

OUR FIRST TEN YEARS OF LEADING WITH LOVE: TRANSFORMING CULTURES THROUGH INTERDISCIPLINARY DISCOURSE

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Abstract

Editor-in-Chief of the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies* Riane Eisler writes about how much the tenth anniversary of this journal means to her. She thanks those who founded *IJPS*, as well as its global readership, for bringing international attention to the urgent need for a cultural transformation from domination to partnership at our time of mounting existential threats such as climate change and nuclear weaponry. Eisler tells us how the questions that led to her work are deeply rooted in her childhood experiences, explains how the new social categories of *partnership* and *domination* came out of her interdisciplinary research, and briefly outlines each of their core configurations. She connects the personal and the political, sharing her 45-year partnership with the late social scientist David Loye, appeals to us to do everything we can to accelerate the shift from domination to partnership worldwide, and shows the important role *IJPS* has in this needed social and cultural transformation.

Keywords: cultural transformation theory, partnership, domination, the partnership-domination scale, interdisciplinary, women, children, family, discourse, morality, David Loye

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I am very grateful for this celebration of the 10th anniversary of our *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies (IJPS)*. It gives me an opportunity to thank the people who have made *IJPS* happen; talk about how far we have come in these ten years; say how important the journal is to me personally in making cultural transformation theory a part of interdisciplinary discourse; briefly describe the partnership and domination social configurations; and tell you a little about my personal journey.

GIVING THANKS

I want to begin my thanks with Marty Lewis-Hunstiger, who made this article possible, and then thank the others who were instrumental in the creation of *IJPS*. Marty Lewis-Hunstiger, then the Editor-in-Chief of *Creative Nursing*, a scholarly peer-reviewed journal with many similarities to *IJPS* in mission and worldview, developed the process for handling manuscripts, peer review, copy editing, and proofreading; assumed the role of Developmental Editor; and became the founding Managing Editor. Teddie Potter, professor in the University of Minnesota School of Nursing who co-authored a book with me about actualizing cultural transformation theory in health care (Eisler & Potter, 2014), facilitated the School of Nursing's co-sponsorship of the journal and assumed the role of Executive Editor, convening the Editorial Board and being the decider for any publication issues that need her level of expertise. Liz Weinfurter, Nursing Librarian and Teaching and Learning Coordinator in the Health Sciences Library at the University of Minnesota, facilitated the Libraries' co-sponsorship of the journal; created our editorial style sheet; developed our open access online platform; and has been our Production Editor all these years, assuring that each issue holds together as a journal issue while honoring the contributions of the individual authors and artists. And Virajita Singh, at that time Assistant Vice Provost and an Instructor in the College of Design at the University of Minnesota, was instrumental in creating the format and "look" of our journal as a reflection of our mission and vision. Figure 1 is a photo taken at the launch event celebrating the publication of our first issue.



Figure 1. Left to right, Marty Lewis-Hunstiger, Riane Eisler, Liz Weinfurter, and Teddie Potter.

This quartet of partners are still with the journal, and many others have joined us in the years since, as Editorial Board members, Managing Editors (shout outs to Heidi Bruce, Emily Abberton, and Fang Lei), and Copy Editors (shout outs to Lata D’Mello and Mara Flynn). I am grateful to them all.

In the years since our first issue, published in November 2014, we have published 24 issues containing 230 articles by a total of more than 330 authors. Without these dedicated scholars and community leaders, our journal would have no wisdom to impart and no stories to tell. And without our readers all over the world, who since 2020 have downloaded articles over 150,000 times, there would be no journal. So I also want to thank all of you!

CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION THEORY IN INTERDISCIPLINARY DISCOURSE

IJPS was the first interdisciplinary journal, and is still the only journal, that functions as a vehicle for focusing on cultural transformation theory, partnership theory, and the partnership-domination social scale. The nomenclature, definitions, explanations, scholarly connections, and community applications of partnership theory have all found a place, and some have appeared first in *IJPS*, serving as a source for citations in many other communication channels.

Just as one example, I learned from Marty Lewis-Hunstiger that *Creative Nursing* Vol. 30 Issue 4, published in November 2024, has the theme of Transforming Power Over to Power *With*, a direct reference to the difference between the hierarchies of domination found in domination systems and the hierarchies of actualization in partnership systems. The Guest Editor for that issue, Julie Kennedy Oehlert, titled her editorial “Design Labs - The Power of *With*” (Kennedy Oehlert, 2024). Marty’s editorial is titled “Hierarchies of Actualization,” in which she says, “All the articles in this issue of *Creative Nursing* depict empowerment: of patients, parents and foster parents, other family members and caregivers, children from preschool age to near adulthood, providers of direct patient care at many levels in many areas, nurses seeking to publish their knowledge, and all people who seek to use language that demonstrates respect and value for all people while acknowledging the diverse cultures in which we abide” (Lewis-Hunstiger, 2024, p. 259).

THE ORIGINS OF CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION THEORY

My passion for the research that led to the development of cultural transformation theory is deeply rooted in my traumatic childhood experiences witnessing the violence required for, and enabled by, domination. But I also witnessed immense spiritual courage: the courage to stand up against injustice out of love.

In Vienna on the night of *Kristallnacht* in November 1938, a gang of Nazi thugs dragged my father away to certain death. But my mother had the courage to object, challenging one of the attackers, who had known my parents for years. She said, “I want him back.” My mother could have been killed, as many Jewish people were killed that night. But by a miracle, she wasn’t. Instead, she got my father back after some money changed hands. She also got a safe conduct, and eventually we were able to escape, leaving my native Vienna at night with only what we could carry.

These experiences led me to questions that my transdisciplinary research sought to answer years later. Why would people be so cruel and violent? And the related question, how do people who do object - who help others at the risk of their own and their families’ lives - find courage to do that?

My research probing these questions led to the publication of *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (Eisler, 1987). The book detailed new archeological evidence of a previous time when cultures were more egalitarian in power relationships (including family and gender), and less violent. It showed that all cultures fall on a continuum or spectrum: the partnership-domination scale. Domination is at one extreme, and has become the general norm globally. But it hasn’t always been that way. And it doesn’t have to be that way.

A WHOLE-SYSTEMS APPROACH TO STUDYING SOCIETIES

To see that there is a partnership alternative requires an inclusive, interdisciplinary approach that takes into account matters we have been taught to marginalize or ignore, such as childhood, gender, and family. For example, the people who found the spiritual courage to stand up against injustice during the Holocaust are the focus of work by Samuel and Pearl Oliner (1988), who reported that, as a group, they were inclined toward inclusive connections to others and a sense of personal efficacy, allowing them “to recognize a choice where others perceived only compliance” (p. 191).

How did they come to be such people, people who went against the norms of their societies and were able to defy the Nazis' threat, and practice, of killing not only those who helped Jews but their entire families? The Oliners found that a critical influence on these people's development was the way their parents treated them, characterized by benevolence rather than fear of spanking or other forms of physical and emotional violence.

Yet our conventional social categories – e.g. religious/secular, right/left, capitalist/socialist, Eastern/Western, Southern/Northern, capitalist/socialist – marginalize or ignore anything to do with children or women (the majority of humanity). Hence, they have little to say about families (to which women and children were generally confined, as they were barred from the public “men’s world”). This should not surprise us, since we inherited the conventionally-used social categories from more authoritarian, violent, and male-dominated times, in other words, times that still oriented more to the domination side of the continuum.

The Domination System

When we examine contemporary cultures, we see that the new categories of domination and partnership describe configurations that are invisible through the lenses of conventional categories. Only when we use the partnership-domination scale or lens can we see that societies that seem completely different actually conform to the domination or partnership configuration, in which family, gender, and childhood relations play a central role (Eisler, 1986, 1995, 2024; Eisler & Fry, 2019).

Aggressive warfare and massive violence, such as the death camps where millions were murdered, characterized the Nazi's authoritarian regime. It was a social system of *rankings*: man over man, man over woman, race over race, religion over religion, and man over nature. *Difference*, starting with the difference in form between male and female, was equated with superiority or inferiority, dominating or being dominated, being served or serving. Nazi laws subordinated women in both families and the state, and Jews, homosexuals, and other out-groups were to be killed.

But it is not only rightist regimes that have the dominator configuration. A noted example is Stalin's authoritarian leftist regime, which killed millions of Russians and had punitive male-headed families and severe penalties for abortion.

Nor is this configuration only found in secular Western societies. Idealizing males as "holy" warriors and returning women to their "traditional" place in a rigidly male-dominated, punitive family is key for the Eastern Taliban, as is authoritarian state rule and a high degree of social violence, from the execution of women who do not accept their subservient status, and denial of education to girls, to the sponsorship of terrorists. Male dominance, the financing of terrorist groups, and the killing of homosexuals is also the norm for Iran's religious authoritarian regime, where women can be killed for not covering their hair.

In Africa, the norm for the traditional Masai of Africa was also authoritarian strong-man rule in intimate, tribal, and intertribal relations, with rigid gender stereotypes and the equation of masculine identity with domination and aggression. Even after revolts against Western colonialism (a feature of domination-oriented societies, including the earlier Muslim colonization and forced conversion of much of that continent), many African regimes still orient to the top-down domination side of the spectrum.

In the United States, which pioneered organizing against domination (like the civil rights, women's and LGBTQ movements), today MAGA is a large subculture that incites violence against out-groups, idealizes strongman rule, prioritizes male dominance in both the family and state, vilifies LGBTQ people, and preaches control over children as well as control over what happens in women's bodies.

Like earlier examples of domination systems such as ancient Persia and Assyria, all these societies have the same core configuration:

- 1) an authoritarian family, economic, and social organization, with hierarches of domination;

- 2) male dominance, rigid gender stereotypes, and the ranking of “masculinity” over “femininity;”
- 3) a high degree of institutionalized social violence, from child and wife beating to chronic warfare; and
- 4) stories and language that make all this seem normal, even moral.

(Eisler, 1986, 1995, 2024; Eisler & Fry, 2019)

However, and this bears repeating, this configuration only becomes visible when families, children, women, and traits and activities considered feminine or masculine are taken into account. Of course, we are dealing with *stereotypes* of masculinity and femininity based on gender-specific domination socialization processes, *not* innate biological differences. Today, as part of the movement toward partnership, many men are redefining fathering in the nurturing ways once associated only with mothering. Because the structuring of gender roles and relations is central to either the domination or partnership configuration, I also want to emphasize that gender equity is *not* a matter of women against men. Many women socialized in domination systems are not only victims; they often collaborate even in their own subordination. And while sometimes “feminine” qualities like caring and peacefulness are given lip service by both women and men, in practice they are seen as appropriate only for women and “weak” or “effeminate” men: those excluded from family, economic, and social governance.

The Partnership System

The partnership configuration is also found in different places, levels of technological development, and time periods. As detailed in *The Chalice and the Blade* and subsequent works including *Nurturing Our Humanity: How Domination and Partnership Shape our Brains, Lives, and Future* (2019), the evidence we have today shows that, contrary to what we have been taught, for millennia in our prehistory most societies oriented to partnership rather than domination. Not only was this the case for foraging societies that go way back in prehistory, but excavations of early Neolithic farming settlements like Çatal Hüyük reveal an early social organization that is generally

equitable, with no signs of gender inequity and no signs of destruction through war (Eisler, 1986, 1995, 2007, 2024; Eisler & Fry, 2019; Hodder, 2004).

In our time, contemporary gathering-hunting societies such as the Batek and Teduray are described in anthropological studies as generally egalitarian, gender-balanced, and peaceful, and so are some farming societies like the Minangkabau and the Zapotec (Eisler, 1986, 1995, 2007, 2024; Eisler & Fry, 2019). Also orienting to the partnership end of the partnership-domination scale are technologically advanced contemporary societies such as Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. And there are trends in this direction worldwide (Eisler, 2007, 2024).

I want to emphasize that the above Scandinavian societies are *not* socialist. They have a strong business or market sector, largely because they have more caring government policies, such as accessible childcare, good training for caregivers and teachers, generous paid parental leave for both mothers and fathers, universal health care, and other policies that support healthy human development and a highly productive workforce.

While not ideal, these societies are consistently on the top of international happiness reports, are often in the forefront of caring for our natural life support systems and curbing the carbon emissions threatening our natural environment, and created the first peace academies and the first laws condemning violent discipline of children. In short, what distinguishes these more peaceful states is their orientation to the more equitable, less violent partnership configuration. This partnership configuration consists of:

- 1) a more democratic family, political, and economic structure, with hierarchies of actualization rather than domination;
- 2) a more equal partnership between women and men in both the private and public spheres, with so-called "feminine" values and activities such as caring, caregiving, and nonviolence integrated into social and economic guidance;

- 3) violence, though present to a degree, is not built into the system, since it is not required to enforce rigid rankings of domination; and
- 4) stories and language that recognize humanity's negative capacities but emphasize our capacities for caring and nonviolence.

(Eisler, 1986, 1995, 2024; Eisler & Fry, 2019)

THE POLITICAL AND THE PERSONAL

The Chalice and the Blade is now in its 57th U.S. edition and has been translated into 27 other languages. In the years since, the books I have written have moved from how we got here to what we can do about it. They are about the sexuality and spirituality (Eisler, 1995), the education (Eisler, 2000), the economics (Eisler, 2007), and the neuroscience (Eisler & Fry, 2019) of partnership. There is even a How-To book that won the Nautilus award as the best self-help book: *The Power of Partnership: Seven Relationships that will Change your life* (Eisler, 2005). All these books are still in print, and being used in schools, universities, and organizations and by people of all kinds engaged in the work of cultural and personal transformation.

I want to end as I began, with my own life. I can personally attest that partnership makes people much happier than domination: my 45-year partnership with David Loye is Exhibit A.

David died two and a half years ago, and I miss him terribly. He worked in tandem with me, supporting me all the way, and at the same time writing many books of his own, among them *Darwin's Lost Theory: Who We Really Are and Where We're Going* (Loye, 2007a) and many books and articles on partnership moral sensitivity (Loye 2007b, 2015). He was an inspiration and partner for my early book *The Equal Rights Handbook* on the ERA, drawing from my legal background (Eisler, 1978, 1999), and together we wrote *The Partnership Way: New Tools for Living and Learning, Healing our Families, and our*

World (Eisler & Loye, 1990), a practical companion for both *The Chalice and the Blade* and later also *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and the Politics of the Body* (Eisler, 1995).

David also wrote an article for the inaugural issue of *IJPS* on the distinction between partnership moral sensitivity and dominator insensitivity (Loye, 2015), and Vol. 9 No. 2 (2022) of *IJPS*, “The Cooperative, Caring, and Moral Nature of Humans: Honoring David Loye” is dedicated to him and his work on reclaiming Darwin and moral sensitivity. Also, I just completed a book about how David and I met and lived and worked together, *Yet Love Remains* (Eisler, n.d.), using David’s wonderful poetry and prose to tell our story.

There is much more I would like to share on this special occasion, but before concluding, I want to return to the urgent need for globally shifting our social organization from domination to partnership - not only to survive but to thrive.

WHERE DOES THE *INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF PARTNERSHIP STUDIES* FIT IN?

IJPS is a vehicle for engaging others and keeping hope. Our focus is: There is an alternative to domination. And its contents help us do what we must do: connect the dots between the four core elements that will decide our future - the configurations of the partnership system and the domination systems.

It was my specific work with Teddie Potter on partnerships in health care that led to the birth of *IJPS*, and I hope the journal will be able to continue all this work on transforming cultures. The interdisciplinarity is a first step toward connecting the dots, which is vital for changing our fragmented consciousness (essential to maintain domination systems), and recognizing and creating a partnership-oriented reality. It will not be an ideal reality, but a much more equitable and peaceful one.

This journal means the world to me, and I want to repeat my thanks to everyone involved in its history, its ten years of partnership, and its bright future.

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