

FINDING LIKE MINDS AND GAINING INSPIRATION: A CONVERSATION WITH TEDDIE POTTER

Interviewed by Riane Eisler, JD, PhD(hon)

Abstract

Riane Eisler interviews Dr. Teddie Potter, Co-Founder and Executive Editor of the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies* and Director of the Center for Planetary Health and Environmental Justice at the University of Minnesota School of Nursing.

Keywords: cultural transformation, open access, transdisciplinary, domination, partnership

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Riane Eisler: First, Teddie, I want to thank you! The *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies (IJPS)* means so much to me, and you have been vital to the founding of this journal from its very beginning. What in your life led you to taking on this role?

Teddie Potter: I remember driving across Northern Minnesota one summer in 2012 or 2013. I was listening to an article on public radio and they talked about the first open access journals that were now being developed. It's as though time slowed down and the light shifted and changed and everything looked different because I knew at that moment that open access was what I had been looking for all along. I've always had problems with traditional journals. Their business model includes paywalls that sometimes keeps people from accessing journal articles. I also am concerned that journals often are associated with professional organizations and membership dues, and

if you're not part of those organizations then you do not receive the journals. If you want to get access to an article you need to pay a significant amount, and this is prohibitive for people who aren't currently associated with a university or a health system, or who lack other ways to access articles for free. Therefore it was a natural step for me to propose creating the very first open access journal for the University of Minnesota. You see, I deeply believe in cultural transformation. In fact, my PhD work was in cultural transformation, so when I heard about open access journals, I thought, "Here is the cultural transformation that we have been seeking." This shift to open access and Creative Commons will allow everyone to participate in the generation of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas.

Eisler: Could you tell us a bit more about your background and how it influenced your life, both professionally and personally?

Potter: Ever since I was a little child I have had a deep concern for people and a deep commitment to fairness. My choice to become a nurse was therefore very logical. I'm not quite sure where my concern for others and concern about lack of fairness or bullying started; I just know that it was deep in my bones from the very beginning. It wasn't necessarily taught to me by my parents, it wasn't something that I heard in society; I just had a deep innate empathy for people who were suffering, be it physically or mentally or spiritually.

In the late 1980s I read your book, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (1987, HarperCollins). I remember thinking, "This explains so much!" I had seen and experienced so much domination and bullying at work in health-care systems, especially between doctors and nurses. I also saw rankism and hierarchies of domination negatively impact the healing of people. Your work helped me understand the root causes of domination, and that it was possible to transform cultures with partnership.

Imagine my shock on the first day of graduate school when I learned that Riane Eisler was going to be one of my faculty. I eventually ended up using Riane's cultural

transformation theory in my PhD work to propose changes to the health-care system in America. Together we turned that work into an award-winning book, *Transforming Interprofessional Partnerships: A New Framework for Nursing and Partnership-Based Health Care* (2014, Sigma Theta Tau International).

When you weave all these threads together, you get to where I am today. I am the Director for the Center for Planetary Health and Environmental Justice at the University of Minnesota School of Nursing. My desire to prevent suffering, to dismantle hierarchies, and to challenge bullies now extends to protecting the health of the entire planetary ecosystem upon which life depends.

Eisler: This issue celebrates the 10th anniversary of *IJPS*. Please tell us what you think the journal has accomplished, focusing on its unique contributions to both the academy and to society worldwide.

Potter: Before this journal, there were very few places where different disciplines or professions could come together and engage in scholarly exchanges. I had hoped when we designed the journal that we would be fostering transdisciplinary education, scholarship, and practice. In the last ten years my expectations have been wildly exceeded. We have created a space for fields as different as nursing, engineering, international aid, environmental conservation, agriculture, gender studies, dance, music, and art to come together in the same space to foster transdisciplinary exchange. Transdisciplinarity is very different from disciplinary engagement or interprofessionalism. Transdisciplinarity means you bring discipline A and discipline B together in a non-hierarchical space, with a commitment to deep listening and sharing. As a result, outcome C becomes possible when it would not have been possible if these disciplines remained siloed.

I'm also delighted that our journal has a global reach. This is important if we're going to solve today's most urgent problems. We need to have everyone invited to participate in sharing solutions and advancing our capacity to work in partnership for the good of

all. I have been delighted by the depth and breadth of our content and the impact it has had on readers and authors.

Eisler: What are your wishes and hopes for the future of *IJPS* and its contributions?

Potter: I have been the executive editor of the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies* for 10 years. At our 10th anniversary celebration, I will turn that role over to Dr Stephanie Gingrich, a talented leader in the next generation. She will set her own vision for the journal and continue to work with our marvelous editorial board members and contributors.

My hope for the journal is that it will continue to be the go-to resource for people involved in transforming cultures from domination to partnership. I hope it will be a place where people can find like minds and gain inspiration to continue the cultural transformation that is so necessary today. I look forward to the next 10 years and all the ideas and hopes and dreams that will come through our pages.

Eisler: What can our readers do to support *IJPS*'s mission and the global cultural transformation from domination to partnership?

Potter: I strongly urge our readers to read as many of the articles as possible that we have published over the years. Don't just read articles in your own discipline, but choose articles from disciplines that are novel to you, because it's in this space of thinking differently that you will have ideas about how to move your own discipline forward. If you are a faculty member, please assign some of the articles as required readings. Invite your students to select articles that move them deeply and to discuss how they want to implement changes in their own lives. If you are a writer, an artist, or an activist in the community who is currently transforming our culture from domination to partnership, please consider submitting an article to the journal. Generations yet to come will be the beneficiaries.

Teddie M. Potter, PhD, RN, FAAN, FNAP, is the inaugural director of the Center for Planetary Health and Environmental Justice at the School of Nursing at the University of Minnesota and a Fellow in the Institute on the Environment at the University. Dr. Potter is deeply committed to climate change and planetary health education. She is a board member of the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments and the Planetary Health Report Card. She is a member of the American Academy of Nursing Environment and Public Health Expert Panel and the Coordinating Committee of Columbia University's Global Consortium on Climate and Health Education, and the Steering Committee of the Planetary Health Alliance (PHA). She serves on the National Academy of Medicine's Action Collaborative on Decarbonizing the US Health Sector; the Health and Medicine Division of the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM); and the Climate Crossroads committee of NASEM. Her most recent work is working with the International Council of Nurses to promote Nursing for Planetary Health.

Riane Eisler, JD, PhD(hon), is President of the Center for Partnership Systems, and Editor-in-Chief of the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies*.

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