The Future is Now: The HECTOR Project & the Society for Humanistic Psychology Conference

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The Future is Now:

Report from The HECTOR Project and The Fourth Annual Society for Humanistic Psychology Conference

Shawn Rubin, Psy.D.

In support of this Special Issue’s survey on the topic of humanistic psychology's future growth and development I offer this brief report detailing recent events that suggests a burgeoning youth movement in our field.

At the invitation of Louis Hoffman, Brent Dean Robbins, Richard Bargdill and the author of this report, 13 early career humanistic psychologists and doctoral-level graduate students were invited to The Chicago School of Professional Psychology for two days of intensive meetings prior to the Conference on April 13th and 14th. In attendance were Doctoral Students Miraj Desai, Bojun Hu, Sarah Kamens, and Amanda Lowe and Early Career Psychologists Todd DuBose, Rhonda Goldman, Robert McNernay, Donna Rockwell, Rochelle Suri, Xuefu Wang, and Mark Yang. Invited but unable to attend were Alex Adame and Jef Cornelius-White.

The ambitious goals of the HECTOR Meetings (Humanistic Existential Constructivist Transpersonal Organizing Retreat) included: identifying areas of need for advancing research and scholarship in humanistic psychology; increasing diversity in humanistic psychology; building bridges with national and international institutions and communities that share our values and objectives; inserting humanistic psychology into the public discourse; identifying and assisting humanistic undergraduate students to find humanistic graduate programs and Improving opportunities for humanistic graduate students to find humanistic-friendly pre- and post-doctoral internships; and supporting early career humanistic psychologists in pursuit of tenure.

HECTOR was honored to welcome distinguished professors Xuefu Wang and Mark Yang from China. In collaboration with Louis Hoffman, these leaders of the existential psychology movement in China organize an annual training series and a biennial conference that has featured seminal psychologists in our field, including Erik Craig, Ed Mendelowitz and Kirk Schneider. HECTOR discussed how best to support emerging international communities, including Rochelle Suri’s interest in organizing a future conference in India and a budding interest in humanistic psychology in Brazil. Add in Society President Louise Sundararajan’s Task Force on Indigenous Psychology and there are several exciting international groups working to illuminate and strengthen humanistic and existential values across the globe.

The camaraderie and support in these meetings made for very productive discussions. The warmth, humor and generosity of spirit among the group members demonstrated to the authors that serious issues pertaining to our movement’s survival and re-emergence can be best addressed within the caring and respectful foundation of person-to-person relationships. The meetings ended with each of the participants developing individual and collaborative action plans to advance humanistic psychology through research, scholarship and networking. Online communication groups and file sharing are being organized and progress related to these tasks will be reported upon at the next HECTOR Meeting which will take place in China or Point Park University, the site of the next Society Conference.
Upon reflection, perhaps we were inspired by the Founders of Humanistic Psychology and the tradition of the meetings at Old Saybrook, over 45 years ago. While the Founders were crystallizing a movement in psychology at their particular time in history, HECTOR is focused on carrying forth the evolution of the movement into the 21st century; broadening and deepening the scope of our academic research and clinical applications, and addressing the diverse needs of global communities. We would like to think the ghosts of Old Saybrook would cheer these efforts. The energy and excitement generated by HECTOR was increased exponentially by the Society Conference which followed.

The Society’s Fourth Annual Conference was held in Chicago April 15th-17th and had its highest attendance to date: over 250 participants. Through the organizational efforts of Society Membership Chair Richard Bargdill, an emerging core of humanistic schools and programs were represented by faculty mentors and students. The Student Ambassadors Program was initiated this year and enlisted student representatives at humanistic-friendly undergraduate and graduate schools to create and present posters of student profiles and scholarly research projects and dissertations.

The exceptional mentoring of student scholars by leaders in the humanistic movement helped to create an energetic atmosphere at the Conference. Faculty mentors and their institutions include: Conference Organizer Todd Dubose of The Chicago School of Professional Psychology where he serves as Chair of the Humanistic-Existential track in the doctoral program; Brent Dean Robbins and Robert McInernay of Point Park University where they are creating an MA Program in Community Psychology; Louis Hoffman, former of University of Rockies and presently of Saybrook University; Kirk Schneider, Orah Krug, Nader Shabahangi, and Mary Madrigal of the Existential-Humanistic Institute which is offering a certificate program in existential-humanistic therapy; Society Members-at-Large Kevin Keenan and this writer of The Michigan School of Professional Psychology which offers a PsyD in Clinical & Humanistic Psychology; Fred Wertz of Fordham University; Rhonda Goldman of the Illinois School of Professional Psychology; Alex Adame and Kevin Krycka of Seattle University which has an Existential-Phenomenological Therapeutic Psychology MA Program; Alan Pope of West Georgia which is offering a PhD in Consciousness & Society; and Society Past-President Sara Bridges of the University of Memphis.

Attendees enjoyed presentations on contemporary trends such as mindfulness, sexuality, spirituality, trauma, disaster work, mixed methods research, clinical internships, and clinical competency and advocacy with racially-diverse and LGBT populations. Other presentations addressed controversial issues such as the startling increases in psychiatric medication for children, proposed DSM-V diagnoses, Palestinian responses to international assistance, and advocacy for individuals with extreme states of consciousness.

Some of the most well-respected voices in our movement were featured as keynote speakers: David Elkins, Maureen O’Hara, & Ernesto Spinelli who also led two additional seminars on the practice of existential therapy. Keynote speaker Voyce Hendrix, served as the original clinical director of Soteria House, a non-medication, non-diagnostic and voluntary residence treating severe psychotic breakdown that boasted impressive recovery rates.

Another highlight was Michael Schwartz’s discussion his existential and phenomenological orientation to psychiatry and medicine. His spoke of the upcoming Third Geneva Conference on Person-Centered Medicine on May 3rd and 4th of 2011. This conference boasted an impressive list of participating organizations including the World Health Organization, World Medical Association, the International...
Alliance of Patients’ Organizations, the International Council of Nurses, International Federation of Social Workers, International Pharmaceutical Federation, and other international organizations of the medical sciences, mental health, neurology, gynecology and obstetrics, sexual health, dynamic psychiatry, medical colleges, and medical students and education. He believes the global theoretical shifts towards “person-centered medicine” and “philosophical biology” are consistent with humanistic values and this presents an opportunity for bridge-building and expansion of our network of like-minded organizations.

Next year’s conference will be hosted by Point Park University in Pittsburgh, PA. We hope to see many returning attendees and meet more of the next generation of humanistic psychologists as we continue to build upon the momentum generated at the Chicago Conference. Join The Cause!

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