

The Handbook of
SPIRITUAL
DEVELOPMENT
in CHILDHOOD
and ADOLESCENCE

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THE RELATION BETWEEN SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY PROCESSES

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In this chapter we take a journey that weaves together spiritual development and identity processes. First, we explore what is known about identity and how we define a spiritual identity. Then, we discuss spiritual identity development as a universal human experience. Next, we examine the developmental processes underlying spiritual identity development. Finally, we suggest future research options related to spiritual identity development.

BACKGROUND ISSUES

Collective and Personal Identity Distinction

Like several other identity theorists (e.g., Tajfel, 1981; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), we believe the self system contains both collective and personal identities. Collective identity refers to that part of an individual's self-concept that derives from his or her knowledge of and attitudes toward membership

in a social group coupled with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership. Unlike personal identities, which distinguish a person from other individuals, collective identities are that part of the collective self that defines the individual in terms of shared similarities with members of certain social groups. Collective identities include those that are socially ascribed (race and gender), as well as those that emanate from group memberships of choice. Different collective identities may vary in salience over time and as a function of various social situations.

All people have multiple collective and personal identities to which they are committed; the salience of these identities may differ across contexts and situations (Brewer, 1991; Deaux & Martin, 2003; Ethier & Deaux, 1994). In addition, identities may manifest in the form of social roles such as student, friend, son/daughter, and leader, as well as more individual or group characteristics (Goffman, 1959; Oyserman & Markus, 1998). Finally, Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe (2004) believe

both personal and collective identities include a cognitive component (e.g., beliefs, ideological positions, and stereotypic traits shared by members of the category), an affective component (e.g., value, importance, perceived value of others, commitment and closeness to members of the category), and a behavioral component (e.g., religious service attendance for a religious identity).

Whether a particular identity is personal or collective depends on its function to the individual. Personal identities are those identity components or characteristics people believe are more unique to themselves rather than shared with a group. In contrast, a collective identity (similar to the social psychological concept of social identity) is shared by a group of people with some characteristic(s) in common, for example, native language, country of origin, or religion (Ashmore et al., 2004; Côté, 1996). It includes category membership, shared beliefs, perceived closeness to other members of the group, and behavioral enactments such as meeting attendance.

Based on this distinction, we define a religious identity as a collective identity. Religion is defined as "an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals and symbols designed (a) to facilitate closeness to the sacred or transcendent (God, higher power or ultimate truth/reality) and (b) to foster an understanding of one's relationship and responsibility to others living together in a community" (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001, p. 18). Individuals with a religious identity believe they are members of a religious group; their identity can vary in terms of their acceptance of belief systems, and their endorsement of the importance of religious values, commitment to the religious group, and practices associated with the religion.

In contrast, we define a spiritual identity as a personal identity because it consists of spiritual characteristics unique to the individual rather than shared with a group and because a spiritual identity is not associated directly with feelings of belonging to a valued religious group. Thus, based on this distinction, a particular identity could be either religious or spiritual or both.

For example, being Muslim can be either a collective identity or a personal identity, depending

upon the function of being Muslim for the individual. If the identity function is primarily associated with being a member of the Islamic community, then being Muslim is a collective identity. On the other hand, if the identity function is not about group membership, but about characteristics unique to the individual, and based on thoughtful commitment to the tenets of this faith, then being Muslim is a personal identity. Creating this conceptual distinction between personal and collective identity allows us to explore the different functions a spiritual identity serves for the individual.

Religiousness as a Collective Identity

Often when people hear the word *spirituality*, religion comes to mind. Because perceived membership in a religious group, a collective religious identity, can be a powerful contextual influence on spiritual identity development, let's take a closer look at what we know about collective identities. One's perceived membership in a social group may be based on assigned or chosen characteristics (Grotevant, 1992). Race, national origin, and gender are examples of assigned characteristics because they are components of identity over which individuals have little choice, but around which they must construct meaning (Grotevant, 1992). On the other hand, chosen collective identity components arise from choices afforded in the social context of the individual, such as being a member of a football team or a political party.

Where does a religious identity fall on the spectrum of *assigned* versus *chosen*? This is not an easy question to answer. A young child growing up in an actively practicing Catholic family is likely to develop a Catholic identity without any reflection or conscious commitment. Such a religious identity is closer to an assigned than a chosen collective identity. The line between a chosen and assigned religious identity becomes more blurred in adolescence, however. For example, imagine an adolescent who is given the freedom and opportunity to explore outside of his or her familial religious tradition and in the end chooses to become a member of a different religious community (e.g., Methodist). This adolescent's religious identity is closer to the chosen end of the continuum. In contrast,

imagine an adolescent who does not explore alternate religious belief systems or who does, but then does not change his childhood religious affiliation. Is his collective religious identity still assigned? If it is chosen, at what developmental point did the change from assigned to chosen take place? Does it become chosen at a developmental turning point, such as when the individual is free to choose whether or not she attends religious services? Even when the individual is allowed to make a choice not to attend religious services, are the social norms regarding religion in the family and community so strong that the individual's identity continues to be more assigned than chosen? Or has the individual simply internalized the prescriptive belief system? Eriksonian theory suggests that a conscious evaluation of, and subsequent commitment to, the religious group is key to the distinction between assigned versus chosen collective identities.

Spirituality as a Personal Identity

Clearly, having a collective religious identity is one possible pathway to a spiritual identity; but it is not the only pathway. We conceive of a spiritual identity as a chosen personal identity that may or may not include collective identity components. We define spiritual identity as a personal identity that mirrors the individual's personal reflection about the role of spirituality in her or his life.

Other researchers suggest that many people distinguish between spirituality and religiosity in similar terms in that people emphasize the personal and chosen nature of a spiritual identity in contrast to the group membership nature of a religious identity. For example, in Mattis (2000) African American women described spirituality as an "internalization and consistent expression of key values" and religiousness as "an individual's embrace of prescribed beliefs and ritual practices related to God" (p. 114). Religious values and practices were described as the means to achieve spirituality. "Spirituality was variously conceptualized as one's relationship with God, self and/or transcendent forces, including nature" (p. 115). O'Brien (1996) described spirituality as an "enduring and integrating core" providing the foundation to

answer questions such as "Who am I?" "Where did I come from?" "What is the meaning of my life?" and "Where am I going?"

Similarly, in a study of people who respond "none" in surveys asking "What is your religious preference?" Vernon (1968) found that some people who reject membership in formal religious groups have a strong sense of spirituality and both a moral and ethical identity. More recently Kosmin, Mayer, and Keysar (2001) found that the proportion of people in the United States responding "none" to the question "What is your religion, if any?" had grown from 8% (14.3 million) in 1990 to more than 14% (29.4 million) in 2001. Interestingly, only 900,000 of the 29.4 million labeled themselves atheists, and almost half of the 29.4 million strongly endorsed the view that God exists. Although it is possible that the spiritual but not religious individuals have some other nonreligious but spiritual group affiliation, we believe it is likely that many of these individuals have a personal spiritual identity without a collective religious or spiritual component.

We categorize such a spiritual identity as a personal identity that is grounded in one's personal beliefs, behaviors, and values concerning the transcendent. We are interested in the developmental pathways associated with the emergence of these personal identity components of one's spiritual identity. For example, when, how, and why do individuals develop personal spiritual identities that they perceive as uniquely theirs? We believe an important developmental mechanism in spiritual identity development is personal experience with the transcendent. Because opportunities for such personal experiences often occur through religious participation, a personal spiritual identity often coexists with a collective religious identity. But this is not always the case; alternative pathways to a personal spiritual identity are possible.

Like other identities, we believe spiritual identities are multidimensional in nature, with cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Koenig et al. (2001) defined spirituality as "the personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, about meaning and about relationship to the sacred or transcendent, which may (or may not) lead to or arise from the development of religious rituals and

the formation of community" (p. 18). We believe this definition well describes spiritual identity formation, and as it implies, a prerequisite for a spiritual identity is the belief that one is embedded in something greater than oneself. Along with this belief comes the desire for, and commitment to, self-transcendence and connection with a greater force. Individuals can express these beliefs and desires through a variety of behaviors, such as attending religious services, picking up trash in the park, private prayer and meditation, volunteering in the community, and spending time in nature.

We also propose that religious and spiritual identities vary in maturity based on individual differences and sociocultural influences. Allport (1950) coined the term *mature religion* to refer to religiousness characterized by complex and critical reflection on religious issues, by a dynamic nature that is responsive to new information and by heuristics that provide direction in life. In contrast, individuals with a foreclosed (Marcia, 1980) collective religious identity may simply accept handed-down prescriptive religious values and beliefs. We believe personal meaning making is at the core of mature personal spiritual identities. Corbett (2000) suggested that the opportunity to develop a more "mature" spiritual identity emerges when traditional religious beliefs and images from childhood no longer offer comfort from suffering or provide adequate reasons for injustices in the world. This mature personal spiritual identity usually develops in private as individuals give new personal meaning to traditional religious beliefs or seek out what is personally sacred in other ways. Such a spiritual developmental journey will produce varying degrees of resonance with different religious figures (e.g., Jesus, Allah, Buddha), different spiritual locations (churches, temples, mosques, natural areas), and different spiritual practices (e.g., prayer, meditation).

FOUNDATIONS OF SPIRITUAL IDENTITIES

Spiritual development is a "process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred"

(Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003). Benson and colleagues (2003) proposed that humans have intrinsic motivation to search for purpose, meaning, contribution, and self-transcendence and that spiritual development takes place both inside and outside religious traditions, beliefs, and practices. We propose that the search for self-transcendence, which may take the form of a search for purpose, meaning, connection, and contribution, results in the development of a personal spiritual identity. The claim by Benson and colleagues (2003) that humans in general possess intrinsic spiritual motivation suggests a universal human phenomenon. In the following subsections we review research focused on supernatural beliefs, teleological reasoning, dream concepts, and connection needs that supports the universal propensity to develop a spiritual identity.

Supernatural Beliefs

False belief tasks, commonly used to assess whether children know that other people hold beliefs different from their own, suggest that humans begin believing in the supernatural at a very young age. For example, in a study in which American children from religious families predicted other individuals' knowledge of the contents of a closed box, Barrett, Richert, and Driesenga (2001) found that most 3- to 4-year-olds attributed true beliefs (e.g., knowing what is in the box) to mother, God, a bear, an elephant, a snake, and a tree; however, by 5 years of age true beliefs were only attributed to God. Only God was assumed to know that the closed box held rocks rather than crackers.

Similarly, in another false belief task, American children from religious families evaluated whether God, a girl named Maggie, a monkey, and a special kitty with night vision could see a block in a blackened box. Most 3-year-olds assumed all could see in the dark. In contrast, most 5-year-olds believed only God (81.8%) and the special kitty (90.9%) could see in the dark; only 36.3% reported that Maggie could see the block.

In a cross-cultural replication, 4-year-old Yukatek children in Mexico believed God and humans could see the box contents, whereas 5-year-olds believed only God could see the

contents (Knight, Sousa, Barrett, & Atran, 2004). In addition, Yukatek children 5 years old and older applied a supernatural hierarchy to true belief attributions; the most "true" beliefs were attributed to God, followed by the sun and forest spirits, then minor spirits and, last, people. That children across cultures readily distinguish between supernatural agents and human agents at young ages suggests fertile ground for spiritual identity development.

Teleological Reasoning and Dream Concepts

Studies of teleological reasoning (propensity to reason about biological and nonbiological things and events in terms of their purpose) also suggest that humans seek meaning and purpose to explain the world around them. Work by Kelemen (2003) suggests that children have a strong tendency to find purposefulness in the shape of natural things. For example, Kelemen asked 7-, 8-, and 10-year-old American and British children to choose between a teleological and physical explanation of properties for living and nonliving things. When the American children were asked "why are rocks so pointy?" 7- and 8-year-olds preferred the explanation that "rocks are pointy so that animals wouldn't sit on them and smash them"; the 10-year-olds preferred the choice that "they were pointy because little bits of stuff piled up on top of one another over a long time" (Kelemen, 1999).

Kelemen (2003) replicated these findings in a British sample. Because the results were evident in both a sample of children from the United States, one of the most religious industrialized nations, and a British sample, one of the least religious industrialized countries, Kelemen concluded that young children are predisposed to teleological reasoning. She also suggested the decline in teleological reasoning after 9 years of age may reflect exposure to a formal science curriculum at school.

Young children also think that their dreams are real events rather than mental images (Piaget, 1928). Kohlberg's (1966) work indicates that the change in beliefs over the childhood years is very similar across cultures. American middle-class children around 5 years of age recognize that dreams are not real, by age

6 they believe that dreams take place inside themselves, and by age 7 they believe that dreams are thoughts caused by themselves rather than by God or other supernatural agents. The progression of beliefs about dreams among boys of the Atayal, a Taiwanese aboriginal tribe, was similar to although slower than among American boys, even though the adults in this cultural group believe that dreams are real. However, the developmental patterns diverge at age 11, when the Atayal boys were exposed to the dream ideology of the adults in their community; at this point the boys again endorsed the belief that dreams are real and come from deities. Kohlberg's dream concept work is important for two reasons: It supports the idea of a universal predisposition to believe in the supernatural, and it shows that contextual influences can exert a powerful influence on developmental changes in supernatural beliefs.

Evidence also demonstrates contextual influences on developmental changes in the endorsement of supernatural versus physical explanations for natural phenomena. Evans (2001) found that 8- to 10-year-old American children, regardless of whether they attended a Christian fundamentalist school, embraced creationist explanations over evolutionary explanations for the origins of life. In contrast, by 11-12 years of age, children endorsed the dominant explanations in their community and home, whether creationist or evolutionist.

The Need for Connection

We propose that humans are intrinsically motivated to develop a spiritual identity in order to satisfy their need for connection. Several research and spiritual communities stress a universal need for connection. Within the research community, this need has been studied by scholars interested in attachment (Bowlby, 1969), belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1954), the minimal group paradigms and social identities (Tajfel, Flament, Billig, & Bundy, 1971; Turner et al., 1987), and terror management (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Rosenblatt, 1990).

Attachment and belonging needs refer to the need for connection with other individuals. Bowlby (1969) stressed the fact that early

interactions with one's mother have long-term consequences for the satisfaction of this need. If the mother-infant attachment system is dysfunctional, the child will develop an avoidant attachment style. Maslow (1954) placed love and belonging needs second only to basic survival needs such as food and safety. In addition, Baumeister and Leary (1995) proposed that the need to belong includes needs for frequent, affectively pleasant interactions with at least a few other people in the context of stable relationships based on mutual caring and concern to satisfy their need to belong.

Religion is one place individuals can turn to have their attachment and belonging needs met. Stark and Bainbridge (1985) concluded from their review of the literature that the need to belong may be a stronger driver in religious participation than religious ideology. For example, they found that movement into and out of religious groups depends more on social bonds than ideological belief. In a religious community, belonging and attachment needs may be satisfied by an individual's relationship with the religious leader (e.g., pastor, rabbi, priest) and other members of the religious group. Kirkpatrick (1998) proposed that people with avoidant attachment styles would be more prone to religious conversion than other attachment styles because adult attachment to God may compensate for lack of secure parental attachment in childhood.

Evidence also suggests that humans gravitate to groups. According to self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987), human beings have an automatic cognitive tendency to divide the world into social categories and to place themselves in the category they perceive most similar to themselves. Tajfel and colleagues (1971) demonstrated through the minimum group paradigm that arbitrary labeling of two groups (such as overestimators and underestimators) was sufficient to elicit in-group favoritism among study participants. Turner (1999) proposed that feeling part of a group provides a meaningful collective identity powerful enough to trigger in-group behavior (e.g., favoritism, loyalty, adherence to group norms). Membership in a religious community provides a powerful setting to fulfill these needs. It also has the potential to foster and reinforce intolerance toward other religious groups.

The need to manage the potential terror resulting from people's awareness of their own mortality is the core of terror management theory (Greenberg et al., 1990). Being a member of a religious group is a very effective way to manage this awareness because many religious belief systems stress one form or another of immortality. But when coupled with in-group/out-group psychological processes, terror management theory (TMT) also helps explain intolerance. TMT experiments show that thoughts of death increase attraction to those who validate one's own cultural worldview and decrease attraction to those who threaten these beliefs (Greenberg et al., 1990). For example, when Christian participants were reminded of their mortality, they made more positive evaluations of an in-group member (a Christian) and more negative evaluations of an out-group member (a Jew) than participants who were not reminded of their mortality.

Atran and Norenzayan (in press) contend that belief in supernatural agency provides a unique buffer against the terror of death that supersedes the need to maintain a cultural worldview. When mortality was salient for mostly Christian American undergraduates, they reported stronger belief in the power of Buddhist prayer than the nonmortality salient group. In addition, Christians with strong religious beliefs were more likely to believe in the power of the Buddhist prayer than other Christians. Atran and Norenzayan (in press) contend that the cultural worldview buffer against terror management is not adequate to explain this finding; however, prayer itself, rather than religious affiliation, may be the core component of the cultural worldview that these undergraduates invoked to buffer against their fear of death.

Thus, it seems likely that individuals are motivated to develop spiritual and/or religious identities in order to fulfill connection needs. Religious organizations provide the opportunities for connection to other individuals and belonging to a group likely to result in a collective religious identity. Likewise, a personal spiritual identity can develop from personal connection with the transcendent (God, higher power, universal energy, etc.). Unlike human relationships, which the other person may leave for a number of reasons, one's relationship with

the transcendent is not vulnerable to dissolution except by the choice of the individual. This is true even in death, which is described in many spiritual traditions as a return to, or ultimate connection with, the transcendent.

SPIRITUAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Childhood to Emerging Adulthood: Developmental Processes

One could claim that if the goal of spiritual development is self-transcendence, newborns are inherently spiritual beings. Many theories in psychology, such as attachment and ego psychology, imply that newborns do not differentiate self from other and thus exist in a state of "oneness." Children move out of the state of undifferentiated oneness as they begin to categorize their world. They place themselves into gender, race, and other religious social categories based on assigned or biologically determined characteristics. They also choose social categories based on the cultural opportunities available to them, such as being a soccer player or a ballet dancer. Unlike chosen social categories, children often perceive the behaviors and values associated with assigned identities as immutable (Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002). They learn the power of social and group conformity norms and what it means to be included or excluded from a group (Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999).

Children categorize themselves based on the concrete categories available in their social worlds, for example, the religion of their parents or primary caregivers. When parents include their children in religious activity participation and/or stress the importance of their religion, children may accept a religious identity much like an assigned identity rather than a chosen identity. Children not only accept their categorical membership in a religious group, they also accept the beliefs, values, and behaviors that are normative for the religious group. In other words, my parents are Catholic, so I'm a Catholic, and this is how a Catholic thinks and behaves.

An atheist friend, Tom, grew up in a religious family. During a discussion about spirituality,

he surprised me by saying that it takes just as much faith to be an atheist as it does to believe in God. He recalls walking around the corner at the age of 8 or 9 and looking back to his house. His view was blocked by other houses and yet he believed the house was still there. Tom started thinking about how he knew the house was still there even though he couldn't see it, and this led him to question how one knows that God exists when you can't walk back around the corner and verify God's existence. He resolved his conflict regarding the existence of things that you can't see or experience with the five senses by deciding God does not exist.

Tom's story demonstrates a turning point in religious identity development concurrent with cognitive and social maturational changes that begin to occur around age 10. During adolescence, individuals begin to develop a new set of cognitive resources described by Piaget and Inhelder (1969) as the formal operations stage. These cognitive resources include an increased ability to think abstractly, to use more sophisticated information-processing strategies, to conceptualize many different perspectives on a problem at once, and to reflect on oneself (Byrnes, 2001). On a social level, adolescents have increased perspective-taking abilities and better developed social skills (Harter, 1999). These cognitive changes move the young child's hedonistic orientation to the world, from concern with approval and disapproval of others in late elementary years, to a more self-reflective and empathetic orientation in adolescence (Eisenberg, 1998). In early adolescence, individuals also begin to become more focused on the psychological as well as to introspect more about their inner life (Damon & Hart, 1982). These maturational changes bring new meaning to the question, "Who am I?" and may trigger questioning of the youth's current religious, or lack of religious, identity similar to what Tom experienced as a child.

Erikson (1968) would describe Tom's loss of belief in God as a turning point, "a crucial period of increased vulnerability and heightened potential, and therefore, the ontogenetic source of generational strength and maladjustment" (p. 96). Development, as conceptualized by Riegel (1975), progresses along four interdependent dimensions: the inner-biological, the

individual-psychological, the cultural-sociological, and the outer-physical. When the progression of events along each of these four dimensions loses synchronicity, conflict or crisis is assumed to be the result. Through the process of restoring balance, the individual matures and is internally strengthened.

In this perspective, development is assumed to proceed through a hierarchical series of crisis formations and resolutions. By attaining new levels of synchrony across the four dimensions and by successfully adapting to each new context, individuals gradually broaden their repertoire of cognitive schemas and become increasingly capable of dealing with more complex situations. Exposure to more complex situations and to maturational and social changes, in turn, can produce new crises and new resolutions (Eccles & Bryan, 1994). The nature and direction of this sequential hierarchy have been described in similar terms by different cognitive and ego stage theorists (e.g., Kohlberg, Erikson, and Loewinger). These theorists describe a graduated, dialectical process of inner psychological growth, mediated by active individual/environment interaction, culminating in autonomous levels of functioning in which the individual integrates once conflicting and differentiated aspects of personality to satisfy self-realized needs. Furthermore, each of these theorists points to adolescence as a critical period in the formation and solidification of a postconventional identity—an identity reflecting one's own goals and experiences rather than being based on socially prescribed roles. Because Erikson has so directly influenced thinking about identity development, we will discuss his work and identity theories derived from his perspective.

Erikson (1968) conceptualized development as a series of stages, each representing a crisis created by the individual's level of development and the socialization demands faced. Optimal growth depends on the successful resolution of each of these crises. Unsuccessful resolution can lead to stagnation and continuing functional preoccupation with that particular level. Important here is that this process reflects dialectical growth, in which the individual is able to incorporate factors of lower stages into current schemas, even while forming newly transcendent ones.

Erikson (1968) believed identity formation to be the primary developmental task of adolescence. Erikson's stages of development can be conceptualized as turning points in development. The eight stages are marked by crises created when an individual's current stage of development no longer matches demands in the social context (Erikson, 1968). Although identity growth can continue to occur after adolescence, future growth will be easier in adulthood if the identity crisis is dealt with well during adolescence. Erikson's Identity versus Role Confusion stage is particularly relevant for our understanding of spiritual identity development. During this stage the individual may develop a stable spiritual identity that can guide subsequent goals, behaviors, and personal experience choices. The length and depth of the "crisis" in this stage depend on the individual and on the sociocultural context.

The potential importance of adolescence as a gateway to spiritual transcendence is made even more salient if one assesses it within the context of Riegel's dialectical model. Viewed from this crisis resolution model, adolescence has to be seen as a period in which the simultaneous changes occurring at all levels create a stage with great potential for rapid growth. On the inner-biological level, adolescence brings rapid brain changes, hormonal changes, and physical changes. The changes in adolescent brains in particular may lead to increases in exactly the kind of reasoning needed to take on the identity tasks occurring at the individual-psychological level (Spear, 2000).

On the individual-psychological level, one's assigned religious identity from childhood, or lack therefore, may be questioned and synchrony lost. Newly acquired reasoning skills may lead to questions about previously unquestioned beliefs from childhood, such as God's existence or the assumed superiority of one's assigned religion over other religions. Religious belief systems regarding what is right and wrong, good and bad, may be challenged as adolescents explore new peer groups and romantic relationships and seek balance between new biological drives and what constitutes a meaningful intimate relationship.

In gradually resolving this crisis, adolescents may seek a renewed balance between their

spiritual identity, socially ascribed beliefs and values, and other personal and collective identities. Individuals may still consider themselves part of a particular religious group, but they may not question some of the beliefs advocated by the group. Negotiating a spiritual identity may mean dealing with conflict between overlapping collective identities. For example, imagine that an adolescent female, who considers herself very religious, realizes she is a lesbian, yet homosexuality is not accepted in the doctrines of her faith. If she accepts the lesbian identity, she must deal with the ideological conflict produced by her religious and homosexual collective identities colliding. If she finds a way to reconcile the conflict and maintains both collective identities, her personal spiritual identity will reflect a new facet representing the resolution of the conflict. If she doesn't resolve the conflict, she may suffer negative mental health outcomes. Another individual's spiritual identity may look much like a patchwork quilt, including bits and pieces of many different religious belief systems without identifying with any one of them. Such a person may not accept any collective identity as part of his or her spiritual identity.

Parents also play a critical role in the spiritual identity development of their children. Fuligni and Flook (in press) propose that family membership provides a social identity for adolescents that helps them interpret and make sense of larger social categories such as ethnicity or religion. The quality of the relationship with parents influences the effectiveness of parental religious socialization. Ream and Savin-Williams (2003) found adolescents were more likely to accept their parents' religion if they had a positive relationship with their parents and were securely attached. On the other hand, if the affective tone of the relationship was less positive and if the youth were not securely attached to their parents, they are more likely to disaffiliate or convert to another spiritual tradition. If adolescents who are close to their parents are more likely to accept their parents' religion, does this mean they continue to have an assigned collective religious identity that may also imply a foreclosed religious identity? And likewise, if the relationship is not positive, are adolescents more likely to develop a

personal spiritual identity? We do not have answers to these questions, but they highlight the importance of context in spiritual identity development.

Adolescent adaptation in the context of spirituality expands beyond parents and peer groups into the perceived cultural milieu. Adolescents are concerned with shaping their rapidly developing identity into socially acceptable roles. On the sociocultural level, spiritual identity may or may not be a major determinant of acceptability during this period. Marcia (1983) suggested that cultures that allow for choice in social, ideological, and vocational roles are best suited to the resolution of the identity crisis. The current cultural environment in the United States presents many opportunities for spiritual exploration. Not only is it the most religious industrialized country, it is also the most religiously diverse industrialized country (Eck, 2001). American adolescents are exposed to more opportunities than ever before to explore spiritual connections beyond the religious and spiritual roles and social groups they identified with as children.

Thus, we believe the periods of adolescence and emerging adulthood can serve as a gateway to a spiritual identity that transcends, but does not necessarily exclude, the assigned religious identity from childhood. Most of our attention has focused on adolescence because it is a unique universal transition time when individuals evaluate childhood identities and begin making the transition to new adult identities. However, spiritual identity development is a lifelong process not bound to a specific critical period, nor does it unfold in an easily understandable or predictable pattern.

Transcendent Spiritual Identity

Normally, people will follow the path that rises from the plains of their own civilization; those who circle the mountain, trying to bring others around to their paths, are not climbing. . . . It is possible to climb life's mountain from any side, but when the top is reached the trails converge. At base, in the foothills of theology, ritual, and organizational structure, the religions are distinct. Differences in culture, history, geography and collective

temperament all make for diverse starting points.

—Huston Smith (1991), *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions*

It is easier to name the summit of the mountain (e.g., mature religion, Allport, 1950; universalizing faith, Fowler, 1981) than to identify the pathways that lead there. Equifinality (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 1996) describes the developmental complexity of diverse pathways that lead to the same destination. For example, adults who consider themselves spiritual but not religious may come from a variety of religious and spiritual family backgrounds. They may have grown up in families actively engaged in their religion and religious community, or in families engaged in community service and civic issues, or in families who spent lots of time outdoors and were very active in conservation efforts. The end point of particular interest to us is the transcendent spiritual identity. Our term, *transcendent spiritual identity*, is paradoxical because transcendent implies, by intention, rising above personal and collective identities to reach a state of oneness with the universe.

To use the artist's technique of defining the negative space around the object of interest, let us first say what a transcendent spiritual identity is *not*. It is not a foreclosed (Marcia, 1980) religious identity in which one accepts and internalizes the doctrines, values, and roles offered by parents or other authority figures without exploring other options. It is also not related to the conventional level of moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1984) where respect for rules and authority dictates one's moral reasoning. It is not an assigned identity that maintains consistent behavior (such as church attendance) or beliefs (such as abortion is a sin) from childhood without question. A transcendent spiritual identity also can't be measured solely by individual outcomes because more global concerns (such as social justice and environmental issues) are at stake as well.

We believe the mountain summit, a transcendent spiritual identity, is seldom attained because it is difficult to continue climbing the mountain once the three types of connection needs described earlier are met. Grotevant (1992) suggests that those who are satisfied with

their identity are unlikely to be motivated to explore other identities. Individuals who stop climbing the mountain may be functioning very well because they have attained a state of equilibrium or synchrony; from a global needs perspective, however, they have neither moved beyond in- or out-group prejudice nor gained commitment to solving critical social and ecological issues.

Earlier in this chapter, we proposed that a transcendent spiritual identity provides a potential gateway to positive social change and better stewardship of our planet. Imagine a world in which humans did not see themselves as separate or different from other humans and other life-forms. Imagine a world in which group cooperation was not in the service of competition as some argue (Dawkins, 1976). What if we could find a way to encourage people to develop spiritual identities that transcend not only the self but also the boundaries that separate individuals from those who appear to be different, including other religious groups, other ethnic groups, and other nonhuman life-forms? First, we would need to understand more fully the developmental processes that encourage such a spiritual identity.

Adolescence and emerging adulthood in modern culture, marked by exposure to changing life circumstances coupled with both exposure to many worldviews and the leisure time needed to explore these worldviews, may encourage people to explore their relationship with the transcendent. Loevinger (1976) described such challenging life events as "pacers." Pacers are defined as complex interpersonal situations that can stimulate movement to a higher level of ego functioning. This movement requires increasing complexity in one's perspective on events, and a search for meaning and purpose in one's life. Pacers may motivate adolescents to reflect on and develop a spiritual identity as they struggle to make meaning and find purpose in life. Thus because challenging life experiences can induce a state of disequilibrium or loss of synchrony, they may provide motivation to deepen one's connection with the transcendent.

But what else is necessary for spiritual development? Think back for a moment to the example of Tom, who, after pondering whether to believe in something whose existence he

could not prove, consciously decided to become an atheist. What if Tom had felt a breeze on his face and had looked up to see the leaves on the trees gently moving in the wind? He might have experienced a sense of oneness with the natural world that reaffirmed rather than undermined his faith in the existence of a transcendent presence in the universe. This simplistic example illustrates the importance of both what we attend to and our emotional reactions to these cognitive experiences when we are in a state of disequilibrium. Disequilibrium merely provides the opportunity for developmental change. The exact nature of that change will depend on what else we experience and feel at that time.

Spiritual development can also be stimulated by family and community practices and beliefs. Exposure to such spiritual practices as meditation, contemplative education, vision quests, and intense experience of nature may encourage individuals to seek a deeper connection with the sacred. Much more needs to be understood about contexts that promote development of a transcendent spiritual identity.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Future investigations should examine the search, formation, and negotiation of spiritual identities across time, situations, and social contexts with a particular focus on how spiritual identity relates to individuals' attitudes and behaviors across a range of domains. We believe spiritual identities are multidimensional and expect variation even within seemingly homogeneous religious groups, but this needs to be verified by empirical studies. We also need to learn more about the role of parent, peers, religious institutions, and cultural practices in facilitating spiritual identity development.

We assume adolescence and early young adulthood are crucial times for exploration and development of a spiritual identity and that spiritual identity work in adolescence can lay the foundation for future spiritual identity development. Some youth take on the complex task of integrating a wide variety of religious and spiritual messages; some youth build a spiritual identity from their assigned religious identity; some youth develop a spiritual identity while

rejecting religious messages; and still others do not develop a spiritual or religious identity at all. We know very little about developmental outcomes related to diverse spiritual identities, little about how youth act as agents in the construction and maintenance of their spiritual identities, and even less about mechanisms that influence spiritual identity pathways. Given the potential of transcendent spiritual identities to address individual and social concerns, we believe increased understanding of these issues is a worthwhile, if not essential, endeavor.

We also know little about the nature of spiritual development across the life span. Erikson suggested that older adulthood may also be a prime time for spiritual development. Similarly, major pacer events throughout adulthood may stimulate renewed attention to one's spiritual development. Future research agendas should address multiple aspects of spiritual identity development. First, a better understanding of the content of spiritual identities is needed. Content includes the subjective meanings, ideologies, behavioral attributes, attitudes, beliefs, values, and cultural traditions that underlie and make up an individual's spiritual identity. Next, we need to know more about the structural properties underlying a spiritual identity: Are spiritual and religious identities experienced by individuals as distinct from one another? We also need to know more about the relation of spiritual identities to individuals' other identities. In addition, we should learn more about continuity and discontinuity of spiritual identity across contexts and across time. What are the stable and dynamic properties of spiritual identities across situations and time? Does a spiritual identity become more salient under certain conditions and situations? Which types of events or situations increase spiritual identity salience and promote growth toward spiritual transcendence? More attention should also be given to the socialization of spiritual identities.

Finally, more information is needed about the developmental and societal outcomes related to various types of spiritual identities. Does a spiritual identity predict individuals' attitudes and behaviors in other domains and in daily life? When do spiritual identities protect individuals against the adverse psychological effects of negative and uncontrollable events

and daily experiences of discrimination and stress? Are some types of spiritual identities more effective in promoting well-being of self, others, and our planet? Finally, what role do spiritual identities play in individuals' attitudes and behavior toward other groups? In other words, do spiritual identities promote tolerance, intolerance, or both?

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