

Report on the 2003 Interests and Beliefs Survey of the Members of the World Transhumanist Association

Prepared by

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Executive Summary

The survey was fielded in December 2003 over the course of two weeks. The survey was fielded to all people who had signed up through the Join page at the website since 1998, or who had joined as full members. Only approximately 1650 email addresses worked, however, with those email addresses accumulated in the last two years working much more often than older addresses. 591 people responded to the survey, amounting to a roughly 36% response rate.

The survey respondents have been categorized into three groups:

- those who said on the survey that they were not “transhumanists” (52 respondents)
- those who are transhumanists, but not full members (459 respondents)
- full members (72 respondents, and about 56% of full members) .

Presumably many of the non-transhumanists are people who wanted to be on our mailing list because of general interest, or to keep tabs on us. Some may be considering becoming “transhumanists.” So I’ll be reporting many of the statistics throughout this report dividing up the sample between observers, basic and full members.

The results show that there is little demographic differences between basic and full members. WTA members are about 90% male, generally between 20 and 40, and about half live in the U.S. The 2-3% of WTAers who are transgender (or at least unwilling to identify as a gender) is of course two orders of magnitude more than in the population at large. Full members are more likely to be living in the U.S., are a little bit older and a bit more female.

Satisfaction with the WTA Overall satisfaction with the WTA is high. Only 9% of members express dissatisfaction with the WTA. Satisfaction with the WTA is correlated with willingness to contribute financially to the WTA, but only very weakly with willingness to recommend or (another question) willingness to organize local activities.

Satisfaction with the WTA website, WTA News, Transhumanity and JET are all relatively high, although the median response for all these was “good” rather than “excellent.” Only a fraction of respondents felt sufficiently familiar with these products, even the website, to rate them. Transvision 2003 was rated extremely high among the full members. There was little meaningful disagreement between basic and full members on these products.

A majority of members were dissatisfied with “local WTA activities” however, and there was high dissatisfaction with “WTA activism.” Full members, who were more familiar with our activism and local strength, were especially dissatisfied.

There were no demographic characteristics that were statistically significant predictors of satisfaction. Men were as happy with the WTA as women, US residents were as happy as non-US residents, and the old were as happy as the young. The year in which someone joined the WTA was unrelated to satisfaction, which meant that those who joined in the late 1990s believed we were as much on track as those who joined since the reformation in January 2002.

Participation, Organizing, Dues and Contributions Curiously, satisfaction with the WTA is only a weak predictor of the willingness of someone to participate in WTA activities, or recommend the WTA to a friend. About 80% of both basic and full members say they would recommend WTA membership to a friend, although only 30-40% are interested in helping to organize local activities, and only 20%-30% would be interested in making a financial contribution to the WTA. This is significant considering that

local chapters and WTA activism (which would require more financial support) were the two areas of dissatisfaction.

More than half the full member respondents said they would likely attend a TV in another country, and 40% said they intended to attend TV04 in Toronto. About half of the full member respondents also participate in wta-talk.

Reasons for Joining and Motivations to be a Transhumanist The overwhelming majority of our members, basic and full, think the full member dues are about right, although none of the full members think they are too high compared with 14% who think they are too low. “Interest” was the most popular reason for joining the WTA followed by “intellectual stimulation.” “Supporting WTA activism” was a distant third, followed “networking”, “discounts” and “participating in governance” as the least common incentives.

Looking at motivations for being a transhumanist, as opposed to joining the WTA, the most popular reasons were “To advance reason and humanistic values,” and personal longevity and intelligence. In other words, for WTA members, transhumanism is about both personal goals and a broader humanist agenda. The second tier of goals were again a combination of personal enrichment (living as rich a life as possible) and social benefit (greater wisdom, kindness and “to ensure other people benefit from future technology”). “Fun” was a reason for becoming a transhumanist for only a quarter to a third of respondents.

Media Consumption and Organizational Memberships The most popular media for our basic members are Wired, Slashdot, New York Times, Transhumanity and Betterhumans, but among our full members the top media are Wired and Betterhumans. The most commonly listed cross-memberships with the WTA are Extropy Institute and Immortality Institute, although this could mean just participation in the ExI list and ImmInst boards rather than paid membership. What is clear is that people who become full members in the WTA are more likely to join other transhumanist organizations as well. People who join the life extension groups like ImmInst are especially likely to also belong to other life extension groups, like Alcor and LEF.

Religion, Politics and the Singularity In terms of the politics of WTA members, a plurality of 40% do not have a clear political ideology, listing “moderate,” “upwinger/future system,” “other” or “none” as their ideology. Of those identifying with an ideology, a third are one kind of left-winger or another, 20%-25% are one kind of libertarian or another, and only 3-4% are one kind of conservative or another. Despite various left, right and libertarian critiques of the WTA and its leadership, political ideology was not a significant predictor of satisfaction with or participation in the WTA.

In terms of religious identity, about a quarter of WTA members identify with one form of religious faith or another, although some of these are likely non-theistic such as Buddhism, “religious humanism,” Unitarian-Universalism and being “spiritual.” Full members are a little more likely to be secular than basic members. Again, religiosity was not a predictor of either satisfaction with or participation in the WTA; the religious were just as happy and involved as the secular.

I have categorized views on the Singularity into three basic groups, “pessimistic,” “possible” or “optimistic.” About a quarter of members are pessimists, saying they don’t really expect a Singularity, while 8-9% expect it in the next twenty years. About two thirds, however, think it will probably happen at some point in this century, as soon as the relevant technology is invented.

Sample

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The survey respondents have been categorized into three groups:

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The results show that there is little demographic differences between basic and full members. WTA members are about 90% male, generally between 20 and 40, and about half live in the U.S. The 2-3% of WTAAers who are transgender (or at least unwilling to identify as a gender) is of course two orders of magnitude more than in the population at large. Full members are more likely to be living in the U.S., are a little bit older and a bit more female.

		<i>Observers</i>	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Full</i>
Gender	Male	92%	90%	86%
	Female	8%	8%	11%
	Transgender/other	0%	2%	3%
Country of residence	US	53%	50%	59%
Age	Mean	40	34	36
	Median	38	31	33
Year joined	1998-1999	16%	13%	--
	2000-2001	20%	26%	--
	2002	22%	24%	39%
	2003	42%	37%	61%

Satisfaction with the WTA

Overall satisfaction with the WTA is high. Only 9% of members express dissatisfaction with the WTA. Satisfaction with the WTA is correlated with willingness to contribute financially to the WTA, but only very weakly with willingness to recommend or (another question) willingness to organize local activities.

Satisfaction with the WTA

	<i>Observers</i>	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Full</i>
Very dissatisfied	0%	0%	1%
Dissatisfied	14%	9%	8%
Satisfied	82%	76%	65%
Very satisfied	4%	15%	25%

Satisfaction with the WTA website, WTA News, Transhumanity and JET are all relatively high, although the median response for all these was “good” rather than “excellent.” Only a fraction of respondents felt sufficiently familiar with these products, even the website, to rate them. Transvision 2003 was rated extremely high among the full members. There was little meaningful disagreement between basic and full members on these products.

A majority of members were dissatisfied with “local WTA activities” however, and there was high dissatisfaction with “WTA activism.” Full members, who were more familiar with our activism and local strength, were especially dissatisfied.

How would you rate each of the following? (Percent Good or Excellent)

	<i>Observers</i>	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Full</i>
Transvision 2003	79%	75%	97%
Transhumanity	64%	74%	77%
WTA website	69%	79%	76%
Journal of Evolution and Technology	79%	76%	75%
WTA News	70%	77%	74%
WTA activism	38%	57%	43%
Local WTA activities	20%	47%	21%

There were no demographic characteristics that were statistically significant predictors of satisfaction. Men were as happy with the WTA as women, US residents were as happy as non-US residents, and the old were as happy as the young. The year in which someone joined the WTA was unrelated to satisfaction, which meant that those who joined in the late 1990s believed we were as much on track as those who joined since the reformation in January 2002.

Participation, Organizing, Dues and Contributions

Curiously, satisfaction with the WTA is only a weak predictor of the willingness of someone to participate in WTA activities, or recommend the WTA to a friend. About 80% of both basic and full members say they would recommend WTA membership to a friend, although only 30-40% are interested in helping to organize local activities, and only 20%-30% would be interested in making a financial contribution to the WTA. This is significant considering that local chapters and WTA activism (which would require more financial support) were the two areas of dissatisfaction.

		<i>Observers</i>	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Full</i>
How likely to recommend	Likely	39%	78%	78%
Are you interested in helping to organize transhumanist activities, such as gatherings and talks, in your area?	Yes	8%	30%	42%
Would you consider making a financial contribution in the future if the WTA had a fund-raising drive?	Yes	4%	18%	32%

More than half the full member respondents said they would likely attend a TV in another country, and 40% said they intended to attend TV04 in Toronto. About half of the full member respondents also participate in wta-talk.

	<i>Observers</i>	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Full</i>
Likely to attend foreign TV	17%	29%	54%
Likely to attend TV04	19%	18%	41%
WTA-talk member	15%	13%	46%
WTA BBS member	4%	8%	19%
WTA Local member	2%	6%	18%

Reasons for Joining and Motivations to be a Transhumanist

The overwhelming majority of our members, basic and full, think the full dues are about right, although none of the full members think they are too high compared with 14% who think they are too low.

How reasonably priced are WTA full member dues (US\$25/\$10)?

	<i>Observers</i>	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Full</i>
Too high	0%	9%	0%
About right	57%	76%	86%
Too low	8%	2%	14%
I wouldn't pay dues of any amount	35%	14%	--
	100%	100%	100%

“Interest” was the most popular reason for joining the WTA followed by “intellectual stimulation.” “Supporting WTA activism” was a distant third, followed “networking”, “discounts” and “participating in governance” as the least common incentives.

Why did you first join the association?

	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Full</i>
Interest	84%	87%
Intellectual stimulation	73%	70%
To support transhumanist activism	41%	61%
Networking	17%	44%
WTA event discounts	4%	17%
To participate in WTA governance	4%	13%

Looking at motivations for being a transhumanist, as opposed to joining the WTA, the most popular reasons were “To advance reason and humanistic values,” and personal longevity and intelligence. In other words, for WTA members, transhumanism is about both personal goals and a broader humanist agenda. The second tier of goals were again a combination of personal enrichment (living as rich a life as possible) and social benefit (greater wisdom, kindness and “to ensure other people benefit from future technology”). “Fun” was a reason for becoming a transhumanist for only a quarter to a third of respondents.

What are your main motivations for being a transhumanist?

	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Full</i>
To advance reason and humanistic values	73%	80%
To live as long as possible	60%	77%
To become as intelligent/rational as possible	73%	73%
To become as wise or kind as possible	56%	67%
To have as rich a life as possible	58%	66%
To ensure other people benefit from future technology	59%	64%
To overcome physical or mental disabilities	39%	46%
To hang out with other transhumanists	19%	36%
Seemed like fun	26%	30%

Media Consumption and Organizational Memberships

The popular media for our basic members are *Wired*, *Slashdot*, *New York Times*, *Transhumanity* and *Betterhumans*, but among our full members the top media are *Wired* and *Betterhumans*.

Which magazines and websites do you read frequently?

	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Full</i>		<i>Basic</i>	<i>Full</i>
Wired	43%	47%			
Betterhumans.com	26%	47%	Kuro5hin	7%	13%
Transhumanity	26%	37%	Cyborg Democracy Blog	6%	13%
New York Times	28%	31%	Slate.com	8%	10%
Slashdot	29%	27%	Arts and Letters Daily	5%	10%
news.google.com	24%	27%	FuturePundit blog	3%	10%
The Economist	19%	27%	BoingBoing	5%	9%
Reason	13%	27%	Sentient Developments blog	2%	7%
Time	19%	19%	Alternet	5%	4%
Tech Central Station	7%	17%	Telepolis	2%	4%
Changesurfer Radio	4%	17%	Volokh Conspiracy blog	2%	3%
Newsweek	16%	14%	Speculist blog	1%	3%
Salon.com	14%	14%	Spiked-online	1%	3%

The most commonly listed cross-memberships with the WTA are Extropy Institute (ExI) and Immortality Institute (ImmInst), although this could mean just participation in the ExI list and ImmInst boards rather than paid membership. What is clear is that people who become full members in the WTA are more likely to join other transhumanist organizations as well. People who join the life extension groups like ImmInst are especially likely to also belong to other life extension groups, like Alcor and LEF.

Which other organizations do you belong to?

	<i>Observers</i>	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Full</i>
Extropy Institute	8%	15%	33%
Immortality Institute	8%	8%	21%
Friendster.com	6%	8%	19%
SL4	6%	3%	19%
Foresight Institute	12%	8%	15%
Alcor	4%	4%	15%
a political party	13%	14%	14%
Life Extension Foundation	4%	7%	13%
transhumanism.meetup.com	0%	3%	13%
Tribe.net	2%	3%	13%
a church, synagogue, temple, coven, etc.	8%	6%	8%
World Future Society	12%	4%	8%
an environmental organization	15%	10%	7%
a women's rights organization	6%	2%	4%
Transhumanist Student Network	0%	2%	4%
Transhumanist Arts and Culture	2%	3%	3%
Cryonics Institute	0%	2%	3%
LA/Bay Area/other Futurists	4%	1%	3%
World Federalist Association	2%	1%	1%
Singularity Action Group	2%	2%	0%
other cryonics association	0%	1%	0%

Religion, Politics and the Singularity

In terms of the politics of WTA members, a plurality of 40% do not have a clear political ideology, listing “moderate,” “upwinger/future system,” “other” or “none” as their ideology. Of those identifying with an ideology, a third are one kind of left-winger or another, 20%-25% are one kind of libertarian or another, and only 3-4% are one kind of conservative or another. Despite various left, right and libertarian critiques of the WTA and its leadership, political ideology was not a significant predictor of satisfaction with or participation in the WTA.

Which of these best describes your political views?

	<i>Observer</i>	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Full</i>
Libertarian socialist	15%	6%	13%
Radical	0%	1%	6%
Social democrat	4%	6%	4%
Democratic socialist	8%	4%	4%
US-style "liberal"	12%	4%	4%
Progressive	4%	7%	1%
Green	0%	4%	1%
Left anarchist	0%	3%	0%
Communist	4%	1%	0%
Left-wing subtotal	46%	35%	33%
Conservative	10%	1%	3%
Far right, racial nationalist, fascist, Third Wave	0%	1%	1%
Christian Democrat	2%	1%	0%
Conservatives subtotal	12%	3%	4%
Libertarian	2%	11%	7%
European Liberal	8%	6%	4%
Anarcho-capitalist	2%	4%	4%
Minarchist	0%	1%	4%
Randian/Objectivist	0%	1%	0%
Libertarians subtotal	12%	23%	19%
Moderate	8%	6%	14%
Upwinger or advocate of future political system	0%	7%	14%
Other political philosophy	13%	9%	6%
Not political	10%	16%	10%
Total	100%	100%	100%

In terms of religious identity, about a quarter of WTA members identify with one form of religious faith or another, although some of these are likely non-theistic such as Buddhism, “religious humanism,” Unitarian-Universalism and being “spiritual.” Full members are a little more likely to be secular than basic members. Again, religiosity was not a predictor of either satisfaction with or participation in the WTA; the religious were just as happy and involved as the secular.

Which of these best describes your religious or spiritual views?

	<i>Observer</i>	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Full</i>
Buddhist	2%	3%	6%
Spiritual	6%	5%	4%
Catholic	2%	2%	3%
Protestant	8%	1%	3%
Jewish	4%	1%	3%
Pagan or animist	2%	2%	1%
Other religion	2%	2%	1%
Muslim	2%	1%	1%
Religious humanist	0%	3%	0%
Hindu	0%	2%	0%
Unitarian-Universalist	0%	2%	0%
Raelian	0%	<0.5%	0%
Religious subtotal	27%	25%	22%
Atheist	22%	29%	38%
Secular humanist	8%	9%	15%
Agnostic	12%	14%	13%
Other non-theistic philosophy	14%	11%	7%
Secular subtotal	56%	63%	73%
None of the above	10%	8%	4%
Don't know	0%	3%	0%
Total		100%	100%

I have categorized views on the Singularity into three basic groups, “pessimistic,” “possible” or optimistic.” About a quarter of members are pessimists, saying they don’t really expect a Singularity, while 8-9% expect it in the next twenty years. About two thirds, however, think it will probably happen at some point in this century, as soon as the relevant technology is invented.

Views on the Singularity

	Basic	Full
<i>Singularity Pessimism</i>	26%	24%
Its a possibility, but I don't really expect it	13%	12%
I don't anticipate an abrupt Singularity	13%	12%
<i>Possible this Century</i>	62%	64%
Its a possibility, but depends on uncertain innovations	24%	22%
Yes, at some point in the coming century	19%	22%
Yes, at some point in the next fifty years	19%	20%
<i>Singularity Optimism</i>	8%	9%
Yes, in the next twenty years	8%	9%
I don't know	5%	4%