are being made by the practitioner. The reports of client transformation in this study were dependent upon a clear assessment by a competent practitioner.
SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This exploratory study attempted to create a common language and understanding of the experience of spiritual resonance. Because the language and definitions used by the participants in this study were generally defined based on personal experience, and although meanings were similar, the language was not consistent. In the continued investigation of this subject, more research would be helpful to explore the experience of spiritual resonance with groups of therapists who have been formally trained in one particular spiritual tradition with a common language that clearly defines an experience of consciousness and a perception of divinity from a common frame of reference. For example, Buddhist psychotherapists may relate differently to the experience, definition, and role of spiritual resonance in psychotherapy compared to psychotherapists with Shamanic training or Hindu Yoga training. The addition of racial and cultural diversity to future study may influence the language as well as the results.

The three stage process of participant interviews, which included two group interviews, appeared to be rewarding for all involved. In further study of the subject, researchers may choose to use a similar three stage design. The themes that emerged were common and consistent with the comparison group, which were interviewed in one single individual interview. The combination of group process with the individual interview proved to be effective and growth producing for the entire group. I witnessed how the heuristic research process paralleled the subject that was being studied.

Further transpersonal research projects might be developed, testing the effectiveness of transpersonal training programs for therapists who choose to develop the skills necessary in bringing awareness to this range of frequency within the psychotherapy session. Research studies can also be developed to explore the role of consciousness in the effective transmission and receiving of information in nonlocal healing, recognizing the participants’ ability to invite in spiritual resonance as a possible variable in the outcome.

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The Author

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ABSTRACT: The Buddhist practice of avoiding conceptual descriptions of experiences of enlightenment was compared to Wittgenstein’s declaration in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* that “what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.” Wittgenstein’s later idea of language games, expressed in *Philosophical Investigations*, was examined in terms of its potential use in the exploration of transcendent experiences, with a focus upon the availability and variability of such language games. Methodological issues involving the contextual nature of transcendence and its manifestations were also discussed.

KEYWORDS: Buddhism, Wittgenstein, language games, sources of transcendence.

WHO KNOWS SIGNS OF ENLIGHTENMENT?

How do I know whether someone, such as a teacher or guru, truly knows the nature of a transcendent experience and whether this can be communicated to me? Within the Zen tradition the Roshi (master) presumably understands the nature of Kensho (enlightenment) and can recognize its presence in another person. The Roshi “knows” when the aspirant “knows.” Within the Zen tradition, after discussion, the Roshi seems to “know” where the aspirant is on the path to Satori (self-realization). The terms Kensho and Satori are sometimes used synonymously. Nonetheless, Kensho seems to be associated with the earlier stages of self-realization, while Satori is often considered to be a deeper awakening (Suzuki, 1961). However, the ultimate inadequacy of conceptual explanations of Kensho and Satori has been acknowledged (Enomya-Lassalle, 1968) and will be revisited later in this article. For present purposes the term “Kensho” will be used.

The ox herding pictures are often referred to as a kind of map that a Roshi can use in giving aspirants a hint of their progress towards Kensho. These pictures can be seen online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=bN126j4FH7g. There are also numerous discussions of the ox herding pictures on the internet.

Zen also identifies stages on the path to Kensho. Kapleau refers to eight levels of Kensho:
Evidence of Kensho, evidence of great enlightenment, evidence of deepened enlightenment, evidence of direct experience of the great way of Buddhism, evidence of attaining the non-regressing mind of Fugen (an historical Bodhisattva or enlightened one), evidence of the joy and peace of being at one with the Dharma [historical teachings], further evidence of the joy and peace of being at one with the Dharma, and presentiment of death. (Kapleau, 1965, pp. 276–289)

I presume that these are suggestive rather than definitive categories of experience and that they resemble the continuous blooming of a flower rather than discrete stages. After the initial Kensho subsequent levels appear to be a deepening of initial experience. These types of Kensho may not occur in sequence necessarily. Sometimes a person may appear to miss one or more of these stages or compound them. Although there are various stages on the path to enlightenment aspirants are often warned about the dubious validity of conceptual descriptions of the path(s) to enlightenment: for example, “Enlightenment is the activation of a spiritual power which is normally found in everyone but has hitherto been hidden and therefore unused” (Enomiya-Lassalle, 1968, p. 36). This description is a generalized abstraction that tells little about the actuality of the experiences of enlightened individuals. However, personal accounts of Kensho are often poetic and not based upon natural science.

One night while I was immersed in meditation, I suddenly found myself in a very strange condition. There was no before and no after. Everything was though suspended. The object of my own meditation and my own self had disappeared. The only thing I felt was that my own innermost self was completely united and filled with everything above and below and all around. An unlimited light was shining within me. After some time, I came back to myself like one risen from the dead. My seeing and hearing, my thoughts and emotions were quite different from what they had been until then. When gropingly, I tried to think of the truths of the world and to grasp the meaning of the incomprehensible, I understood everything. Everything seemed to me quite clear and real. Spontaneously, I threw up my arms in an excess of joy and danced. And all of a sudden I exclaimed, ‘A million sutras are only a candle in front of the sun. Marvelous, really marvelous.’ (Enomiya-Lassalle, 1968, p. 27)

Nonetheless, words are used in an attempt to communicate the actuality of human experience despite Wittgenstein’s assertion in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (*Tractatus*), published in English in 1922, that mystical and transcendent experiences are not well served by language. However, the migration of Buddhism from Asia to western countries has resulted in the limited use of language as a compensation for the lack of an historical tradition of practice.

*From Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus to Philosophical Investigations*

Throughout his life, following a Catholic background, Wittgenstein was favorably predisposed towards mysticism (i.e., “A doctrine or discipline
maintaining that one can gain knowledge of reality that is not accessible to sense perception or to rational conceptual thought,” Audi, 1999, p. 925). His later interest in the aesthetics of music and other arts (Hagberg, 1995) confirmed the difficulties he had anticipated in the Tractatus concerning the inability of language to illuminate transcendent experience whether it is mystical, ethical or aesthetic experience.

Lundquist (1999) suggested:

It’s fine to give linguistic meaning to things and to draw parallels – this is the intellectualization that is accepted by our society and it is our way of quantifying experience. As long as we understand that this way of doing things is not necessarily authentic - there is something underlying aesthetics that is indefinable, incomprehensible and impossible to conceptualize through the mind. It must be passed over in silence. (p. 4)

Wittgenstein’s (1961) final line in the Tractatus (“what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence”) had already been a major part of Buddhist practice for centuries. However, the acceptance of some limited value associated with linguistic explanation of mystical, ethical and aesthetic experiences, has been suggested by scholars such as Janik and Toulmin, (1973) and Lundquist, (1999). The inability of language, as a means of apprehending the meaning of transcendent experiences, has been implied by Buddhist practice over centuries. Buddhism and Wittgenstein (in the Tractatus), emphasize the non-conceptual understanding of the actuality of mystical experience and other transcendent phenomena. Buddhism allows some word based pointing with the caveat that enlightenment lies beyond conceptual thinking.

The Tractatus, as a whole, created the initial impression that what can be said are only propositions of natural science. But, Wittgenstein was not responding from a positivist point of view as some philosophers may have thought. His point was that there are realms of human experience, such as mysticism, ethics and aesthetics which sometimes are beyond language. Despite Wittgenstein’s early view, expressed in the Tractatus, words continue to be routinely used in the attempt to understand transcendent experiences. Janik and Toulmin (1973) suggest that, to some extent, language can facilitate at least an approach to transcendent experience, despite its shortcomings, by helping us to “see” that we need to understand beyond words.

The impact of the distinction between saying and showing, acknowledged by Wittgenstein, led to increased awareness, among philosophers, that aspects of human experience are beyond propositional language. Wittgenstein’s apparent mystical references have been compared to the Zen practice of “acting with an empty mind” (Glock, 1996).

The following excerpts from the Tractatus are considered to be evidence of Wittgenstein’s interest in, and sympathy with mysticism: (a) “feeling the world as a limited whole – it is this that is mystical” (T6.45, p. 73)\(^1\), (b) “We feel that
even when all possible scientific questions have been answered the problems of life remain completely untouched. Of course there are then no questions left, and this itself, is the answer’’ (T6.52, p. 73), (c) “So too it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics. Propositions express nothing that is higher” (T6.42, p. 71), (d) “If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present” (T6.4311, p. 72).

The following two quotations present a picture of some of Wittgenstein’s early views, contained in the Tractatus, regarding language use:

Everyday language is a part of the human organism and is no less complicated than it. It is not humanly possible to gather immediately from it what the logic of language is. Language disguises thought. So much so, that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it, because the outward form of the clothing is not designed to reveal the form of the body, but for entirely different purposes. (T 4.002, p. 19)

“The limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (T5.6, p. 56). Hodges (1990, p. 82) suggests that “Such limits are not psychological, personal or individual. In fact the limits of my language are precisely the limits it has, not in virtue of being mine, but in virtue of being language at all—in virtue of being a mode of representation.”

Hodges identifies Wittgenstein’s shifting involvement with the mysticism of the Tractatus:

It is this “mystical” breaking free that the author of the Tractatus thought he had accomplished. However, the author [i.e., Wittgenstein] of the Philosophical Investigations (PI) cannot accept that. It is not that he rejects the mystical, but rather that he rejects the mystical as the ultimate ground for the intelligibility of language. (p. 196)

After almost a decade, following the publication of the Tractatus, Wittgenstein announced a new approach to what he called “ordinary language.” However, PI was not published until 1953 following Wittgenstein’s death in 1951. His approach to language is expressed in this answer to a question:

So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false? It is what human beings say that is true or false; and they agree in the language they use. This is not agreement in opinions but in form of life. (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 88)

A Theory of Language

Prior to the writing of PI Wittgenstein’s picture theory was compatible with propositional logic. A person could read off the structure of reality from the
structure of language used to express it. This was similar to the way in which a picture can work. Within the PI he introduced the tool metaphor as a replacement for the picture theory of reality. Meaning is the sum total of the uses of a word as a tool rather than one essential meaning. However, all these uses, and therefore meanings, of a language game have a “family resemblance.”

Words, seen as tools, are used differently in various contexts. For example, some occupations and professions will use words in ways that are a function of their specialty. The functionality of word usage is what determines the nature of language games. There are relatively few words that have invariant meaning (e.g., specialist technical uses). Mostly, there is no essence of word meaning. The meaning of a word depends upon the job that it does. Wittgenstein used the analogy of language as a game to illustrate his idea of how language worked.

The concept of a language game seems to be appropriate if we consider the similarities (e.g., games have rules). The rules may have some ambiguity but can be modified if required. There can also be a certain amount of variability within game rules (e.g., how high one can tee up a golf ball, or whether one can toe or side foot a soccer ball in play). Nonetheless, language games do have rules or conventions that are relative to particular circumstances and applications.

Wittgenstein believed that in order to understand the meaning of language we need to look at it in practice and its relation to what he calls “form of life” – the result of the interconnection of culture, world view and language. The term “language-game” is meant to highlight the view that “the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life” (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 11). According to Wittgenstein there is no point of view outside language. We cannot get out of language to use it just as we cannot get outside ourselves in order to see into ourselves. No thought or experience is free of language. We use language in discussing the use of language.

Wittgenstein’s preference for ordinary language and the jobs that words do parallels the linguistic austerity of Buddhist approaches to transcendence. As Sontag (1995, p. 3) suggests: “He seeks to simplify expression and action, as the Zen monk does, because both know that complex language obscures vision by focusing attention on tortuous thought forms.”

Although he was well aware of the difficulty, or even impossibility, of using language to explain all human experience, he continued to struggle with this issue like many philosophers before him (Sontag, 1995). Wittgenstein made several remarks regarding the difficulties of logic in trying to explain aspects of human experience such as mysticism: “What cannot be expressed we do not express, – And how try to ask whether THAT can be EXPRESSED” (Wittgenstein, 1969, p. 52). He also said that “the moment we try to apply exact concepts of measurement to immediate experience, we come up against a particular vagueness in this experience” (Wittgenstein, 1975,
In addition, he drew attention to the limits of language: “Time and again the attempt is made to use language to limit the world and set it in relief - but it can’t be done. The self-evidence of the world expresses itself in the very fact that language can and does only refer to it” (Wittgenstein, 1975, p. 80).

**LANGUAGE GAMES**

Wittgenstein’s choice of ‘game’ is based upon the analogy of language as a game. Because of the diversity and sheer number of games a satisfactory definition is difficult because the diversity of games covers physical, spoken, intellectual, safe and dangerous games and more. We cannot find “what is common to all these activities and what makes them language or parts of language” (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 31). The analogy of word games suggests that language is primarily based upon usage in many varieties of contexts that give rise to a variety of uses. However, Wittgenstein (1980) noted that what distinguishes language from a game in this sense is its application to reality. This application is not shown in grammar, the application of the signs is outside the signs, the picture does not contain its own application, but that connection cannot be made by language, explained by language.

Wittgenstein persisted in hoping that language could ultimately illuminate human experience of the world as expressed in this comment: “At this point I am trying to express something that cannot be expressed” (Wittgenstein, 1969, p. 31). “What is mirrored in language I cannot use language to express” (Wittgenstein, 1969, p. 42). He also agrees that “how words are understood is not told by words alone” (Wittgenstein, 1970, p. 26). The use of language in everyday life is different to the use of language and grammar in situations where formal logic prevails. Sometimes our concerns lay outside the limitations of language. Wittgenstein (1974, p. 19) also said: “the task of philosophy is not to create an ideal language, but to clarify the use of existing language.” Language is not always logical and we do not necessarily behave logically.

No matter how we try to understand what enlightenment and other transcendent experiences mean, we often want to interpret them in words, even though we have been informed that there may not be appropriate language for descriptions of transcendence. In trying to grasp something beyond words we still fall back on working with words. However, a person’s experience of difficulty in describing a prior experience may be an indication of the potential validity of that experience because it confounds linguistic explanation (Janik & Toulmin, 1973).

**METHODODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES**

I present some hypothetical examples of possible problems in researching transcendence within a group of Buddhist practitioners. The purpose is to
uncover potential problems, particularly the problem of how to approach research of a phenomenon, when one’s fore-understanding may be based upon conceptual descriptions of possible transcendent experiences. How can we frame a valid study given the problem of accessing a phenomenon that is resistant to linguistic description? Transcendence has been defined as “broadly the property of rising out of or above other things (virtually always understood figuratively); in philosophy, the property of being, in some way, of a higher order of being” (Audi, 1999, p. 925). It is also important to understand that transcendence is only one of various phenomena that comprise the corpus of Transpersonal Psychology (Lajoie & Shapiro, 1992). A problem with any attempt to research experiences of transcendence is the identification of the level of apparent transcendence reported prior to and during participation in a study. The above definition could refer to a relatively small advance or a much more significant advance such as might be reflected in the ox herding pictures (Kapleau, 1965, pp. 302–311). So levels of transcendence can vary but there is no linear progression or scale. A change in apprehension of transcendence can be a subtle move or a leap. In Zen practice it is the Roshi who is qualified to acknowledge the presence of transcendence.

As one might expect, there may be individual members of an esoteric practice who attempt to research the nature of possible transcendent phenomena experienced during their own “spiritual” practice. A group member may decide upon a research study and a subsequent interview of other members of the group, to which she belongs, as a potential data source. The intention underlying such a study would be the illumination of the experiences of practices that are considered to be a means of progressing towards the attainment of a mystical phenomenon such as Kensho.

It is probable that experiential data obtained in interviews will express individual experiences of progress, or the lack thereof, rather than the attainment of enlightenment. However, can the researcher who is also an aspirant, tell how near or far each participant is from the ultimate goal and the extent of their apprehension of the kind of advice found in the Dharma and their own practice of meditation? The credibility of the researcher, to make such judgments, is in question.

What does the researcher know about transcendence? What level of understanding of enlightenment has been obtained previously by the researcher? She may identify common and unique themes in interview transcripts but can the researcher relate these accounts to the possibility of the ox herding pictures or Kensho? Also, where is the researcher in terms of personal experience in relation to various stages of the path to Kensho? The ox herding pictures are an attempt to show the path to enlightenment in symbolic and metaphorical terms. The twelve pictures depict the search for the ox and its eventual pacification. The twelve stages outlined by Kapleau (1965, pp. 302–311) are: Seeking the ox, finding the tracks, first glimpse of the ox (often associated with a first experience of Kensho), catching the ox, taming the ox, riding the ox home, ox forgotten self alone, both ox and self forgotten, returning to the source and entering the market place with helping hands.
These pictures are not a kind of “one size fits all” checklist of the stages of enlightenment but a metaphorical representation of experiences of progressive transcendence. Perhaps one could describe the process as the pacification of the mind through the practice of meditation and shift from duality to a body-mind unity. Buddhist teachers deny that word based descriptions can explain the process adequately. However, the ox herding pictures can be helpful for some people but can lead to getting stuck in conceptualization. Nonetheless, this approach has been used for centuries.

The researcher is not neutral. Her interpretation of the data from interviews with group members and how they are to be interpreted will be influenced by whatever knowledge and understanding she may have of the history of group members’ practice. A researcher, who is a member of a Sangha (Buddhist community) may interview other members of that community in an attempt to record their experiences of the teachings of their respective traditions. Being a member of the Sangha and its teachings and traditions may have already initiated the Buddhist language game that is a byproduct of the community. Perhaps the researcher should try to familiarize herself with any word games that exist within the community before the research begins. However, if the word games are conceptual in nature they could misdirect an approach to transcendence.

Conformity across members of the group, reflected in their language, may reveal signs of word games or what some may call “Buddhist speak.” The willing conformity of a group is likely a conditioning effect within any Sangha simply as the result of a deeper knowledge and understanding of the Dharma. The group leader, monk or lay person, can lead the group in ways that are traditionally appropriate as specified by their founders. Whatever ideas or opinions the researcher and the group hold, as participants in the research, they are likely to manifest in terms of demand characteristics of the group and the researcher. Such influences become critical in terms of deciding what comprises the data and to what extent conditioning and prior experience may have contributed to dialogue, observation and later analysis.

Sources of variability brought to a research study are the conscious and unconscious history of a researcher’s values and world view. The relationship of a researcher to the participants in the research is discussed below by several authors, as moving closer to the level of circumspection usually associated with counseling and psychotherapy. Rather than maintaining unrealistic “objectivity” these authors have addressed variability that has been overlooked by the attempt to edify natural science traditions. A more open relationship between researcher and participants, where the illusion of complete objectivity turns into greater openness and self-awareness, is what some researchers try to bring to their research. A researcher’s fore-understanding of the phenomenon in question needs a much deeper level of self-reflection. The following are some examples of this approach to research and its particular relevance to research directed at the exploration of transcendence.

Tambornino (2002) criticizes the absence of the role of the body in philosophical and political research. He decries the continued influence of
the mind-body dualism despite Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) work on “body-consciousness.” Tambornino adopts a “corporeal turn” and uses the provocative term of the “corporeality of thought” as means of drawing attention to what is often neglected. Sheets-Johnstone (2009) also promotes the need for a unified body-consciousness as she works with movements of the body as a primordial form of thinking. She recognizes that, like Wittgenstein, experience precedes language. The body is often able to show what cannot be spoken. Dancer Pina Bausch and her company (Wenders, 2011) provide outstanding examples of how the body can show rather than tell.

Romanyshyn (2007) presents a research method of continual self-reflection which he calls “metaphoric.” This label captures the somewhat equivocal nature of what is and is not to be found in a metaphor. Zwicky (2003, p. 10) states the situation succinctly: “The implied ‘is not’ in a metaphor points to a gap in language through which we glimpse the world. That which we glimpse is what the ‘is’ in a metaphor points to.” There is fluidity and uncertainty that the researcher needs to recognize. Of particular importance is the issue of transference for both researcher and participant. This metaphorical ambiguity is also reflected in language and is compatible with Wittgenstein’s reservations about the inability of language to fully represent experience. Romanyshyn also claims that metaphoric uncertainty can help avoid “methodolatry.”

Anderson and Broad (2011), like Romanyshyn, focus upon personal attributes and values that researchers may bring to their research and the possibilities for their own transformation in terms of increased self-awareness, and especially transpersonal elements. However, the inadequacy of linguistic representations of experience are well recognized among transpersonal researchers such as those discussed here. Awareness of the limitations of linguistically transmitted reports of human experience is not without value. To some extent, the validity of the communication of human experience can be strengthened by increasing the amount of research on transcendence and the examination of the variable contexts and linguistic reports. If we learn more about the thematic structure and presentation of descriptions of transcendence we may be able to identify pervasive components and what they seem to be saying. Perhaps Wittgenstein saw the value of a wider field of research encapsulated within his language games.

Observation of behavior in the form of gestures and movements can sometimes show what cannot be told. What the body shows is a source of data that can be cross referenced with peoples’ descriptions of their experience. The combination of what is said and what is shown may offer a degree of cross validation. Wittgenstein highly valued the arts as being able to communicate what cannot be said (Hagberg, 1995). Emphasis upon behavior of the whole body by Tambornino and Sheets-Johnstone allows the body to show what may not be possible to describe in words.

There may be ample discussion of progressive experiences within a particular spiritual tradition such as Buddhism. However, there is a sense in which the devotion to the Dharma may require a paradoxical degree of conformity in
order to promote more personal freedom from automaticity and programming. Experiences of individual seekers may appear to have some common stages (e.g., the ox herding pictures of Zen where several people may be catching a glimpse of the ox’s tracks). This circumstance might also be a manifestation of a word game.

There are no, one-size-fits-all descriptions of transcendent experience. However, there are written accounts from those who have had such experiences. It is from these accounts that attempts are made to capture the phenomenon in words. But, these descriptions are often accompanied by warnings such as “enlightenment is essentially an inward experience which defies expression in unequivocal concepts or words” (Enomiya-Lassalle, p. 11, 1968). Nevertheless, attempts are made to give seekers some broad indication of the journey that awaits them. The ox herding pictures are a kind of pictorial map of the path but Zen also stresses that enlightenment cannot be obtained through intellectual efforts. It is a sort of intuition, according to Enomiya-Lassalle, that can open a door to progress. Advice offered, such as not necessarily trying to capture the experience of transcendence in words, could also impact word games.

In the Zen tradition paradoxical answers are often given by a Roshi to questions regarding this topic, usually in periodic interviews (Dokusan). The aspirant cannot understand the experience until it happens and then both, the Roshi and the aspirant recognize that something unusual has happened. Most aspirants would not find much satisfaction from the types of conceptualizations given to those who want information about enlightenment because conceptual descriptions take an abstract form. The need to know about future enlightenment can actually interfere with the meditative process.

The use of the words used by interviewees to describe their experiences, almost certainly, will overlook Wittgenstein’s call for silence, expressed in the *Tractatus*, as well as advice regarding the inadequacy of conceptual language. The researcher may have no knowledge of where the participants are on the path to transcendence. Nonetheless, they may have experienced some early signs (e.g., signs of the ox’s track) without knowing it. Participants in the study might struggle for appropriate words to describe their experiences and thereby obtain an insight into the problems of language that preoccupied Wittgenstein throughout his life.

Another likely influence upon participants’ reports of their experiences has been shaped by Heidegger’s notion of human “thrownness.” To some extent “thrownness” can be viewed as a form of conditioning that is shaped by genetic and environmental factors such as the influence of “the they” (society at large). Heidegger also believed that language is prior to human speech. When one is thrown into the world a form of pre-comprehension of the world is developed as a platform for the development of language (Heidegger, 1962). His notion of “thrownness” expresses the fact that humanity’s entry into the world is beyond control. We do not choose our parents, their culture and language, their economic circumstances or the genes we inherit from them. The community
into which we are born exerts pressure to conform to prevailing values, customs and particularly our language culture. If, however, as Heidegger claims, there is an early pre-comprehension of the world that is ultimately displaced by language, there may still be a residue of such pre-comprehension that enables an apprehension of human experience that is language free.

A natural science approach to understanding an experience of transcendence is likely to produce invalid data that is characterized by a failure to understand the superimposition of language upon the actuality of experience. Overlooking the fact that language follows experience may result in a literal interpretation of language that does not accurately reflect a person’s experience. Many people have had pre-linguistic thoughts which they have difficulty expressing in language. When people use similar language to explain their experience of a phenomenon, one cannot conclude that their experiences are identical. The words used to describe such experiences may give some indication of the experience but be subject to a prevailing language culture that has the potential to distort the actuality of the experience. Some language games will manifest misapprehension of meaning, particularly if the meaning of the experience of interest is subtle, as is the case with transcendence.

Problems with the interpretation of language in research are usually embedded within individual accounts of other peoples’ linguistic accounts of human experiences in either spoken or written form. This situation is probably impossible to avoid. However, it certainly needs to be borne in mind during data analysis of accounts of human experience. Wittgenstein (1969, p. 42) stated that “what is mirrored in language I cannot use language to express.” There may be aspects of language that can show something beyond linguistic dimensions of language such as unfamiliar modes of speech. Wittgenstein (1970, p. 26) cautions that “how words are understood is not told by words alone.”

Kensho, as previously stated, can occur in several stages or as a totality. In the hypothetical study discussed in this paper some of the experiential descriptions arising from meditative experience may contain hints of a process that could lead to progress towards a first glimpse of Kensho. Such an experience is not uncommon in Zen meditation. However, there is no guarantee of further progress. At this stage of meditative experience word based descriptions of experience may have partial validity. However, the actuality of a higher level of Kensho may reach a stage where words become inadequate. Experience precedes attempted explanations. If words are deployed they may take the form of linguistic gestures or exaltations that have little to do with their literal meanings.

Early signs, such as seeing the tracks of the ox, may or may not be present in the experiences of participants in a research study. In view of such unknowns a researcher might be well advised to frame the aims of a study in terms of gathering accounts of meditative experience without looking through any pre-conceived lens for signs of Kensho. Unless a researcher has read some of the literature on transcendence she may not be familiar with “word games” that
cover transcendent experience and thereby be at a significant disadvantage when she analyses experiential descriptions from members of a Buddhist or other group devoted to self-knowledge.

How does a researcher recognize whether transcendent experiences are present in peoples’ accounts of their experiences? This begs the question of the possible existence of a language game for transcendent experience. Wittgenstein’s view was that language games are rarely composed of an essence. Examination of the diversity and commonality of language games about transcendence might establish what can be said. One can summon up long lists of mystics on line. However, even a cursory look provokes some doubt as to what constitutes a mystic. Even authors who have written novels containing quasi mystical characters seem sufficiently qualified to be on such a list. An uncritical acceptance of mystics without looking at their language games, in order to understand the extent of variability and commonality they contain could result in misdirected acceptance of an attempted understanding of transcendence. If a wide array of relevant extant language games existed as a source of transcendent experiences, they might provide some helpful criteria for the recognition of other transcendent experiences. In other words: What are some of the characteristic markers of a disjunctive concept of transcendent experience? Is there a sufficient spectrum of word games that can provide a map of the extent of relevant word games related to transcendence and the extent of their cohesion and variability? Is Wittgenstein’s notion of word games a workable solution to the problem of describing and being able to recognize transcendence?

Is the task of extracting meaning from literal and metaphorical descriptions viable? At best this linguistic predicament casts doubt upon the validity of text or spoken experiential accounts as a valid source for the attempt to explain the nature of transcendence. This has been clearly recognized in Buddhist tradition expressed in the Dharma. However, in countries lacking a Buddhist heritage of Zen, teachers can face the dilemma of providing some descriptive information about the nature of experiences of transcendence even though it is discouraged by Buddhist tradition.

Words used in a study to describe apparent commonalities of experience may have intended meanings that differ from common uses of the same word(s) or perhaps be a function of an esoteric language culture (e.g., an altered state vocabulary associated with drug usage) that may appear to be counter intuitive in regard to the experience in question. Consequently, a high degree of commonality of particular word usage may imply possible reliability but not validity. What are the possible linguistic indicators of valid descriptions of transcendence? How can these indicators be recognized by those who have not experienced transcendence to a level of enlightenment but are perhaps looking for a glimpse of the “tracks of the ox”? This may be one reason why Buddhism has the practice of Dokusan as a way of monitoring the experience of an aspirant and providing guidance.

How can a researcher identify the nature of a valid experience if she has not experienced the phenomenon herself? She cannot, but she may be able to glean
some hints that point to where a participant appears to be in terms of the tracks of the ox if she has experiential wisdom. The challenge for the researcher and the participant is to find shared word games. But even if they appear to succeed in doing so the degree of “family resemblance” among chosen words could be distant.

Researchers of what are claimed to be transcendent experiences may conclude that an understanding of enlightenment is beyond the reach of language even though there may be some value in terms of language pointing practitioners in the appropriate directions, according to historical practice. The Zen approach to understanding experiences that are preludes to transcendence, as well as its actuality, is based upon centuries of the history of Roshi-aspirant relationships. This accumulated wisdom is crucial in directing aspirants towards practices based upon guidance from those who “know.” Perhaps they do not intend the use of word games but they do use the ox herding pictures. These pictures obviously involve meanings that are transmitted through language as well as visually.

The methodological issues raised in this article, together with comments from various scholars, suggests that the attempt to research transcendent experiences will not be easy or perhaps not viable. The difficulties discussed here imply that methodological circumspection is appropriate. Issues of language and meaning are important for studies of personal experience because, much of the collected data from interviews of practitioners of various forms of transcendent spirituality involve the attempt to find words to describe what may be beyond description. Moreover, if—as Wittgenstein (1953) suggests—meaning should be derived from its use in a complexity of overlapping contexts that involve meanings determined by usage rather than a meaning that is invariant, satisfactory descriptions of transcendent experiences may be problematic.

Existence is being-with-others and subject to the persuasive influence of ‘the they.’ This situation implies the need for sharpened awareness of the problematic nature of language cultures in trying to understand the nature of transcendence. Culturally based languages can act as spectacles through which lived-experience is processed. For much of the time speakers are simply doing what is taken for granted. Language users are encapsulated within an existence that allows discussion of their “forms of life.” However, then comes the dilemma of using language to discuss problems of language. Wittgenstein persevered but did not achieve finality on the meaning and use of language. His many questions about the nature of language, however, and its effects upon our understanding of transcendent experiences, particularly mysticism, aesthetics and ethics, are a valuable legacy that has not lost its currency.

**Conclusion**

The difficulties of finding language games for transcendence are considerable. The job they are supposed to do relies upon the choice of which words qualify for language games. Language games can also be widely spread and different
even though they may have a family resemblance. The environment for looking at transcendence in this article is contextualized in terms of Buddhist practice. Transcendence is such a slippery concept. Whatever definition is the starting point should express some aspect of an elevated state. However, this is a very minimal description of an experience that can lead to Kensho. However, transcendence in the form of a breakthrough in understanding may be relatively simple while other experiences of transcendence may be elevated and beyond words. If we look for words that appear to have some frequency of use in being associated with transcendence how can we know whether these words were associated with “genuine” experiences of transcendence? The root of the problem lies in the validity of whatever extant information describes the experience. One person’s experience of “transcendence” may be more like a dream state evoked by the contemplation of nature on a sunny day rather than transcendence. How can we look for the appropriate word games when we have such limited and variable information on the nature of transcendence? The situation appears to be subject to circularity. Buddhist validation of transcendence seems to depend more on those Buddhists who have had transcendent experiences and realize the futility of attempts to use descriptive conceptual language in describing the experience. Poetic metaphorical language and emotive expressiveness seem to occur in many reported cases. The experience may create a sense of wonder and a change in world view. But these manifestations are not standardized. Are there word games that illuminate transcendence and where are they?

The later pages of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* seem to be more compatible with a sense of ineffability that is often referenced in discussions of advanced transcendence. Despite his focus upon ordinary language Wittgenstein acknowledged that “there are indeed things that cannot be put into words. *They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical*” (T6.522, p. 73). The *Tractatus* as a whole was judged as ultimately leading to philosophical nonsense. Wittgenstein acknowledged this judgment in the text (T6.54, p. 74). However, the so called mystical part of the text has been well received, particularly by scholars of religion (e.g., Lundquist, 1999; Sontag, 1995).

Research that attempts to openly and directly explore the presence of transcendence can be difficult because the phenomenon is unusual. Buddhism, as discussed earlier in this article, discourages conceptually based accounts of transcendence. Definitions of transcendence appear to abstract what seems to characterize many alleged examples of transcendence. Perhaps this is why the definitions are limited and vague like the example cited earlier in this article [i.e., Audi, 1999]. The variability of the contexts in which the phenomenon may occur resembles the kind of diversity expressed in Wittgenstein’s language games. The situations could share a family resemblance in some respects as well as significant contextual diversity.

The ineffable nature of an individual’s transcendence is not well served by language alone. However, as suggested earlier, the body is a valuable source of expressing an experience or showing meaning via a particular art form.
Descriptions of transcendence seem somewhat limited to an elevation of consciousness within a positively perceived experience. Traditionally it appears, in part, to be associated with being an aspirant of a religious or “spiritual” way of life. The fact that transcendence appears to be a disjunctive concept means that it can be defined in many ways and in different settings. Lists of attributes or behaviors are not always constants. The context in which transcendence occurs may or may not be significant.

A researcher’s attempt to openly express the object of research as an investigation of transcendence within a group, or individually, is probably ill advised. Revealing what the researcher is looking for may become a demand characteristic of the research. However, a researcher’s interest in the experiences of those who are members of a group that is committed to a self-knowledge practice such as Buddhism, or even dangerous sports, may be less likely to interfere with the integrity of the expression of individual experiences. Without mentioning the phenomenon of transcendence a researcher can seek to explore experiences within various groups that might have elements of transcendence embedded within their practice of self-knowledge.

Transcendence can be associated with religion, personal growth, a higher level of consciousness, “being in the zone” in sports and in so called “spiritual” experiences not associated with familiar religions. Transcendence can also be involved in “going beyond” usual limits of pain and fatigue in athletic performance. Psychological investigations of the experiences of participants in dangerous sports have opened a new frontier in the study of transcendence (e.g., Parry, Nesti, & Watson, 2011; Selsi, 1992). These examples are merely some of the many contexts in which transcendence may occur. The nature of the transcendence varies to some extent in its response to the context in which it occurs. The variability of contexts and their associated aims may at least share the experience of going beyond their usual experience to a higher level of consciousness related to the purposes of the contextual group.

The study of transcendence in dangerous sports has opened a new ready-made source of transcendence that avoids the problem of looking for transcendence in various groups that pursue self-knowledge through established methods such as prayer and meditation but present a researcher with no guarantee of the presence of transcendence. From a researcher’s perspective already available accounts of transcendence avoid the problem of searching through reports of experiences in search of transcendence. Those persons who participate in dangerous sports may exhibit aspects of their experiences that are unique to their sport. Their experiences of transcendence may also contain qualities found in other different groups. Interviewing those who engage in dangerous sports and have freely reported transcendent experiences, when interviewed, can avoid demand characteristics because evidence of transcendence has already occurred spontaneously.

Despite the difficulties of researching transcendence a researcher can ask participants in a research project to describe their experiences of living within a
particular way of being such as found in a religion or systems of personal growth. Some participants may report transcendent beginnings such as “tracks of the ox” while others may be more advanced. The fundamental challenge is that, as a researcher, one is looking for experiences of a phenomenon often associated with the teachings of certain groups that focus upon self-knowledge but whose membership is no guarantee of the experience of transcendence.

A problem for some researchers is being able to recognize and understand transcendence if they have not experienced it themselves. Can they recognize the difference between genuine transcendence and other psychological phenomena such as fantasies, hallucinations, inflation and psychological projections? These are called Makyo in Zen Buddhism.

Another possibility for a potential researcher who is interested in transcendence is to investigate the published accounts of transcendence, such as those of Franklin Merrell-Wolff’s Pathways through to Space and Evelyn Underhill’s Mysticism. Transcendence is also to be found in the oeuvre of poets (e.g., Hopkins, Whitman, Dickinson). The nature of transcendence found in a variety of sources may expand the extent of its commonality and singularity across different contexts.

Regardless of the concerns expressed in this article, in reference to the use of linguistic accounts of transcendence, the telling of human experience is likely to continue. However, an understanding of the limitations of words in communicating experiences of transcendence may be offset by reference to other indicators of experience such as the expressions of the human body. Individual expression through reference to dance and music may be workable but not always so. Sontag (1995) concludes that:

‘Mysticism’ or the ‘mystical,’ means many things, of course. Plato pointed out that all significant concepts have multiple and not single meanings. The irony is that for both Wittgenstein and all of history’s ‘mystics’ that experience lies outside normal confines and thus is outside of normal language, it cannot be finally pinned down in its meaning within language. (p. 155)

NOTES

1 “Tractatus employs a notoriously austere and succinct literary style. The work contains almost no arguments as such, but rather, consists of declarative statements which are meant to be self-evident. These statements are hierarchically numbered, with seven basic propositions at the primary level (numbered 1–7), with each sub-level being a comment on or elaboration of the statement at the next higher level (e.g., 1, 1.1, 1.11, 1.12).” http://en.wikipedia.org/wicki/Tractatus_Logico-Philosophicus

Although Wikipedia may often be considered a questionable source from a scholarly perspective, based on my knowledge of the Tractatus this description is valid, succinct, and accessible in its explanation.
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BOOK REVIEWS


In this personal and heartfelt book, *Waking from Sleep*, Steve Taylor asks us to consider through his examples and feeling-laden prose that higher states of consciousness are not just spontaneously generated. He wants to show us how they can actually be produced intentionally and sustained permanently.

Taylor postulates that our everyday sense of consciousness is like a sleep trance, from which one can awaken, and then have an experience of a higher state of consciousness. According to the author, this more heightened sense of awareness can be quite beautiful and blissful. He sees these states as giving one a “glimpse of the world of beauty, meaning and unity that lies beyond the normal human world of separation and suffering – a new world which is possible for us to inhabit permanently” (pp. xix–xx).

Taylor feels that it is important to understand this because our normal consciousness does not give us a full picture of reality that is objective. He believes we are missing out on what is really present by merely settling on the view we derive from our normal psyche.

Taylor cites anthropological studies that detail how indigenous peoples’—and via others’ personal accounts, mostly childhood—experiences demonstrate a natural awakened state, and he goes on to say how children in non-indigenous cultures slowly lose this state as an aftereffect of the formation of the ego. He also discusses how this state can be induced by experiences outdoors, in nature.

Taylor claims two points of origin for our experiences of awakened states of awareness. He calls one a “disruption in homeostasis” (DH) and the other an “intensification and stillness of life energy” (ISLE). A DH originating state can be effected by anything that disrupts the normal consciousness status quo; for instance fasting, taking drugs, pain, etc. He differentiates this from an ISLE because a DH induced state can be dangerous to physical health and doesn’t generally lay the groundwork for a sustainable enlightened state. Whereas, on the other hand, an ISLE can be achieved through mindfulness and other spiritual practices, resulting in more complete and sustainable states than a DH catalyzed event (pp. 172–174).

Throughout the book, Taylor quotes and describes the experience of many people reaching different levels of these states, in different ways, ranging from his own experiences to those of friends, mystics, poets, children, and even, as mentioned above, indigenous peoples. Ultimately, he feels that we can maintain the internal blissful ego free state by setting up ways of life to elicit them more regularly, like long-term spiritual practice. He concludes that not only does this bring about an internal sense of well-being that is transmittable
to others, but that it is imperative for human beings, in order to better our disrupted world. This book is therefore relevant to spiritual seekers, therapists, and anyone who works in the field of mental health who is specifically looking for inspiration and for ways to enhance their internal world.

*Waking from Sleep* also offers some of the author’s informal qualitative research and reviews of the subject matter and is peppered with the author’s personal conclusions and definitions. While I agree with many of the conclusions that Taylor comes to, I found the basis for these decisions often lacking and the use of these experiences, while interesting, left me with a sense of vagueness. It’s not clear to me how these awakened states are actually engendered. Additionally, how and why he comes to his definitions of ego is not clear, yet he assumes his readers know what he means by this term. For instance, building on his assumptions about ego—while generally coherent—Taylor makes use of anecdotal evidence about schizophrenia, which could be problematic for those who have a great deal of experience working with, or perhaps who have experienced, schizophrenia (p. 164).

Another issue that Taylor left dangling is this concept that you can experience these states by being in the presence of others who are more permanently in these awakened states. His comment about Andrew Cohen and how being awake “doesn’t make you perfect,” on page 159 leaves me puzzled. Is he implying that awakened states are morally neutral? Is Taylor saying, for example, that a charismatic psychopath might have this effect?

To his credit, Taylor has created an experience for the reader that is wonderful. The book has a lovely appeal and seems to almost generate the feeling of the awakened experiences that are described so beautifully. His descriptions of his and others’ experiences promote kinesthetically—that is, in a felt-sense way—his thesis. It was inspiring and truly a joy to read.

**The Author**

*Steve Taylor*, M.Sc., PGCE, has authored 4 books, including *Waking From Sleep, The Fall, Making Time*, and a newer volume *Out of the Darkness*. He has appeared in a number of British media outlets (TV, radio, and print), in addition to being published in over 30 magazines, newspapers, and academic journals related to psychology and spirituality. He is a lecturer at Leeds Metropolitan University, a researcher in transpersonal psychology at Liverpool John Moores University, has taught yoga & meditation, and has been a meditation practitioner since the age of 19. In addition, he has published two articles in this Journal (*Journal of Transpersonal Psychology)*

**The Reviewer**

*Susie Herrick*, M.A., LMFT, is chair of the masters in counseling psychology program at Sofia University. For twenty years, she has been practicing as a psychotherapist, teaching graduate students in the field of counseling.
psychology, and training conflict resolution mediators. She has taught at Santa Clara University, has trained mediators at Stanford University, and specializes in transpersonal psychology and its relationship to marriage and family therapy and peaceful conflict resolution.

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Christophe Bache is a seasoned professor of religious studies who posits that there is a collective consciousness, or *group field*, at play in college classrooms. Bache rejects the atomistic view that we, as human beings, are separate individuals. Rather, he embraces a transpersonal position, firmly grounded in his perspective, in perennial philosophy. He believes that we live in an interconnected universe and all beings are energetically bound together beyond the conscious realm. Bache developed his theory after years of witnessing radical shifts in certain students’ points of view, as well as moments of instant understanding (a-ha moments) in the classroom.

Beneath the levels of consciousness in which our minds are separate and distinct lie hidden depths where they begin to interpenetrate until they eventually are enfolded within an unbroken, seamless field of consciousness that I am here calling Mind …..If we view teaching as an activity taking place within this Mind …our model of classroom dynamics expands dramatically ….and teaching is more than just sending out information across an ontological chasm for our students to catch ….teaching involves the direct energetic engagement of the mental fields of our students. (Bache, 2008, pp. 36–37)

The core foundation of Bache’s theory of the group field in a classroom, which he calls the *class field*, is Rupert Sheldrake’s concept of morphic fields. In fact, the author notes that it was reading Sheldrake’s books that gave him the insight that he was not only impacting individual students when teaching, but also that “groups have minds” (p. 51) and that the leaps in understanding and profound instances of transformation for students were results of morphic fields being activated in a class over the course of a semester. The author then extends his ideas even further: He posits that there are class fields, as described above. But there are also *course fields*, which are the cumulative field of all of the sections of the same class that have been taught by the same instructor over a span of time. An example of the activation of a course field is when students quickly grasp difficult concepts that, in past iterations of that lesson, took
more time and detail to explain to prior groups. He views this as a leap in learning that is a result of the course field. An alternative explanation may be that the concept, notably with regard to the subject matter Bache teaches (religion), may be prevalent in the increasingly global and diverse communities in the United States, or that students are exposed to the content via multiple streams of media. Nonetheless, he has illuminated an interesting and under-researched phenomenon in teaching and learning that deserves ongoing consideration, namely increases in prior knowledge that students bring into contemporary classrooms.

The book is divided into four sections. In the first section, Bache describes the phenomenon of collective consciousness in the classroom and cites research supporting his claims. He then gives specific examples of how he works with the fields, which for him, include preparing, nourishing, and closing the fields as steps to take before, during, and at the end of the semester. As a long-time meditator, Bache includes ritual grounded in forms of Tibetan Buddhism to foster the setting of intention for the best and highest learning experiences for all of his students. The third section is a chapter that reads like a contemplation on the value of harnessing the collective energy in learning environments. The book concludes with a stand-alone set of chapters built around student essays that the author has collected over the course of his teaching life. He uses these essays to illustrate some of the profound shifts and leaps of understanding that some of his students have achieved in his classes. The subjects of these chapters are related to healing through writing, spiritual experiences, death and dying, religious conversion, and personal insight. These are moving chapters that beautifully illustrate the profound impact that learning can have in a person’s life. While these chapters are of great value and are worthy of a volume of their own, they were tangential in relation to the rest of the book. Bache does an adequate job of explicating their purpose in the book, but the remainder of the content would stand alone without this final section.

A strength of this volume is that Bache recounts the history and highlights the weighty evidence of psi research, including a primary focus on “telepathy, or mind-to-mind contact” (p. 70) to support his claims. Classic experiments like the Ganzfield studies, dream studies, remote viewing, and direct mental interaction with living systems (DMILS) studies, are juxtaposed with theory and research from quantum physics and field consciousness, and provide compelling evidence that “intelligence is collective from the very start” (p. 94). Bache suggests that great learning, “has occurred when students find the courage to confront the inadequacies of their old ways of thinking and heroically turn to explore new options without necessarily knowing where these will lead” (p. 63). Bache notes that the focused attention on learning developed in university settings creates the very group field that is the catalyst for “‘higher’ or ‘deeper’ or ‘wider’ states of knowing” (Bache, 2008, p. 64) that promote great learning.

While the transpersonal ground upon which Bache rests his hypotheses provides ample support for his theory, explication of constructs such as education scholar Jack Mezirow’s (2000) transformational learning theory...
would bring additional evidence directly from the field of education into this exploration. A rich tradition of scholarship on transformational processes, research and theory alike, describe much of what Bache witnesses in his students. Meizrow suggests transformations come about due to one of four processes: Elaborating existing frames of reference, learning new frames of reference, transforming points of view, and transforming habits of mind. A consideration of the processes described by education experts such as Meizrow may have afforded additional vantage points and descriptive language to describe the multiple ways in which students may change and grow within the learning environment.

In his theory on class and course fields, Bache places much import on the role of the educator in harnessing the power of the collective energy he describes. As a self-described long-time meditator and student of altered states of consciousness, Bache is, undoubtedly, keenly attuned to subtle energy and variations in states of mind. He cites the works of education pioneer Parker Palmer and avows a belief that “good teaching is not a matter of technique but emerges from the fundamental identity and integrity of the teacher” (Bache, 2008, p. 60). In many places, the author acknowledges that the existence and power of class fields cannot rest solely with the instructor and that the students must also engage in the process. However, a bias toward a central focus on the professor as the key to using group fields in education is evident in the book. Pluralistic and participatory views such as those supported by philosopher Jorge Ferrer (2000, 2002) might offer philosophical and pedagogical challenges to the centrality of the instructor as the nexus of collective intelligences produced in classrooms.

Teachers have individual and personal strengths. Bache does an excellent job of disclosing his own strengths and weaknesses as a teacher and uses his own teaching life as illustration of the processes of class fields as he experiences them. As noted above, the second section of the book is dedicated to a description of working with fields of consciousness. Bache, step-by-step, outlines his own way of working including in-class meditations he conducts to raise students’ awareness of their interconnection. For educators less familiar with transpersonal theory and practice, these examples may be challenging to adapt into their own frames of reference or spiritual traditions. Thus, a caveat to make the work their own would have been of benefit to less transpersonally focused, but nonetheless curious, readers. A chapter devoted to ways in which the work of Juanita Brown and David Isaacs, founders of the World Café communication processes, can be adapted to classroom settings was a useful addition to the how-to section and provided solid examples of a process that can enhance connection to the collective consciousness in the classroom.

Bache has offered a thought-provoking theory of teaching and learning that is worthy of serious consideration. This book is posing important questions about how we learn, and also how learning is a form of transformation. For educators and students alike, *The Living Classroom* provides a wider and deeper exploration of classroom dynamics and would be a useful resource in
classes and programs dedicated to training educators in transformational teaching and learning practices.

REFERENCES


The Author

Christopher M. Bache, Ph.D., is Professor of Religious Studies at Youngstown State University and the author of *Dark Night, Early Dawn: Steps to a Deep Ecology of Mind*.

The Reviewer

Christine Brooks, Ph.D., is Associate Professor and Chair of the Residential M.A. and Ph.D. programs in Transpersonal Psychology at Sofia University. Her scholarship is focused on issues of diversity in transpersonal psychology and related fields and exploring the potential for social transformation and social justice from a transpersonal perspective. Additional areas of interest include women’s adult psychospiritual development, the use of gendered language and imagery in psychospiritual theory and models, and transformational education and leadership.

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John Amoroso’s *Awakening Past Lives* significantly advances the fields of regression therapy and transpersonal development through a process he calls Integrated Imagery. Written at an accessible level for clinicians and lay people alike, this book synthesizes two centuries of research and successful therapeutic practice involving past-life recall, much of it now forgotten. Amoroso traces different theoretical models and contributions to the field from psychotherapy, spiritual traditions, and esoteric schools. The result is a yeasty mix that, though it may confound conventional audiences, presents a rich, multi-layered, and nuanced cross-disciplinary tapestry to transpersonalists. For example, his
Integrated Imagery technique synthesizes key concepts, such as the nexus between psychological complexes, the energetic chain of experience, and the laws of karma, into practical applications clinicians and counselors can use with patients—or that lay readers can use for their own self-development.

The book is designed for experiential learning. Each chapter presents theoretical information illustrated with case histories, most from Amoroso’s decades of experience. The theoretical material is followed by multi-modal, step-by-step exercises for clinical application or self-exploration, including journaling, autobiographical exploration, dream work, and imagery of various kinds. The book comes with an audio CD of recorded regression inductions for a variety of different purposes so that readers can explore on their own the methods described in the book. Exercises for processing the regressions are also included as a way of furthering the benefits of the experience.

Integrated Imagery, which builds on some of the most successful techniques of Morris Netherton, Roger Woolger, Stanislav Grof, Carl Jung, and Helen Wambach, goes beyond approaches that focus on treating and resolving pathology. Amoroso’s approach emphasizes the positive complexes that represent talents, strengths, and wisdom individuals bring forward, not just the negative ones. He discusses the ways positive complexes interact with negative complexes, and how the two can be used developmentally to help people realize their existential potential, or soul purpose in this life. In fact, many of his clients are successful people who, in mid-life, found something missing and wanted to focus on their higher purpose.

Integrated Imagery works with positive and negative complexes from past-life experiences as well as key formative times in the biographical life, especially the pre- and peri-natal period. As with other regression therapies, no belief in reincarnation or past lives is necessary since the method works effectively with the unconscious. Anyone can benefit from it, especially as it involves releasing or activating past material held in mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual constructs. Altered-state inductions to access unconsciously held material are furthered by Jungian Active Imagination and gestalt techniques that help resolve conflicts to realize positive potentials.

*Awakening Past Lives* is exactly what its subtitle says—a practical, step-by-step guide to self-exploration from a transpersonal perspective, one that can be used by skeptics as well as believers.

**The Author**

*John Amoroso*, Ph.D., has maintained a full-time transpersonal psychotherapy practice in the Philadelphia area for more than 25 years using Integrated Imagery (past life regression) as a primary therapeutic approach. He has also taught at the graduate level in several universities during that period. For the last six years, John has been on the faculty of Atlantic University in Virginia.
Beach teaching courses in transpersonal studies and creativity studies, as well as offering a certification program in Integrated Imagery.

The Reviewer
Jenny Wade, Ph.D., is a professor at Sofia University and a leadership and organization development consultant. A researcher, she specializes in adult development and consciousness studies, especially naturally occurring altered and regression states, and their application to transformative processes.

ERRATA

Please note the following print corrections for a book review that appeared in the most recent issue. Vich is former long-time editor of the Journal.


p. 240 “… proceeded within …” instead of “… proceeded with in …”

p. 241 “… strategies for advancing …” instead of “… strategies for dancing …”

p. 242 “… editor of …” instead of “… editor to …”

**Volume I:** Introduction: Essential concepts and summary of transpersonal and metatranspersonal theory. **Volume II:** Steps to a metatranspersonal philosophy and psychology: A critique of the systems of Wilber, Washburn and Grof, and an outline of the Dzogchen path to definitive true sanity. **Volume III:** Further steps to a metatranspersonal philosophy and psychology: An evaluation of Ken Wilber’s system and of the ascender/descender debate. **Volume IV:** Further Steps to a metatranspersonal philosophy and psychology: An assessment of the transpersonal paradigms of Grof and Washburn [and Appendices I, II, and III] beyond mind papers.

In these four volumes--some 1,200+ pages—Capriles, a scholar teaching at the University of the Andes in Merida, Venezuela, presents the Tibetan Dzog-chen view as the penultimate path to true sanity, psychological health, and “enlightenment in this lifetime.” A long-time student of Buddhism and the Tibetan lama, Namkhai Norbu and others, he is fluent in a number of languages and familiar with various psychological/spiritual systems

... Paul M. Clemens


A wonderful way to understand a different worldview, especially of love and beauty, and nature. 3000 years of poetry.


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...Miles Vich


...Jenny Wade