

Into the Mystery: A phenomenological study of Embodied Spiritual Inquiry (ESI) and the perceived transformative value for inquirers

Marina L. Mecheva

Alef Trust and Liverpool John Moores University

Can we gain spiritual knowledge by tuning into the body's inherent wisdom? This paper explores such a possibility through the lens of Embodied Spiritual Inquiry (ESI), a participatory approach to transpersonal learning, developed by Jorge N. Ferrer, proposing the integration of multiple ways of knowing through physical, somatic, vital, emotional, mental and spiritual experiences. The focus of this phenomenological study was on the experience of ESI and its potential transformative value for inquirers. Seven individuals who previously participated in ESI research were interviewed. Findings emerged through eight essential themes: four textural constituents - transpersonal experiences, intimacy with self and others, transformation in everyday life, and serendipity; and four structural qualities - inquiry container, intuitive knowing through the body, collaborative research, and enhancement of other practices. Results reflected the intrapersonal, interpersonal and transpersonal experiences of participants, suggesting that ESI may have a transformative value for researchers engaging with the method. While these results require further investigation in regard to their transferability, they may inspire future studies in light of the implications of transpersonal research in the field of psychology and beyond.

Keywords: Embodied Spiritual Inquiry, participatory approach, embodied transpersonal learning, transformative education

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Marina L. Mecheva. Email: office@marinamecheva.com

Recommended citation: Mecheva, M. L. (2023). Into the Mystery: A phenomenological study of Embodied Spiritual Inquiry (ESI) and the perceived transformative value for inquirers. *Consciousness, Spirituality & Transpersonal Psychology*, 4, 15-27. <https://doi.org/10.53074/cstp.2023.49>

Transpersonal research suggests that embodied means of inquiry contribute to enhanced ways of knowing and potentially to transformation by engaging the participation of the entirety of one's conscious experience connecting to something greater than oneself (Anderson & Braud, 2011; Moustakas, 1990). The field of transpersonal psychology is broadly characterized with this outlook (Daniels, 2005) and as Ferrer (2002) suggests, the comprehensive understanding of human experiences "requires the inclusion of spiritual phenomena" (p. 8). This is quite logical as human beings have a natural tendency to explore the nature of their experiences. Transpersonal psychology may therefore bring value to our curiosity by surfacing insight from spiritual traditions, creating bridges between spirituality and science (Lancaster, 2008). Embodied Spiritual Inquiry may be one such approach to research which embraces embodied and spiritual ways of knowing. This method suggests a unique, integrative and mature approach to research presented in a framework which may encourage transformation for those engaging with the method. As Ferrer (2002) states: "The most genuine spiritual paths involve a gradual transformation from narrow self-centeredness towards a fuller participation into the mystery of our existence" (pp. 144–145).

What is Embodied Spiritual Inquiry?

Embodied Spiritual Inquiry (ESI) is a contemplative, second-person approach to research and a graduate course developed and implemented at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), San Francisco, by Jorge N. Ferrer (2017) since 2003. The majority of ESI research has been conducted in academic settings.

The methodology involves Interactive Embodied Meditations (IEMs) which were originally developed in the context of Albareda and Romero's Holistic Transformation approach to integrative development (Ferrer, 2003), which engages with multiple embodied ways of knowing, polarities and the intrapersonal, interpersonal and transpersonal dimensions. This is also one of the approaches that contributes to Ferrer's participatory paradigm (Ferrer & Sherman, 2008), in which the research methodology of ESI is grounded. Within ESI, IEMs are used as inquiry tools through John Heron's (1996) Cooperative Inquiry framework to facilitate "deep listening into the essential human dimensions" (Ferrer, 2017, p. 167). The method involves mindful physical contact of specific areas of the body enacted between two or more practitioners, facilitating access to the physical body, vital energy, heart, mind and consciousness (Ferrer, 2003; Malkemus & Romero, 2012; Osterhold et al., 2007).

For the mind and consciousness - the area of contact is the head; for the heart - the chest and the back; for the vital world - the lower abdomen; and for the body - the feet and legs. During these practices one person plays a receptive role (i.e., receiving the physical contact) and another an active role (i.e., initiating the physical contact) (Osterhold et al., 2007). A typical ESI study engages co-inquirers in contemplative learning through an introductory class of approximately three hours, followed by three intensive weekend retreats. In the spirit of open-ended inquiry (Almaas, 2002) research questions emerge

from the particular interest of research groups and are later dynamically elaborated through four stages: initial reflection, action, immersion inside the experience of the subject of interest, and final reflection. Inquiry also involves drawing, dancing, critical discussion, sharing, journaling and reflective papers. Through these specific tools participants are able to access propositional, experiential, presentational and practical knowing (Heron, 1996) “embracing the entire epistemic spectrum” (Ferrer, 2017, p. 167).

Studies that Employed ESI

The first published ESI case study was foundational to the method and focused on transformative education and the potential for integrating all human attributes into research (Osterhold et al., 2007). Findings suggested that this may facilitate a transformation that was “powerful and, in some cases, life changing for participants” (p. 10). Participants described the ESI inquiry container as a “shared field” (p. 11) supportive of deeper unitive states and “feelings of oneness” (p. 11) bringing forth an expansion of awareness and other unique transformative processes.

Another study with ESI explored the nature of human boundaries (Sohmer et al., 2019). Its findings tended to support Osterhold et al. (2007). The study suggested that ESI may have implications beyond the inquiry process supporting participants’ personal growth and maturity in their everyday life and participation into the world (Heron, 1996). Participants also reported ESI to feel like a space that allows the experience of deep embodiment and a sense of awareness of self through the communication with another (Sohmer et al., 2019).

A more recent heuristic inquiry included an exploration of a constituent element of ESI – the Interactive Embodied Meditations (IEMs) (Hector, 2021), and the living experience of participants with IEMs. Among the emerging themes for practitioners were “multidimensional ways of knowing” (p. 7), gradual processes of self-directed personal growth towards “integral health and wellbeing” (p. 7) and an emergence of shared experiences.

Lastly, a doctoral study by Sohmer (2020) on the value of Cooperative Inquiry – the other essential component of ESI, focused on the value of working with the individual and collective shadow, which were seen as stepping stones for the transformation of inquirers. In her study, Sohmer speaks of a transpersonal field where inquirers become mirrors for each other, facilitating spiritual states that are phenomenologically similar to unitive states of consciousness (Sohmer, 2020).

As the implications of the ESI method may offer valuable insights for the field of transpersonal research and personal transformation, this study aims to inspire further investigation with the method. It also aims to contribute toward filling the literature gap on ESI by presenting a complete essential structure of ESI and its potential impact on the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual worlds of inquirers. The research question

for this study was: *What is the experience of Embodied Spiritual Inquiry and what is the perceived transformative value for inquirers?*

Method

Phenomenology was selected as the method for this study to gather “a deep understanding of a phenomenon as experienced by several individuals” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 80). Phenomenology was also chosen as it is a philosophy of the first-person perspective “that is always intimately situated in relationship to one’s bodily dimension” (Malkemus, 2012, p.216). The method therefore allows us to attend to both “part and whole, the contingent and the essential” (Van Manen, 2014, p. 36). This also encourages awareness of detail and the embracing of an inquiry process into one’s lived experience “as a biological and spiritual identity” (Malkemus, 2012, p. 213). The essence of the ESI experience was distilled particularly through transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1990) and sought to intricately elaborate on participant experience and the meanings associated with it (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants

A pool of 71 former students at CIIS who had participated in ESI research between 2005 and 2015 were contacted through a letter of invitation to participate in the study. Ten responded, of which seven confirmed their intention to participate and underwent the interview process. All seven participants were adults (over 18 years of age) and were selected according to a single sampling criteria, quantified as no less than one participation in an ESI study. No other factors such as gender, ethnicity, culture, nationality, or any other specific facets of identity were controlled for. All participants who participated were Caucasian, three were male and four were female, presenting for a balanced gender sample. The age range of participants was from 34 to 42, with the average age of 38. All seven worked in the field of psychology at the time of the interview.

Data Collection

Data was gathered through seven structured to semi-structured individual online interviews, which took place over the Zoom platform and lasted approximately 40 minutes. Interviews consisted of eight open-ended phenomenologically-structured questions. Questions invited for a detailed description of the ESI experience and how it may have affected the somatic, vital, emotional, mental and contemplative worlds of participants. Questions also regarded the setting and context of ESI and invited for an indepth description of individual experiences and whether they may have had an overall transformative value for participants.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed through the analytical procedure of Colaizzi (1978): bracketing, establishing intense familiarity, and distilling texts into their constitutive structures to create an in-depth description of the essential experience of the method. The thematic analysis involved data horizontalization to identify salient meanings based explicitly on

the recorded experience of participants. The process of transcript analysis and its different phases is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Transcript Analysis

Essential Phenomenological Steps	Description of Process
Step 1 - Familiarization & embodiment	Becoming deeply familiar with the data, allowing it to organically mature and and bring forth the felt sense of participant experiences
Step 2 - Identifying salient statements	Identifying statements in the text relevant to the phenomenon
Step 3 - Formulating meanings	Clustering statements of similar meanings
Step 4 - Clustering themes	Deep familiarization with all formulated meanings and emerging themes.
Step 5 - Developing essential descriptions	Allowing for the indepth structural (the “how” of the experience) and textural (the “why” of the experience) to emerge as the cumulative maturity of all elements
Step 6 - Emergence of fundamental structures	Developing the fundamental structure and phenomenological descriptions, the most essential to the structure and texture of the phenomena (Tufford & Newman, 2010, p.81)
Step 7 - Participant feedback	Emailing fundamental structures to participants for feedback

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) Research Ethics Panel following which a letter of invitation was emailed to the pool of 71 potential participants. Those who responded and confirmed their participation were invited to sign a consent form, information and debriefing sheets. Participants were assigned a letter (from A to G) in place of real names. Each interview began with a brief meditation inviting a sense of reverence for the unique experience of every individual.

Results

Through the seven conducted interviews, 190 salient statements surfaced which emerged into eight main themes. Four were textural (identified with capital T) describing the “what” of the experience, and four were structural (identified with capital S) describing the “how” of the experience.

Textural Themes

T1 – Transpersonal Experiences

Experiences of participants with ESI were reported to bring forth an expanded sense of self and deeper awareness and were therefore unified under the common theme of transpersonal experiences. These transpersonal experiences ranged from individual to collective and

were diverse in nature. They were distilled into five subthemes: collective field, subtle communication, vivid dreams, shadow integration and enhanced states of awareness.

T1.a. Collective Field. During the inquiry process participants felt like they were part of a collective field. This was implied in statements such as: “We would go off in pairs for the meditation and then we would come back and it would seem like similar themes were explored in different meditation pairs” (Participant A). The collective experience was compared to “a portal” (Participant B) which held a space “greater than the sum of all the parts” (Participant D). Participants felt that they could “only speculate” (Participant A) about what was guiding their collective experience, but suggested that it “may be the result of individuals coming together with a common intention” (Participant C). The collective experience was also named a “transpersonal morphic field”, which was suggested to be everywhere and “just accessed through the work” (Participant E). In this, ESI was seen potentially as a “doorway” (Participant E) to this and other transpersonal experiences such as subtle communication.

T1.b. Subtle Communication. During the inquiry process, participants reported to have communicated with each other through a deeper awareness in their energy centers: “We both experienced it in the same way, even though it was a more subtle perception, you know we were not communicating about it” (Participant A). The physical touch during IEMs was perceived “to invite this awareness into the centers of knowing” (Participant B) making the “language of the body more comprehensible, gentle and authentic” (Participant F). The process was perceived to be “equally welcoming all energy centers” (Participant B) and participants shared that they could perceive one another’s subtle experiences without being told about them:

Let’s say that I am meditating and all of a sudden, my heart is wanting to fly and expand, I may not believe this, but then if my partner with whom I am not speaking is also experiencing this, just through our physical contact, it certainly makes it feel more real and then that creates a feedback loop - I am believing more in these subtle perceptions (Participant A).

Subtle communication also tended to be expressed in intrapersonal ways, where participants claimed to be able to determine whether there was “good communication between say my heart and my vital center” (Participant A). Through these experiences, personal boundaries seemed to be more fluid and yet properly administered, “actually allowing greater closeness” (Participant G).

T1.c. Vivid Dreams. The integration of polarities during the inquiry process was reported to “mobilize energy which came forth through dreaming” (Participant B) and enhanced one’s ability to remember their dreams. One participant reported to have experienced “such rich dreams as a result of the inquiry” (Participant B) and to have gained insight into important life decisions through them. The enhanced

awareness and vividness of the participants' dreams also tended to support a deeper connection with more subtle realms aiding a greater ability "to listen to inner wisdom and guidance" (Participant B). This also tended to support greater trust in one's inner faculties as was also suggested by Participant A.

T1.d. Shadow Integration. The surfacing of the shadow from the unconscious to the conscious was perceived to be a natural and organic part of ESI, witnessed both within the individuals and inside the group, allowing "what is to emerge without judgement" (Participant E). One explanation for the surfacing of the shadow experiences was that "when a group comes together, there is always the possibility for some kind of challenge" (Participant A). In this, the shadow was perceived in the "Jungian sense that there is an underbelly of experience that might not exist within the conscious field" (Participant G). "Shadows emerged at different levels depending on one's level of consciousness" (Participant E) and the key for integration was in "honoring the truth of every experience" (Participant E). The emergence of the shadow was also seen to be very revealing in terms of one's life purpose (Participant F). As one participant pointed out, "the ESI container provides an opportunity to engage with the components of oneself, though in the end it is up to the individual how they catalyze, interpret and embody their experiences" (Participant G).

T1.e. Enhanced States of Awareness. IEMs in the inquiry process were experienced as a gateway to subtle realms (Participant B,) supportive of "visions" (Participant B) and "mild altered state of consciousness" (Participant D). These states were suggested to have emerged due to the deeply felt sense of presence, which was described to be "semi-psychedelic, as we do not live in that state of presence ordinarily" (Participant D). Similarly, the increased levels of attention during the guided meditations and the noticing of one's own vital energy (Participant D) were suggested to enhance overall awareness. The deepened sense of presence with self and others was also experienced as "direct connection with the divine" (Participant E).

T2 – Increased Intimacy & Presence

Being in touch with one's vital energy was reported as "not something to fear, but as the place where deepest creativity, wisdom and intuition may reside" (Participant D). The increased sense of intimacy tended to open participants to a deeper sense of emotion permitting "emotion without fear" (Participant E). One participant pointed out that "everyone was moving around in such presence with each other that it was a little scary, because it was involving real intimacy (Participant B). This greater sense of intimacy and connectedness with self and others was reported "to open the heart" (Participant B) and to remove "a protective armor" (Participant B) exposing feelings of "rigid, or firm boundaries" (Participant A) allowing access to "deepest creativity, wisdom and intuition" (Participant D). All of this created space for what needed to heal through "the merging of emotional and physical depth of experiences" (Participant E).

T3 – Transformation in Everyday Life

The inquiry process was reported “to enhance participant certainty in their intuitive faculties” (Participant A) “encouraging greater trust in alternative ways of knowing through the richness of all energy centers and a sense of wisdom beyond contemporary awareness” (Participant B). Alienation from the body due to “narratives of oppression such as sin, shame and guilt were seen to be replaced by narratives of liberation” (Participant D). Though this change often felt “nuanced and invisible” (Participant G) it inevitably supported body-fullness, rather than head-fullness, opening “the door to what the soul wants” (Participant E). ESI was therefore seen as a doorway to the embodiment of cognitive processes and a timely tool in the processes of conscious awakening, “bringing spirituality out of the head and into the body, not only on a spiritual, but also on a cognitive level” (Participant E).

T4 – Serendipity

ESI was experienced as contributing toward students’ intention for change, “supportive of dreams, insights and wisdom” (Participant A). The course was seen as “a very fundamental thread in my evolution as a person” (Participant D). This good timing was suggested by some to be accompanied by a sense of serendipity, or to have been “a tool placed on one’s path by the universe” (Participant E), which “absolutely changed the course of my life” (Participant F). As one student shared, there was a sense of synergy between students’ intentions for personal and professional growth and their enrolment in the course: “I was hungry for change, I was looking for healing, so I was very ripe for that kind of experience” (Participant B). Through their experience with ESI, “seeds were planted, which continued to grow” (Participant D) in their lives, “influencing even choices for change of profession” (Participant E).

Structural Themes

S1 – Inquiry Container

ESI took place in settings closer to nature which presented a “strong energetic container” (Participant A) providing “the felt sense of a retreat” (Participant C). These settings felt safe and invited participants to “drop more deeply into their bodies and the collective psyche” (Participant C). Other factors that may have influenced the ESI experience were psychosomatic states such as deep relaxation, intentional breathing, light touch, and meditation - all part of the ESI protocol and yet potentially seen as a separate context. Participants reported that even though these factors may have additionally influenced their experience, all was perceived to be essential and supportive to the overall process and especially to the “ability to open to the body and to internal pockets of locked, or blocked energy” (Participant A).

S2 – Intuitive Knowing Through the Body

Being present with one’s body and holistic psychosomatic experience was considered to be the main inquiry tool during the research process. In their excitement about this, one participant shared: “Wow, I can, I do have that mobility to connect to my belly

and my pelvis and ask for information from that place. I don't always have to ask my head" (Participant C). Inquiry was therefore experienced to be entirely inclusive of the physical, vital, emotional, mental and spiritual worlds through the body. This tended to support an engagement with a topic in "inclusive, grounded and embodied ways with the intuitive wisdom of the body, providing an altogether different lens to research" (Participant E). This was also said to invite "a perception of reality past cognicentric ways of knowing bringing the voices of all centers together" (Participant A). For most participants, the research process therefore felt like "a homecoming into the body" (Participant D) and "supported the exploration of blockages preventing students from knowing and being themselves" (Participant D) and helped them to "relate to the world more holistically, through the body" (Participant D).

S3 – Empirical Research through Collaboration

ESI was described as an "engaging and happening in real time process" (Participant A). The idea of "creating knowledge together" was inspiring, and also experienced as supportive of individual growth (Participant A). The witnessing of the transformation of others felt "like meta, or a hall of mirrors" (Participant A). The method was reported to be an awakening experience invoking "images and inspirations" (Participant B) different to a purely cognitive approach, and yet "not less stimulating academically, allowing moments of direct insight" (Participant D). The method also encouraged "a collaborative dialogue with self and others" (Participant G) confirming that "research can be a cooperative collective process" (Participant G). Finally, the inquiry was reported to engage personal blockages as "an opportunity to create change and personal transformation" (Participant G) while being one's own catalyst in the process.

S4 – Enhancement of Other Practices

ESI tended to enliven other practices such as yoga, making it feel more "creative, dynamic and inspired" (Participant A). It was also experienced as complementary to practices for "enhancing attention" (Participant C), "non-ordinary states of consciousness" (Participant D) and therapeutic use of plant medicines (Participant D). ESI also tended to illuminate participant perception in regard to long term spiritual practices, such as Zen meditation, which was which one participant experienced as "a defense against my own sexuality and my own identity" (Participant B).

Essential Invariant Structure

In sum, my findings suggested that Embodied Spiritual Inquiry was experienced as a transformative method for empirical investigation, inviting whole body exploration into subtle areas of research, embracing alternative ways of knowing and aiding integrative participatory embodiment, holistic transformation and presence with one's vital energy.

Discussion

Participant experiences supported the literature which describes ESI to be a whole-person inquiry tool encouraging embodied and participatory ways of knowing. The embodied

practices of the method were experienced as a doorway to the physical, vital, emotional, mental and spiritual worlds, engaging participants in an inquiry process that was holistic and complete. Real-time, collaborative research brought forth the emergence of self-discovery in the he personal and social domains, nurtured the integration of multiple polarities and enhanced transformative processes into the everyday lives of participants.

One of the key features of ESI seemed to be the transformative value of working with polarities, demonstrated through many of the themes (shadow integration, subtle communication, intimacy, collaboration, etc.). According to Ferrer (personal communication, February 24, 2022), ESI engages the two major polarities, proactive and receptive, and each of these, surface a richness of embodied experiences. As Albareda and Romero (2001) have suggested, the integration of human polarities such as the immanent vital energy (sexuality) and the transcendent energy of consciousness (spirituality) is essential for our transformation and vital for our times.

Another key component suggested by participant experiences was the possibility for shadow integration in an academic framework, as was also indicated by the three articles on ESI discussed in the literature review (Osterhold et al., 2007; Sohmer et al., 2020). The presented study may also inspire further investigation into dream states and how they may be affected or enhanced through shadow and polarity integration, as was reported to be the case during Embodied Spiritual Inquiry.

Participant data also suggested that the method supported an opening up to a collective or morphic field, as it encouraged the liberation of vital energy, which “tunes into the deepest codes of one’s life energy, an intelligence beyond what we know, or understand” (J. N. Ferrer, personal communication, February 24, 2022). Further studies exploring the possibility to tap into the vital energy and knowing of both the body and collective field, as well as polarity and shadow integration, feel essential in terms of personal transformation and whole-person education, especially as the method also allows an exploration into the “subtle, nuanced territory of human psyche” (Sohmer, 2018, p. 119) which matches the complexity of such unexplored territory.

My own encounter with the method through participant experiences felt deeply transformative. It made me sense my own rigid boundaries, the narratives of shame and guilt that were very present, as well as my own armour of the heart. It made me aware of just how mental my whole life experience tended to be, and helped me to endeavour on my own process of living more fully through my body. This is still something that I am deepening into as I write this article over one year after this research. As Anderson and Braud (2011) suggest, research can be “accompanied by increased self-awareness, enhanced psycho-spiritual growth” (p. 29) both for researcher and participants, and this certainly was the case for me.

Validity and limitations

Participant validation was tested for with member checks. All seven participants concurred that their experience with ESI was accurately portrayed by findings. Nevertheless, all inquirers came from academic backgrounds and worked in the field of psychology, which may have led to satisficing and “self-selection bias”. Bias may have also been reached through the shared meditation and intention at the start of interviews, which despite being intended to create a space for open communication may have enhanced positive assessment of the method. I also wondered about the pool of 71 individuals to whom I sent invitations; why did only 10 write back? Is it possible that only those with a positive experience responded, or may there have been a discrepancy with contact details as at least seven years had passed since the last ESI course? In terms of my objectivity as a researcher, I had no first-hand experience with ESI and therefore very little bias for or against the method. My observation following interviews with participants only suggests that an integration program may be incorporated following ESI to help continue the learning and transformative processes of participants. In regard to previous criticism of the method, I found none, which may have been due to the insufficient exploration of ESI and therefore lack of data. As far as the transferability of results gathered here, the implementation of ESI in more conventional settings may determine whether findings go beyond the transpersonal field.

Conclusion

Can we gain spiritual knowledge by tuning into the body’s inherent wisdom? The findings of this study may support this possibility through the experience of students with Embodied Spiritual Inquiry and the transformative value which the method brought forth into their lives. It is therefore my hope that this article may provoke interest in ESI and its potential contribution to the field of whole-person transformative education.

Acknowledgements

This article is based on the final dissertation research project undertaken by the author and supervised by Dr. Gabriel Fernandez Borsot. It was submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MSc programme in Consciousness, Spirituality, and Transpersonal Psychology. The programme was delivered by Alef Trust in partnership with Liverpool John Moores University, UK.

References

- Almaas, A. H. (2002). *Spacecruiser inquiry: True guidance for the inner journey*. Shambala.
- Anderson, R., & Braud, W. (2011). *Transforming self and others through research: Transpersonal research methods and skills for the human sciences*. SUNY Press.
- Colaizzi, P. (1978). Psychological research as a phenomenologist views it. In R. S. Valle & M. King (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological alternatives for psychology*. Oxford University Press.

- Creswell, J.W. & Poth, C.N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage.
- Daniels, M. (2005). *Shadow, self, spirit: Essays in transpersonal psychology*. Imprint Academic.
- Ferrer, J. N. (2002). *Revisioning transpersonal theory: A participatory vision of human spirituality*. State University of New York Press.
- Ferrer, J. N. (2003). Integral transformative practices: A participatory perspective. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 35(1), 21–42.
- Ferrer, J. N. (2017). *Participation and the mystery: Transpersonal essays in psychology, education and religion*. SUNY Press.
- Ferrer, J. N. & Sherman, J. H. (2008). *The participatory turn: Spirituality, mysticism, religious studies*. SUNY Press.
- Hector, F. (2021). *A heuristic inquiry into the living experiences of participants in Albareda and Romero's holistic transformation practices* [Unpublished Master's thesis]. Alef Trust, Professional Development Foundation, & Middlesex University.
- Heron, J. (1996). *Co-operative inquiry: Research into the human condition*. SAGE.
- Lancaster, B. L. (2008). Engaging with the mind of God: The participatory path of Jewish mysticism. In J. Ferrer & J. Sherman (eds.), *The participatory turn: Spirituality, mysticism, religious studies* (pp. 173-196). SUNY Press.
- Malkemus, S. A. (2012). Toward a general theory of enaction: Biological, transpersonal, and phenomenological dimensions. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 44(2), 202 - 223.
- Malkemus, S., A. & Romero, M. T. (2012). Sexuality as a transformational path: Exploring the holistic dimensions of human vitality. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 31(2), 33–41. <https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2012.31.2.33>
- Moustakas, C. (1990). *Heuristic research: Design, methodology and applications*. SAGE Publications.
- Osterhold, H. M., Husserl E. R., & Nicol, D. (2007). Rekindling the fire of transformative education. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 5(3), 221 - 245. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344607308022>
- Romero, M. T., & Albareda, R. V. (2001). Born on Earth: Sexuality, spirituality, and human evolution. *ReVision*, 24(2), 5-15.
- Sohmer, O. R., Baumann, R., & Ferrer, J. N. (2019). An embodied spiritual inquiry into the nature of human boundaries: Outcomes of a participatory approach to transpersonal education and research. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 38(2), 117-137.
- Sohmer, O. R. (2018). Interactive meditation as research practice: An introduction to embodied spiritual inquiry. *Integral Transpersonal Journal*, 10(10), 118–137.
- Sohmer, O. R. (2020). The experience of the authentic self: A cooperative inquiry. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167820952339>
- Tufford, L., & Newman, P. (2012). Bracketing in qualitative research. *Qualitative Social Work*, 11(1), 80–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325010368316>
- Van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing*. Left Coast Press.

About the Author

Marina Mecheva graduated with a BA in Psychology from Valdosta State University, USA and an MSc in Consciousness, Spirituality, and Transpersonal Psychology from Alef Trust & John Moores University, UK. Her practice is based in Sofia, Bulgaria where her work's focus is the personal transformation and the blossoming of creativity of her clients. She teaches spiritual awakening, personal responsibility and the importance of embodied spirituality in our daily lives and for our communities. Her website: www.marinamecheva.com



Copyright © 2023 Mecheva. This is an open-access article licensed and distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) or licensor are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.