



## Editorial

by **Christopher R. Stones**  
Editor-in-Chief

The current edition of the *IPJP* may be termed “The Norwegian Number”. Apart from a book review by a Canadian PhD student whose fieldwork is based in northwestern Madagascar, the contributors to the content all hail from Norway, albeit from various academic and research institutions in the country. Evident from all of their papers is a background culture of collaboration and both public and political participation in establishing and supporting academic research as a national priority, and the existence of policies not only pointing to research foci, but making provision for the funding of approved research projects. Apparent too is a highly organised research-oriented academic system, with research teams and discussion groups providing procedural support for individual researchers. One can only be impressed, not only by the extent of official input and provision, but by the impact of this on research quality and depth.

And yet the Norwegian academics contributing to this edition of the journal are not blindly conformist in seeking merely to generate yet more data to endorse national or institutional policies and practices. To the contrary, their papers all proceed from a position of critical questioning, of wonder, of intrigue, of pondering alternative possibilities. Both methodologically and in their focus on the meaning of lived experience, Karen Groven, Målfrid Råheim and Eli Natvik challenge the hegemony of quantitatively derived nomothetic data and evidence-based practices in the physiotherapeutic field, questioning the meaningfulness of the former and the effectiveness of the latter. Mona Sommer and Tone Saevi query the actual meaning of the notion of support in an organizational system ideologically based on providing precisely that, with evidence-based policies and practices implemented in various programmes and initiatives, despite evidence in practice that those given

what might officially be regarded as support do not necessarily experience that they have received support. Olav Tangvald-Pedersen and Rob Bongaardt similarly interrogate the meaning of experiencing a sense of belonging in the workplace in light of the emphasis on this mental health benefit by the move in Norway towards integrating those with mental health problems into the workforce – both to promote mental health through community participation and to reduce the drain on the welfare state of benefit dependency – and in the process point to experiencing a sense of belonging as not an inevitable consequence of being in the workplace, but contingent on two crucial choices being made. In turn, Kristin Evensen and Øyvind Standal explore with wonder the phenomenon of spatiality in relation to its interrelation with mobility limitations, non-verbal self-expression, and the communication of embodied meaning. Each of these papers also bears the stamp of the authors’ personal individuality in style, approach and priorities. What in fact sets the Norwegian papers apart as a group is the confident sense of conviction of the authors as individuals in socially relevant regards.

No less significantly, we nevertheless gain a sense from this collection of papers of the priorities of Norway as a welfare state: concern, on the one hand, regarding its economic sustainability, and, on the other, its core commitment to making provision for the livelihood, care and well-being of those deemed unable to function in the workforce and hence dependent on the state to support their survival. From an outsider perspective – and, as such, that of a psychologist – there would seem to be much to be said in both regards for the responsibility of the Norwegian government to the need for persons with mental health problems to be integrated into the financially self-sustaining workforce. The psychosocial

benefits would seem by far to outweigh concerns about the impact of psychological morbidity on productivity in the workplace.

The foci of the papers included in this edition are on (1) the meaning of physical activity after weight loss surgery, (2) the experiential meaning of the buzz-word “support” in relation to mental health service provision, (3) the essential meaning structure of the experience of a sense of belonging in the workplace, and (4) the significance of the meaning of spatiality in educational provision for students with profound and multiple disabilities. The theme of “The Norwegian Number” is, therefore, “meaning”: as made, as experienced in the moment, as described, as embodied in its expression of the perspectives of those otherwise entrapped in silenced lifeworlds.

The focus of the erudite book review by Seth Palmer is on the more recent contributions by Kalpana Ram to the field of phenomenological anthropology and the study of spirit possession. In addition to the scholarly volume co-edited with Christopher Houston, *Phenomenology in Anthropology: A Sense of Perspective* (2015), there is her own ethnography, *Fertile Disorder: Spirit Possession and*

*the Provocation of the Modern* (2013), with its emphasis on embodied forms of knowledge in relation to the regulation of the female medium’s body by the nation-state and biomedicine, possession as making visible what modernity has missed, and “the phenomenological parallel between bearing a child and bearing a spirit”. Fascinating stuff. The locus of Ram’s study as focused on possession practices in Tamil Nadu fishing villages further had particular resonance for me, given our sense of place as a family some thirty years ago while residing in a 17th century fishing village on the North-East coast of Yorkshire: a place ruled by tide times and not the clock, and by women, the men’s domain being the sea. Such places are indeed esoterically Other, and fertile ground for phenomenological anthropological study.

This edition of the *IPJP* thus invites the reader into realms of wonder and meaning beyond the taken-for-granted and conventional, and – as pointed to by Sommer and Saevi in their consideration of the relevance of Levinas’s theory to their theme – calls for openness to not only the possibility, but the imperative, of openness to the unknown and to not knowing in order to come to know whatever lived experience might reveal of the otherwise unknowable and its mystery.

## Referencing Format

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## About the Author



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Professor Christopher Stones, previously Head of the Department of Psychology at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa and former Professor of Psychology at the University of Johannesburg, has enjoyed a lengthy academic and research career, in the course of which he has taught in the areas of physiological, clinical, forensic and social psychology, as well as research methodology. He has served as Vice-President of the South African Association for Psychotherapy since its inception, and as past Chairman of the South African Society for Clinical Psychology. Editor-in-Chief of the *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* since 2003, he is also on the editorial panels of two other online journals. Professor Stones’s research interests are in the areas of identity, attitudes and attitude change, phenomenological praxis and methodologies, abnormal psychology and psychotherapy, spirituality and religious experience, in all of which areas he has published extensively. An Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, with which he is also registered as a Chartered Psychologist, Professor Stones is registered with the South African Health Professions Council as both a Research and a Clinical Psychologist.

Currently, he conducts a full-time clinical psychology practice at a health-care centre, and also serves as a consultant in the fields of forensic investigation and behavioural risk management.