

Report on the 2007 Interests and Beliefs Survey of the Members of the World Transhumanist Association

Prepared by
James J. Hughes, Ph.D.
Secretary, World Transhumanist Association

January 2008

For more information please contact

James Hughes Ph.D.
Secretary
World Transhumanist Association
<http://transhumanism.org>
secretary@transhumanism.org
Box 128, Willington CT 06279 USA
(office) 860-297-2376

Copyright © 2008 by WTA
All rights reserved

Executive Summary

This survey was fielded in December 2007 over the course of ten days. The survey was fielded to everyone we considered members (N=4642) whose email addresses still worked (N=3737). Of those 760 people responded, compared to 606 in 2003 and 586 in 2005. This was a lower response rate (20%) than the 2003 and 2005 surveys (26% and 36% respectively). A majority of respondents (52%) had joined in the last two years, and the response rate from more recent joiners was higher than from pre-2002 joiners. However the stability of the frequencies in this report suggest that there is not a large problem of comparability between the years, although the response biases are of course unknown. Voting members were much more likely to respond (69%) than basic members (18%).

Respondents represented US and non-US members, basic and full members, and our too-few non-male members, in a reasonably balanced way. The percent of non-US respondents rose in this sample was 57%, reflecting their actual proportion in our membership base. As in 2003, roughly 90% of the sample was male. The median age of the respondents in both 2003 and 2005 is roughly the same, about 30-33. Approximately one in five of our members have disabilities. Curiously there was no relationship between the age of the member and the likelihood of having a disability or chronic illness.

Comfort with “Transhumanist” Identity The second question on the survey was about how comfortable the respondent felt about identifying as a transhumanist. Although all respondents had signed up as WTA members through the website membership form, some had done so in order to get access to the website and newsletter, and some didn’t even remember doing that. The percent of respondents who were comfortable calling themselves transhumanists was up 5% from 2005 (from 83% to 88%).

Satisfaction with the WTA and Transhumanism Satisfaction with the WTA remains very high. Fully 83% of the respondents say they are satisfied with the WTA overall, down slightly from the 90% satisfied in 2003. Satisfaction of US and non-US members is roughly equal.

Satisfaction with the Transvision conferences (for those who attended) was relatively high, while satisfaction with the “WTA Activism” remains the lowest. Of all respondents, 50% thought our activism was fair or poor, compared to only 39% who thought the WTA website was fair or poor.

Three quarters of transhumanists say they are likely to recommend that someone join the WTA.

One question related to satisfaction with whether respondents thought we were too utopian or too pragmatic. The 8% of respondents who felt we were too pragmatic, and the 19% of members who felt we were too utopian, were less satisfied than the three quarters of members who felt we had the right balance of utopianism and pragmatism.

As in 2003, “interest in transhumanism” was the principal reason noted for joining, followed by “intellectual stimulation.” Activism was only cited as a reason by 40% of members, and networking only by 20%.

Two thirds of respondents think our voting member dues are “about right” (71% last time and 68% this time). Members in the developing world were more likely to think full membership dues were too high (31% versus 14%). Only 13% of respondents say they would never pay full voting membership dues.

Conferences Four in ten respondents were very likely to attend conferences in their own country, but only 6% were very likely to attend a conference in another country. This is generally true for Americans and non-Americans.

Attitudes A part of this survey was a set of attitudes that respondents were asked to agree or disagree with. We used responses to these questions in 2005 to create a 10 question self-diagnostic for whether someone is a transhumanist:

	2005	2007
Ten "Are you a Transhumanist?" Questions		
Do you believe that people have a right to use technology to extend their mental and physical (including reproductive) capacities and to improve their control over their own lives?	95%	95%
Do you think human genetic engineering is wrong because it is "playing God"?	95% No	95% No
Do you think that by being generally open and embracing of new technology we have a better chance of turning it to our advantage than if we try to ban or prohibit it?	94%	94%
Do you expect human progress to result from human accomplishment rather than divine intervention, grace, or redemption?	93%	93%
Do you think it would be a good thing if people could become many times more intelligent than they currently are?	92%	93%
Do you think it would be a good thing if people could live (in good health) for hundreds of years or longer?*	80%	87%
Do you believe women should have the right to terminate their pregnancies?	83%	83%
Does your ethical code advocate the well-being of all sentient beings, whether in artificial intellects, humans, posthumans, or non-human animals?	81%	82%
Would you consider having your mind uploaded to computers if it was the only way you could continue as a conscious person?	78%	80%
Should parents be able to have children through cloning once the technology is safe?	76%	77%

* "In good health" was added in 2007

There was little change on the consensus around these issues.

If we use agreement with more than half of these statements as a self-diagnostic for whether someone is probably a transhumanist, this would include 98% of all the respondents to this survey who were "very comfortable" calling themselves transhumanists.

Since a change in the anti-aging question to add "in good health" appeared to garner an additional 7% of affirmation for life extension it is also interesting that we added a question about what to call our advocacy for anti-aging medicine. A plurality voted for "life extension."

Politics and Religion Asking about political self-identity, there is a substantial trend toward increasing left-wing orientation, from 36% of respondents in 2003 to 47% in 2007. The category "technoprogressive" was offered for the first time this year, and garnered 16% of the respondents. The increase in left-wing orientations was accompanied by slight declines in the libertarian, conservative, apolitical and other categories.

In regards religious views, the dominant secularism of the WTA membership remains unchanged at almost two thirds of all members (atheist, agnostic, secular humanist or some other secular philosophy). This year we asked about "other" religious or non-religious views and were able to reclassify many of the formerly other or nones to existing or new religious categories. For instance 1% of respondents listed "pantheist" or "scientific pantheist" as either a religious or secular philosophy.

We also asked about whether transhumanism was compatible with religion. Our members are all over the map on this question, whether secular or religious. The majority of the religious or spiritual believed transhumanism was compatible with religion, although 8% believed it was incompatible with "religion" (although no presumably with their beliefs). The majority of the seculars believed transhumanism could

be compatible with or synthesized with at least some form of religion, although a third believed transhumanism was incompatible with religion.

Other Organizational Memberships There have been notable increases in the proportion of respondents who belong to political parties (one in five) and the Transhumanist Student Network (one in ten). More than four in ten belong to Facebook.

Sample

This survey was fielded in December 2007 over the course of ten days. The survey was fielded to everyone we considered members (N=4642) whose email addresses still worked (N=3737). Of those 760 people responded, compared to 606 in 2003 and 586 in 2005. This was a lower response rate (20%) than the 2003 and 2005 surveys (26% and 36% respectively).

Demographics

The 2007 respondents roughly represented our larger geographic distribution, although Europeans were slightly over-represented, and Africans and Asians were under-represented.

Sample by Geographic Region

	All Members	Working emails	Respondents by Continent	Response rate by Continent
USA	44%	44%	43%	20%
Europe	29%	29%	34%	24%
Canada	6%	6%	8%	24%
L. America	5%	4%	4%	19%
Oceania	4%	4%	4%	20%
Africa	4%	3%	1%	8%
Asia	3%	3%	2%	14%
S. Asia	3%	3%	2%	12%
Middle East	1%	1%	<0.5%	7%
Caribbean	<0.5%	<0.5%	<0.5%	--
Unknown	<0.5%	<0.5%	<0.5%	--
Total	100%	100%	100%	20%

A majority of respondents (52%) had joined in the last two years, and the response rate from more recent joiners was higher than from pre-2002 joiners.

Sample by When Joined

	All Members	Working emails	Respondents	Response rate
1998	61	57	5	9%
1999	124	111	12	11%
2000	149	136	16	11%
2001	199	181	19	10%
2002	367	208	34	16%
2003	456	270	37	14%
2004	675	507	77	15%
2005	747	602	126	21%
2006	909	772	159	21%
2007	954	894	275	31%
All				20%

Voting members were much more likely to respond (69%) than basic members (18%).

Sample by Membership Status

	All Members	Working emails	Respondents	Response rate
Basic	4488	3599	664	18%
Voting	153	140	96	69%
Total	4641	3739	760	20%

As in 2003 and 2005, roughly 90% of the sample was male.

Gender of Respondents

	2003	2005	2007
Male	89%	91%	89%
Female	9%	8%	10%
Transgender	2%	1%	2%

The median age of the respondents was roughly the same since 2003, about 30-33, with a mean of 35.

Age Distributions of the Samples

	2003	2005	2007
15-24	26%	26%	22%
25-34	34%	34%	33%
35-44	18%	19%	19%
45-64	17%	18%	22%
65-100	5%	4%	4%

Approximately one in five of our members have disabilities. Curiously there was no relationship between the age of the member and the likelihood of having a disability or chronic illness.

Disabilities by Age

	Age					All
	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-64	65-100	
chronic illness	8%	6%	10%	13%	7%	9%
physical disability	2%	6%	4%	8%	7%	5%
sensory disability	3%	5%	4%	3%	0%	4%
cognitive disability	2%	3%	4%	2%	0%	3%
psycho-emotional disability	9%	10%	8%	4%	7%	8%
Any disability	23%	22%	21%	19%	21%	21%

Comfort with “Transhumanist” Identity

The second question on the survey was about how comfortable the respondent felt about identifying as a transhumanist. Although all respondents had signed up as WTA members through the website membership form, some had done so in order to get access to the website and newsletter, and some didn't even remember doing that. The percent of respondents who were comfortable calling themselves transhumanists was up 5% from 2005 (from 83% to 88%).

How comfortable are you describing yourself as a "transhumanist"?

	2005	2007
Not a transhumanist	5%	2%
Very uncomfortable	1%	1%
Uncomfortable	11%	8%
Comfortable	44%	45%
Very comfortable	39%	43%
Total	100%	100%

For the subsequent analyses I have excluded those who said “I am not a transhumanist”.

Satisfaction with the WTA and Transhumanism

Satisfaction with the WTA remains very high. Fully 83% of the respondents say they are satisfied with the WTA overall, down slightly from the 87% satisfied in 2003. Despite suggestions that political divisions within the WTA had led to growing dissatisfaction those who were left of center politically were only marginally more satisfied with the WTA (86% satisfied) than those who were not left of center (81% satisfied), with political "moderates" being the most satisfied all (91%).

How satisfied have you been with the World Transhumanist Association overall?

	2003	2005	2007
Very dissatisfied	1%	1%	1%
Dissatisfied	9%	12%	15%
Satisfied	75%	71%	71%
Very satisfied	15%	16%	12%

The 8% of respondents who felt we were too pragmatic, and the 19% of members who felt we were too utopian, were less satisfied than the three quarters of members who felt we had the right balance of utopianism and pragmatism.

Are we too pragmatic or too utopian?

	Percent of members	Percent satisfied with the WTA
Too focused on near-term and pragmatic issues	8%	65%
About right in the balance of pragmatic and visionary	73%	91%
Too focused on utopian, futurist or science fiction issues	19%	67%
Total	100%	83%

Satisfaction with the Transvision conferences (for those who attended) was relatively high, while satisfaction with the “WTA Activism” remains the lowest. Of all respondents, 50% thought our activism was fair or poor, compared to only 39% who thought the WTA website was fair or poor.

How would you rate each of the following?

1=Poor, 2=Fair, 3=Good, 4=Excellent

	2005	2007
Transvision conferences	3.1	2.9
WTA News	2.9	2.7
WTA website	2.9	2.7
WTA discussion lists	2.6	2.6
WTA activism	2.5	2.5

Three quarters of respondents say they are likely to recommend that someone join the WTA.

How likely are you to recommend that someone join the WTA?

	2003	2005	2007
Very likely	28%	32%	30%
Somewhat likely	47%	44%	47%
Not likely	14%	15%	16%
Not sure	11%	8%	7%

As in 2003, “interest in transhumanism” was the principal reason noted for joining, followed by “intellectual stimulation.” Activism was only cited as a reason by 40% of members, and networking only by 20%.

Why did you first join the association? Choose all that apply.

	2003	2005	2007
Interest in transhumanism	84%	83%	89%
Intellectual stimulation	71%	60%	69%
To support transhumanist activism	41%	39%	53%
Networking	21%	20%	27%
Other	11%	8%	11%

Two thirds of respondents think our voting member dues are “about right” (71% last time and 68% this time). Members in the developing world were more likely to think full membership dues were too high (31% versus 14%). Only 13% of respondents say they would never pay full voting membership dues.

How reasonably priced are WTA full member dues?

	2003	2005	2007
Too high	8%	14%	16%
About right	77%	71%	68%
Too low	3%	3%	4%
I wouldn't pay any dues	12%	13%	13%

How reasonably priced are WTA full member dues? By Continent

	USA	Non-US Developed World	Developing World	All
Too high	13%	15%	31%	16%
About right	73%	69%	53%	68%
Too low	5%	3%	0%	4%
Wouldn't pay dues of any amount	9%	14%	16%	13%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

Non-US respondents are more likely to say they would attend a WTA conference in their own country than Americans are to want to attend conferences in the US (non-Americans are 88% willing and Americans 73% willing). And non-Americans are far more likely to want to attend WTA conferences in countries other than their own than Americans are. Only 16% of American respondents said they would attend conferences outside the US, down from 24% in 2003, contrasted with the 35%-43% of non-Americans who would travel outside their country.

How likely are you to attend a WTA conference ?

	In your country		In another country		
	2005	2007	2003	2005	2007
Very unlikely	3%	4%	43%	40%	48%
Somewhat unlikely	11%	11%	19%	26%	22%
Not sure	4%	3%	5%	7%	8%
Somewhat likely	38%	39%	23%	19%	17%
Very likely	43%	43%	10%	8%	6%

Attitudes

One part of this survey was a set of attitudes that respondents were asked to agree or disagree with.

These questions tap five basic values that inform transhumanism:

1. **Human-Enhancement:** attitudes about life extension, intelligence augmentation, cryonics and uploading
2. **Humanism:** attitudes about human self-reliance and whether there are divine limits on human reason
3. **Technological-Optimism:** attitudes about embracing or banning new technologies, such as nanotechnology, genetic engineering and human enhancement technologies
4. **Personhood ethics:** attitudes about valuing the well-being of all sentient beings, including rights for great apes and robots, and conversely about permitting abortion
5. **Reproductive rights:** attitudes about abortion, human cloning and the genetic enhancement of children

The responses to these questions in the 2005 survey were used to develop a ten question self-diagnostic test for determining if one is a transhumanist.

	2005	2007
<i>Ten "Are you a Transhumanist?" Questions</i>		
Do you believe that people have a right to use technology to extend their mental and physical (including reproductive) capacities and to improve their control over their own lives?	95%	95%
Do you think human genetic engineering is wrong because it is "playing God"?	95% No	95% No
Do you think that by being generally open and embracing of new technology we have a better chance of turning it to our advantage than if we try to ban or prohibit it?	94%	94%
Do you expect human progress to result from human accomplishment rather than divine intervention, grace, or redemption?	93%	93%
Do you think it would be a good thing if people could become many times more intelligent than they currently are?	92%	93%
Do you think it would be a good thing if people could live (in good health) for hundreds of years or longer?*	80%	87%
Do you believe women should have the right to terminate their pregnancies?	83%	83%
Does your ethical code advocate the well-being of all sentient beings, whether in artificial intellects, humans, posthumans, or non-human animals?	81%	82%
Would you consider having your mind uploaded to computers if it was the only way you could continue as a conscious person?	78%	80%
Should parents be able to have children through cloning once the technology is safe?	76%	77%
<i>Additional high consensus items</i>		
Do you think human nanotechnology and genetic engineering will always be dangerous and should be banned?	94% No	94% No
Do you believe there are clear divinely-set limits on what humans should do?	91% No	91% No
Is your concept of "the meaning of life" derived from human responsibility and opportunity rather than divine revelation?	86%	87%

Do you believe a chimpanzee modified to think and communicate like a human being should be granted human rights?	73%	77%
Should people be allowed to experiment with recreational drugs so long as they don't harm others?	71%	75%
Should robots who think and feel like human beings, and aren't a threat to human beings, be granted human rights?	70%	72%
Would you consider being frozen and re-animated later if it was the only way you could continue living?	69%	71%
<i>Lower consensus items</i>		
Should the goal of ethics and morals be the happiness and well being of all people?	68%	69%
Do you believe parents should be able to choose the sex, intelligence and other characteristics of their children?	63%	61%
Although we may devise better political systems in the future, do you believe that multi-party democracies with civil liberties for individuals are the best of the existing political orders?	62%	64%
Do you believe humans and posthumans will be able to coexist in one society and polity?	46%	46%
Do you believe that emerging technologies will cause an abrupt, cataclysmic, worldwide social change by 2040?	31%	31%

* "In good health" was added in 2007

Comparing agreement with the ten "are you a transhumanist?" questions to the question about how comfortable people feel with the transhumanist label again validates the use of these questions as a diagnostic. More than 95% of respondents who were "very comfortable" with the H+ label agreed with 7 or more of the questions, compared to a 95% cut-off at 3 or more for those who were "uncomfortable."

**Agreement with the Ten Questions
by Comfort Calling Oneself Transhumanist**

Agreement with 10 question test	Comfort with calling oneself a "transhumanist"		All Rs
	Uncomfortable	Very comfortable	
10 yeses	32%	50%	43%
9 or more yeses	51%	78%	71%
8 or more yeses	75%	89%	86%
7 or more yeses	79%	96%	92%
6 or more yeses	87%	98%	96%
5 or more yeses	90%	98%	97%
4 or more yeses	92%	98%	97%
3 or more yeses	95%	99%	98%
2 or more yeses	95%	99%	99%
1 or more yeses	95%	100%	99%
0 or more yeses	100%	100%	100%

Since a change in the anti-aging question to add "in good health" appeared to garner an additional 7% of affirmation for life extension it is also interesting that we added a question about what to call our advocacy for anti-aging medicine. A plurality voted for "life extension."

What to call anti-aging?	
Life extension	41%
Maximum healthy longevity	14%
Anti-aging	13%
Rejuvenative medicine	12%
Indefinite lifespan	8%
Immortality or Immortalism	7%
Prolongevity	6%
Total	100%

Politics and Religion

Asking about political self-identity, there is a substantial trend toward increasing left-wing orientation, from 36% of respondents in 2003 to 47% in 2007. The category "technoprogressive" was offered for the first time this year, and garnered 16% of the respondents. The increase in left-wing orientations was accompanied by slight declines in the libertarian, conservative, apolitical and other categories.

Which of these best describes your political views?

	2003	2005	2007
Left	36%	39%	47%
Technoprogressive	--	--	16%
Libertarian socialist	7%	7%	7%
Progressive	6%	7%	4%
Democratic socialist	4%	6%	5%
Social democrat	5%	5%	4%
Green	4%	4%	4%
US-style liberal	4%	4%	3%
Left anarchist	2%	3%	2%
Radical	2%	1%	<0.5%
Communist	1%	1%	1%
Libertarian	22%	22%	20%
Libertarian	11%	10%	10%
European Liberal	6%	7%	5%
Anarcho-capitalist	4%	2%	2%
Randian/Objectivist	1%	2%	1%
Minarchist	1%	1%	1%
Other	17%	16%	14%
Upwinger/advocate of future political system	8%	10%	7%
Other	9%	7%	7%
Not political	15%	12%	11%
Moderate	7%	8%	7%
Conservative	4%	3%	2%
Christian Democrat	1%	<0.5%	<0.5%
Conservative	2%	2%	1%
Far right	1%	<0.5%	<0.5%

The dominant secularism of the WTA membership remains unchanged at almost two thirds of all members (atheist, agnostic, secular humanist or some other secular philosophy). This year we asked about "other" religious or non-religious views and were able to reclassify many of the formerly other or nones to existing or new religious categories. For instance 1% of respondents listed "pantheist" or "scientific pantheist" as either a religious or secular philosophy.

Which of these best describes your religious or spiritual views?

	2003	2005	2007
Secular, atheist	64%	62%	64%
Atheist	30%	30%	35%
Agnostic	14%	16%	14%
Secular humanist	10%	9%	9%
Other non-theistic philosophy	10%	7%	6%
Religious or spiritual	26%	24%	31%
Spiritual	4%	6%	5%
Protestant/E. Orthodox	1%	4%	4%
Buddhist	3%	2%	4%
Religious humanist	3%	2%	2%
Pagan or animist	2%	2%	2%
Catholic	2%	2%	4%
Unitarian-Universalist	2%	2%	2%
Hindu	2%	1%	1%
Other religion	2%	1%	3%
Jewish	1%	1%	1%
Muslim	1%	1%	1%
Pantheist	--	--	1%
Mormon	--	--	1%
Transhumanist	--	--	1%
Raelian	<0.5%	1%	<0.5%
Other/DK	10%	14%	5%
None of the above	7%	11%	5%
Don't know	3%	4%	1%

We also asked about whether transhumanism was compatible with religion. Our members are all over the map on this question, whether secular or religious. The majority of the religious or spiritual believed transhumanism was compatible with religion, although 8% believed it was incompatible with "religion" (although no presumably with their beliefs). The majority of the seculars believed transhumanism could be compatible with or synthesized with at least some form of religion, although a third believed transhumanism was incompatible with religion.

Is Transhumanism Compatible with Religion?

Transhumanism is...	Religious/secular			All
	Religious or spiritual	Other/DK	Secular, atheist	
Incompatible with religion, and is not a religion replacement	7%	16%	28%	21%
A threat to religion because it is a replacement for it	1%	0%	7%	5%
A challenge to religion, but could be synthesized with it	18%	26%	24%	22%
Compatible with some religions and not with others	32%	32%	28%	30%
Compatible with religion	42%	26%	12%	22%

Other Organizational Memberships

There have been notable increases in the proportion of respondents who belong to political parties (one in five) and the Transhumanist Student Network (one in ten). More than four in ten belong to Facebook.

Which other organizations and groups do you belong to?

	2003	2005	2007
Facebook	--	--	43%
Myspace	--	--	26%
wta-talk discussion list	17%	27%	22%
a political party	14%	17%	22%
local chapter of the WTA	7%	17%	15%
Immortality Institute	10%	13%	13%
an environmental organization	10%	12%	13%
Life Extension Foundation	7%	7%	11%
a church, synagogue, temple, coven, etc.	6%	8%	9%
Transhumanist Student Network	3%	4%	9%
A cryonics association	8%	10%	8%
Foresight Institute	10%	11%	7%
World Future Society	5%	8%	5%
a women's rights organization	3%	4%	5%
transhumanism.meetup.com	4%	6%	3%