

Eminently Social Spirituality

Context, Practice, and Power

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Spirituality is in the spotlight. While levels of traditional religious belief and observance are declining in much of the Western world, the number of people who consider themselves spiritual but not religious is on the rise. Spiritual practices such as yoga, meditation, and pilgrimage are prevalent and growing. Innumerable “wellness” regimes impart spiritual experiences and vocabularies to practitioners. Books on cultivating spiritual life proliferate. People are delving into non-Christian and premodern traditions for insights into spirituality, while global migration encourages hybrid practices that are both transnational and unique. Writers talk of a new spiritual awakening “after religion.”

This current interest in spirituality has a lineage. A “spiritual revolution” has been underway since the middle of the twentieth century. After a revival of sorts after World War II, organized religion—and its associated identities, beliefs, and practices—began to weaken under the influence of the 1960s counterculture. In an era that placed greater value on individualism, freedom, and authenticity, people began to move away from commitment to organized religion toward spiritual seeking, which often happened outside religious institutions. This turn toward spirituality, fed by the rapid social transformations of the 1960s, was an acceleration point in a longer trajectory. Writing at the opening of the twentieth century, Émile Durkheim predicted the decline of religious authority and the complementary rise of the self as the center of sacredness. Even before that, pietist movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries challenged religious institutions with their emphasis on interior experience, individual devotion, and emotional states over doctrine and conformity. Seen in this light, the contemporary embrace of spirituality can be viewed as the latest stage in a movement toward the subjectification of transcendent experience.

Given the high degree of interest in spirituality, now is a valuable time for a new appraisal. While the historical trajectory that brought us here seems clear enough, common understandings of contemporary spirituality have limitations. As we outline in the sections to follow, the dominant assumptions embedded in much of our thinking about spirituality are only partially correct. Though spirituality is associated with individualism, it is not predominantly individuated and idiosyncratic; it is socially influenced, enabled, and patterned. There are not highly generalizable forms of spirituality; spirituality, both as a lived experience and as an analytic category, is shaped by context and therefore quite variable. Spirituality should not be solely associated with belief, transcendent states, and sentiments of awe and wonder; it is rooted in social practice and physical embodiment, and oriented toward pragmatic action. Spirituality does not float above human power relations; it is also contested, strategically framed, and shaped by institutional forces.

None of the foregoing denies the positive benefits commonly associated with spirituality. This view of spirituality is warranted, but its scope is narrower than supposed. We show the inescapably social foundations of spirituality. These foundations help explain spirituality's positive associations, but, more broadly, account for its multifaceted nature. While definitions of spirituality have an individual locus, and while spirituality is often grounded in a discourse of Western individualism, it nonetheless has sociological antecedents, variations, and consequences. Definitions and discourse aside, spirituality is just as "eminently social" as Durkheim ([1912] 1995) showed that religion was over a century ago. It should be socially situated.

Below we outline the insights and assumptions of what we refer to as first-wave scholarship on spirituality. Then we lay out a framework for second-wave scholarship on spirituality that is more oriented by context, practice, and power. Our hope is that this framework contributes to more socially embedded and comparative understandings of spirituality within and outside of organized religion and religious populations.

First-Wave Perspectives on Spirituality

There have long been spiritual groups and movements—metaphysicals, Transcendentalists, occult followers, and New Age practitioners, just to name a few (see Albanese 2007; Schmidt 2005). And there have long been scholars who studied them. What was distinctive about first-wave scholarship on

spirituality was its attention to the *society-wide* shift away from religion and toward spirituality. The work of this first wave, which began in the 1990s, was crucial to better understanding spirituality. It carved out analytic space for spirituality that was distinct from religion, documented spiritual trends in the general public, analyzed factors that accounted for its growth, and assessed its impact.

In *After Heaven*, Robert Wuthnow (1998) argued that a fundamental shift from religious "dwelling" to spiritual "seeking" occurred in the decades following World War II. Dwelling involved an enduring commitment to a stable religious tradition, while seeking was characterized by restless movement between religious groups and traditions and by a more individualized assembly of personal beliefs and practices (what become known as "tinkering" or "bricolage"). Slow-moving social changes created fertile grounds for this shift: among them, an increasingly postindustrial economy, rising levels of education, occupational and geographical mobility, and the growth of a consumerist mindset. But it was the 1960s counterculture, with its emphasis on freedom, critique of existing institutions, mood of openness, influx of Eastern religious groups, and therapeutic discourse that accelerated the trend toward spiritual seeking. Wade Clark Roof's *The Spiritual Marketplace* (1999) specifically tied the trend toward spirituality to generational change. The spirituality of the baby boomers, who came of age in the 1960s or later, was based on seeking, questing, and expressive individualism. Religious traditions provided spiritual resources from which boomers eclectically drew for their own purposes. Roof argued that baby boomer spirituality was the vanguard of American religious life and would soon become the mainstream. Not long thereafter, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (2005) documented similar trends in the United Kingdom. Their book's title, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality*, telegraphed their argument and its scope. The authors distinguished between religion and spirituality and the logics of conformity/transcendence and authenticity/immanence associated, respectively, with each. They argued that a spiritual revolution was underway in the contemporary West, a revolution rooted in the cultivation and sacralization of internal subjective significance.

With spirituality ascendant, researchers turned their attention to conceptual and descriptive matters. Exploring the definitional and empirical relationship between "religion" and "spirituality" proved to be complex and became a virtual cottage industry (e.g., Hill et al. 2000; Marler and Hadaway 2002). Documenting the spread of new forms of spirituality was another

important objective. In the Western European case, Houtman and Aupers (2007) documented the growth of "post-Christian spirituality" between 1981 and 2000. Along similar lines to Heelas and Woodhead, they argued that this represented a trend away from the authority of external tradition and toward that of the self and subjective life. While people in the United States were more religiously observant than their European counterparts, the term "spiritual but not religious" entered the lexicon (e.g., Fuller 2001) and became a significant descriptive category in the analysis of US religious trends (Mercadante 2014; Parsons 2018).

Other attention turned to the personal impact of spirituality. Much of this research sought to explore the links between individual spirituality and mental and physical health (George et al. 2000). In the field of psychology, where much of this work was located analytically, research focused on determining the best measures of spirituality, raising numerous questions about definitions and dimensions. Health research found positive associations between spirituality and mental health, physical resilience, and life satisfaction. As this line of research proliferated, scholars raised questions about a potential bias toward positive findings. If spirituality was defined and measured in reference to inherently positive qualities, as was often the case, studies would inevitably find positive outcomes (Koenig 2008). Nevertheless, given spirituality's positive cultural connotations and empirical associations, it became something that healthcare providers sought to incorporate into patient care (see Koenig 2013).

First-wave scholarship on spirituality accomplished a number of important things. It created analytic space for attention to spirituality as distinct from religion, identified factors that led to the societal shift toward spirituality, and looked at the impact of spirituality in various areas of life. Yet it did not displace, and may have reinforced, a number of assumptions about spirituality that remain common. The first is that the trend away from organized religion leads to individuated spirituality. This draws an overly sharp boundary between religion and spirituality; in many contexts, religion and spirituality overlap considerably. It is also bound up with an overly sharp contrast between religion as social and communal and spirituality as cultivated outside of social relationships and influences. This contrast has been reinforced by definitions of spirituality, which have an individual locus, by psychological measures and scales that assess spirituality as a property of individuals, and by long-standing associations between spirituality and religious individualism (e.g., Bellah et al. 1985).

A second assumption is that spirituality plays a positive role in personal cultivation. This is reflected in spirituality's growing role in treatment and interventions of various types. Medical professionals see spirituality as enhancing mental health and physical well-being, prison systems host spiritual development programs for their inmates, schools have meditation and yoga programs for their students, and workplaces sponsor spiritual programming aimed toward improved employee satisfaction and productivity. As commentators have noted, these types of programs treat the individual, rather than systems, as the locus of personal and societal wellness (e.g., Carrette and King 2005) and assume that spirituality is positive or at least benign. This assumption overlooks the fact that seeking connection with transcendent sources of meaning may also lead to melancholy, despondence, or anger. These emotions, and feelings of failure, are not uncommon in spiritual life (Johnston 2017).

A third assumption is that the rise of spirituality has been largely uncontested and not a product of struggle or strategy. This view bears the mark of classical secularization theory, in which the rise of contemporary spirituality is the outgrowth of modernization processes (Bruce 2011), not a product of group interests and conflict (e.g., Smith 2003). Some first-wave studies tried to counter this view by showing, for example, how prominent women were in the rise of spirituality, how much it aligned with and supported changing gender roles, and how contested these changes were (Sointu and Woodhead 2008).

A fourth, and overlapping, assumption is that there is a master trend toward spirituality that follows a single path of societal modernization, modeled on North America and Europe, rather than a variety of ways that spirituality might manifest itself in modern settings (see Eisenstadt 2000). This assumption privileges a particular set of historical processes that serve as the foundation for theoretical generalizations. What constitutes "spirituality" for people in North America is not necessarily the same as, for instance, in East Asia or North Africa.

All of these assumptions require revision.

Second-Wave Perspectives on Spirituality

First-wave scholarship on spirituality laid a crucial foundation that subsequent work builds upon. But it was necessarily focused on early-stage

problematics and foils involved in clearing conceptual ground. There have been compelling forays beyond the framework of first-wave perspectives, some coming from within the first wave itself. Here we consolidate a number of these insights to propose new conceptual perspectives that hold promise for a deeper understanding of contemporary spirituality.

The foundation of what we describe as second-wave perspectives is the recognition that, against the individuated view of spirituality, spirituality is thoroughly social. This recognition extends beyond first-wave analyses that identified the sociological factors driving the rise in spirituality. Newer work of the second wave centers on the *collective processes*—such as socialization, group gatherings, common affordances, shared narrative—that are constitutive of contemporary manifestations of spirituality. For instance, Aupers and Houtman (2006) showed that the growth of New Age spirituality in Western Europe not only took place against a backdrop of skepticism toward mainstream institutions but involved active socialization processes and ideological legitimations that produced a coherent form of “individuated” spirituality. The authors were early in calls for a “sociologization” of the study of spirituality and its legitimating structures. In an exemplary ethnographic study of “new metaphysicals,” with metaphysicals serving as an exemplar of William James’s “individual” religious experience, Bender (2010) explored how metaphysical spirituality was suffused with sociality—shared discourses and collective practices shaped by group settings. Ammerman’s (2014) rich study of spirituality from a “lived religion” perspective likewise generated important insights about the social foundations of spirituality. Among them, she showed that a person’s “sacred consciousness,” which is at the center of a spiritual outlook, is often based in and nurtured through social conduits, including religious organizations, small groups, and diverse media. Pagis’s (2019) ethnographic analysis of vipassana meditation illustrated how the cultivation of interior (and seemingly personal) spiritual experience is enabled by shared social practices, intersubjective understandings, and community affirmation.

In order to better situate spirituality in the social, and oriented by like-minded work, such as that of our chapter contributors here, we focus our attention on three angles of vision in particular: context, practice, and power. We also expand beyond the culturally Christian settings of the United States and Western Europe. Doing so helps to illustrate how a narrow and arguably provincial understanding of spirituality should be recast in light of a broader range of contexts. The contributors conduct research in North America,

Central America, East Asia, South Asia, Africa and the African diaspora, Western Europe, and the Middle East. They study not only Christian, Jewish, and Islamic societies, but also non-Abrahamic societies with native as well as transnational sacred traditions.

As we elaborate further below, these analytic angles and expanded cases help to demonstrate that spirituality, both as analytic concept and as lived experience, is a relational phenomenon, embodied and practical, and shaped by power relations, even if these dynamics go unrecognized by practitioners (and perhaps analysts) themselves. Second-wave understandings of spirituality are also as attentive to the relationship between the spiritual and the secular as to the spiritual and the religious.

Context

Although the term “spirituality” is often used as if it refers to a stable, easily identifiable substance, we recognize that, like the term “religion,” it does not have an innate, universal essence, the way H_2O is the chemical formula of water wherever water may be found. Thus, it is misguided to search for an overarching definition of spirituality that would work transhistorically, transnationally, and transculturally: “There is no view from nowhere—no Archimedean point outside of history—from which one could determine a fixed and universal meaning for the term ‘spirituality’” (Carrette and King 2005, 3).

Instead of “a view from nowhere,” a “view from somewhere”—or context—is how we approach the concept of spirituality. Context refers to two aspects of spirituality research: conceptual and substantive. How we understand spirituality is standpoint dependent (where we view spirituality from) and situation dependent (where spirituality is situated). The act of definition is itself a social process and practice, one related to institutional and political—such as postcolonial—structures of power. Context is the concrete as well as symbolic social space in which the embodied, intersubjective, discursive, and pragmatic spiritual practice takes place. By identifying contexts and emphasizing the significance of standpoints, we are following in the footsteps of feminist theorists to privilege the traditionally less powerful, invisible, and overlooked (Harding 2009).

The conceptual dimension of the context of spirituality must start with its historical embeddedness. In this, spirituality is very similar to the concept

of religion, which is subject to myriad historical forces such as the development of different religious traditions; social and cultural changes; capitalism and colonialism; diverse modes of modernity; and the politics of academic knowledge production, among many others (Asad 1993; Chakrabarty 2000; King 1999; Sun 2013). As Nietzsche famously puts it in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, "Only that which is without history can be defined" ([1887] 2009, 60).

Any attempt at a genealogy of the concept of "spirituality" would yield a very complex history. In the Western tradition, the term goes back to the "spiritual" in Greek religion (*pneumatikos*), denoting both the spirit that resides in humans and what belongs to the divine spirit. The latter was used extensively in Greek biblical texts in early Christianity. By the thirteenth century, the term was used to refer to the jurisdiction of the church, the ecclesiastical sphere, and ecclesiastical authority. The idea of "spiritual exercise," referring to the rigorous cultivation of the spirit and the mind, also has ancient roots, practiced by the Stoics in the third century BC before it became part of early Christian monastic tradition (Hadot 1995). Ignatius of Loyola revived and reinvented spiritual exercise in the sixteenth century, and it remains a venerable practice in contemporary Catholicism.

In America in the nineteenth century, discourses on spirituality and transcendentalism captured the religious imagination of several generations of Americans, with the "new metaphysicals" engaging in new forms of spiritual practice in the twenty-first century (Bender 2010). The rising wave of non-Western religious practices such as meditation and yoga since the late nineteenth century resulted in the notion of "Eastern spirituality" (Ellwood 1979), although these diverse "Eastern traditions" have had vastly different processes of transformation once they were transplanted to America (Palmer and Siegler 2017; Seager 2012; Tweed 2000).

The concept of "spirituality" cannot be properly understood without knowledge of how the dominant form of religious life in North America functions in this context. It is the changing reality of Christianity—historically dominant and thoroughly institutionalized, now gradually evolving into a more porous presence in some quarters and a more rigid one in others—that shapes how spirituality is defined and comprehended there. The conceptualization of spirituality is relational, for its usage always corresponds to the historical developments of religion in societies where religious membership has been the norm.

Outside of such contexts, the term "spirituality" has a very different set of connotations. For instance, it is not easy to find a Chinese or Hebrew

translation of "spirituality" that is its exact functional equivalent in the Christian West, for the simple yet deep reason that there is no functional equivalent of a concept in societies where there have been very different religious, social, and political realities. This explains why, although the concept is much employed in the sociological study of religion in North America and in Europe, "spirituality" is not nearly as commonly used in studies from other parts of the world. The solution is not to ride off in all directions seeking a catchall definition of "spirituality," but rather to begin with an analysis of what counts for spirituality in a given society. Only then can we proceed from this nuanced and historically grounded understanding to undertaking empirical projects that may shed light on the specific conditions of a particular form of religious life.

Another aspect of spirituality as a concept is its boundary work (Gieryn 1999; Lamont and Molnar 2002). It is defined and understood in relation to both the religious and the secular. This is not unlike the contrasting and corresponding concepts such as the sacred and the profane in Durkheim, or "the proletariat as the negation of the capitalist class" in Marx (Lamont and Molnar 2002, 167), or the master-and-slave dialectic in Hegel. How are the symbolic and social boundaries between the three entities—religion, spirituality, and the secular—drawn and maintained? And which takes priority? Does the experience of spirituality come first? Or do we find first the boundaries that separate spirituality from religion and the secular?

Abbott makes the bold claim that "social entities come into existence when social actors tie social boundaries together in certain ways. Boundaries come first, then entities" (1995, 860). We suggest that the boundary work of spirituality often entails similar processes. Boundary-making is a social process that involves institutions, social actors, and material as well as symbolic objects. And in the case of spirituality, it also includes ritual activities. The making of "boundaries into entities" occurs in particular times and places: there is no universal pattern for how such a process of boundary work is carried out. For instance, in societies where the boundaries between the secular and the religious are long-standing and strong, such as in the United States and France, the boundaries of spirituality are likely to be under pressure to be clearly demarcated, therefore creating a social space for the existence of the entity of "spirituality." In these circumstances, the boundary work results in a stronger sense of the spiritual as a distinct entity, as a thing in itself. But the hard boundary between religion and spirituality comes first—people and institutions have stakes in the boundary's existence—and makes

the bounded entity possible. In societies where the secular and the religious do not have strong boundaries and are often diffused, such as in Africa or in China, people are unburdened of the need to have clearly defined religious identities (Adogame, this volume; Sun 2021). In such cases, spirituality may not become a full-fledged social entity because boundary work is not needed. People will be more likely to speak of their practices rather than of their “spirituality” in the abstract, and indeed they may be puzzled when asked about spirituality detached from practices.

Once we are explicit about the situated nature of the conceptual frame we adopt, the ensuing empirical work allows us to examine the lived experiences of “spirituality,” defined in whatever terms are meaningful to the specific contexts. This is the study of spirituality as lived experience, which aims to understand how spirituality is practiced differently in different micro- and macrocontexts. This is what we call “situated spirituality,” which refers to the way spirituality is always part of the social world, and always conditioned by cultural, political, and legal contexts. Spirituality can be—and should be—studied in terms of its substantive characteristics and variations, as long as we recognize that conceptualizations of spirituality are always context dependent. As Talal Asad suggests, “there cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes,” rather than abstract systems of meaning (Asad 1993: 29). The same may be said about spirituality.

To situate spirituality means examining it in relation to other features of context, looking for patterns, variations, and significant comparisons. Valuable work has already been done in this direction, with empirical research looking for the impact of race and ethnicity, education, politics, religious membership, gender, sexuality, cross-national differences, inter-religious differences, and many other social factors in the lived experience and practice of spirituality. Notably, the general insight that one’s individual spirituality has a sociological basis lays the groundwork for expecting variation but seeing it as patterned. At the individual level, the meaning and experience of spirituality are shaped by sociodemographic and ideological traits. In the United States, views of spirituality fall into distinct clusters that are associated with age, education, and political orientation, and changes in these contexts affect the way people identify themselves as “religious” or “spiritual” (Ammerman 2013; Rockenbach, this volume; Steensland et al. 2018). A study of daily spiritual experience found that people’s spiritual awareness is

influenced by a host of sociological factors—for example, it is typically higher in the presence of friends and family, which is evidence that solitude is not necessarily the most conducive setting for spiritual experience (Kucinkas et al. 2018). Research by Jason Shelton (this volume) also shows that blacks and whites differ in their identifications as “a spiritual person.”

In cross-national comparisons, we see variation across entire societies. In regard to the meaning that spirituality holds for people, Ammerman (2013) and Steensland and colleagues (2018) both find that spirituality and religion overlap considerably in the United States. Theism of some type is the dominant reference point in American spirituality, and wholly immanent modes of spirituality are fairly limited. Studies in Western Europe that use similar research methods find that spirituality is markedly more immanent or “this-worldly.” In an Italian study, spirituality was much more likely to connote things such as harmony, life’s meaning, and inner peace than belief in God or other references to organized religion or transcendence (Palmisano 2010). Likewise, a Dutch study showed that people in Holland were considerably more likely to conceptualize spirituality in terms of inner feelings, the human mind, or a life philosophy than Americans are (Berghuijs et al. 2013).

Taken together, these micro- and macro-level comparisons illustrate an essential point: While spirituality feels personal to people, it is fundamentally sociological in its antecedents and manifestations. The situated discourses of spirituality and its attendant culture are what produce its individualistic connotations. This recognition opens up possibilities for expanding our understanding of spirituality in a host of ways. Ammerman’s framework (this volume) for examining spiritual practices in four different contexts—entangled, established, institutionalized, interstitial—charts a promising course. Many of the other chapters further illustrate the value of studying spirituality in varied settings across the religious and secular landscape and in relation to religious and nonreligious groups.

Practice

Now is also the time to pay greater attention to practice in the study of spirituality. Robert Wuthnow (2020) surveyed the recent “practice turn” in the social sciences and highlighted its implications for the study of religion. He described the shift in focus as one from *classification concepts* to *structuring processes*. This, in essence, is a shift from *what* to *how*—from definitions and

conceptual categories to the temporal and processual dynamics that undergird religion as it is actually lived. Religious leaders and institutions themselves have long recognized the centrality of practice in religious formation. Many traditions are in fact characterized as much by orthopraxy (right practice) as orthodoxy (right belief). In the study of religion, attention to practice is reflected in examinations of activity like private prayer, corporate worship, devotional pilgrimage, sacramental rites, dietary strictures, and acts of charity. Research in the lived religion perspective (e.g., Ammerman 2007; McGuire 2008) has been on the forefront of this agenda. The benefit to this attention to practice is that it situates religion in its everyday contexts while simultaneously demonstrating how practices constitute religious life itself (Ammerman 2020).

The study of spirituality is beginning to make this same shift toward practice. First-wave scholarship was largely oriented by the classificatory phase of study, as early work in a new area typically is. It focused more on questions concerning definitions, distinctions, and measurement. What is the nature of spirituality? How is spirituality related to religion? How should we conceptualize the dimensions of spirituality? To what extent does spirituality impact other aspects of life? This is necessary and important work. But it shaped our conceptualization of spirituality by centering on spiritual experience and spiritual identity (see Sheldrake 2012). For instance, numerous studies have focused on people who identify as “spiritual but not religious” and the growth of this group. Yet most of these studies shed little light on what sustains spirituality or what it does in the lives of respondents. Even Mercadante’s (2014) illuminating analysis of this group focuses on beliefs and meaning structures over spiritual activities. Along similar lines, large national studies assess spiritual dispositions with questions about whether one has experienced a state of awe or wonder or harmony. But the field has devoted less attention to spiritual practices, which are the underlying engines that produce meaningful experiences and robust identities. Such experiences do not necessarily come easily or without intentionality. This neglect of practice could be due to the fact that spirituality connotes something that is deinstitutionalized and therefore less rooted in shared ritual. Spirituality has ostensibly fewer established behavioral expectations, is less prescriptively rooted in time and place, and, for scholars, is more challenging to observe outside established institutions. With prominent exceptions from research in the lived religion and ethnographic traditions, exemplified by a number of the contributors to our volume, the study of spirituality has yet to fully take the practice turn.

Yet understanding the role of practice in spirituality is arguably even more important than for religion. To the extent that spirituality is cultivated and lived outside of religious institutions, it is largely left up to individuals to assemble the components of their spiritual selves. As Wuthnow (1998) observed, this places the burden of spiritual formation on individuals that religious institutions have historically borne. Once institutions stop doing the “thinking” (Douglas 1986), individuals are left to improvise, choose, and tinker. Spiritual practice becomes the foundation that sustains the spiritual self.

Here and in the chapters to follow we and our contributors offer five angles of vision on the role of practice in spirituality based on insights from existing work in the field. The first is the most fundamental. Practices, while they may happen outside religious institutions, are social. Even as people cultivate an authentic-feeling and individualized spiritual self, they do so through collective processes. They meditate with others at retreat centers. They read books, listen to lectures, and participate in discussions. They internalize collectively produced narratives and aspirations that form and reshape their spiritual sensibilities (Johnston 2016). Recognizing the sociality of practice helps to move us beyond the mythos of the solitary spiritual individual. As Bender (2010) argues, even though observers in the modern West tend to think about the “autonomy of spirituality,” there are few spiritual experiences that are sociologically unmediated. Even so-called spiritual virtuosi, who are devoted to personal practices and seem to represent extreme cases of *sui generis* spiritual individualism, are shaped by their immediate communities—who provide interpretation, discipline, and purpose—and their broader societal and historical contexts (Goldman and Pfaff 2018).

Second, spiritual practices are embodied. In the case of postural yoga, this is self-evident, but embodiment is much more broadly relevant. Daily routines, dietary habits, modes of dress, gestures of kneeling and prostration, tattoos—these and many more are techniques of the body that allow spirituality, metaphorically and physically, to get under the skin. Winchester (2016) examined the embodied nature of spiritual formation by showing the linkages between fasting and spiritual desires. Bodily experiences of hunger and appetite become embodied metaphors for understanding sin and virtue. Beyond the realm of overt spiritual practices, such as fasting, grasping the significance of embodiment also helps us see how everyday practices like gardening can take on the significance of spiritual disciplines (McGuire 2008). Attention to spirituality and the body also provides valuable points of entrée

for conceptualizing the intersections of gender or race/ethnicity with sacred experience (e.g., Davidman 2015).

Third, practices include discourse. Speech is part of embodiment at the somatic level, such as the recitation of scriptures through *lectio divina*. But more broadly, spiritual meanings and identities are constructed and maintained through discourse: conversations, texts, media, and so on. Besecke (2014) showed how people cultivate a discourse of “reflexive spirituality,” one that is akin to its own language, to help them navigate the tensions they experienced between faith and rationality. Along different lines, experiences as seemingly personal and idiosyncratic as spiritual awakenings are shaped by collective discursive conventions (DeGloma 2014). In the wider culture, to describe something as spiritual is to legitimate it as such. The discursive aspect of spirituality is part of the plausibility structure that sustains and legitimates it and, perhaps now even more so, broadens its appeal.

Fourth, practice is empowering. It can be a conduit for feelings of divine power and efficacy. McGuire (2008) described how this played out in medieval folk practices, where everyday spiritual powers were understood to be widespread. Practices gave people a sense of control in otherwise hard and uncertain circumstances. Beyond the mundane world of the everyday, practices provide spiritual resources that can lead people to engage in extraordinary ways during extraordinary times. Chappell (2004) identified practices oriented by divine power as a key spiritual resource in the southern civil rights movement. Because leaders and everyday participants believed in the power of miracles, they engaged in collective action that took on the appearance of the miraculous.

Fifth, spiritual practice is often pragmatic. While spirituality, at least in the modern West, is stereotypically associated with transcending everyday concerns, spirituality as practiced is also directed toward everyday goals and struggles. Smith (2017) has recently sought to reorient the study of religion toward the study of practices premised on the existence of superhuman powers that are oriented toward realizing human goods. These human goods are fundamentally practical (as opposed to otherworldly) concerns. In contrast to religion, spirituality may or may not reference superhuman powers, but we share Smith’s view that both religion and spirituality are often oriented toward pragmatic problem-solving.

All told, practices are critical to have at the center of our understanding of spirituality. They are formative, sustaining, and expressive. Practices heighten spiritual awareness and open “doors to an experience of the sacred”

(Kucinkas et al. 2017, 434). Closer attention to spiritual practice in everyday life should (minimally) focus on its collective, embodied, discursive, empowering, and pragmatic dimensions.

Power

To recognize the social dimensions of spirituality is to create analytic space for power, influence, and contestation in ways that have yet to be adequately explored (Wood and Bunn 2009). Overt power is exercised through marshaling and utilizing resources for influence (Clark 1973). Opaque power operates in more subtle and diffused ways, through knowledge, normative influences, subjective development, and the structures in which we live (Foucault 2001). Spirituality is enmeshed in the dynamic relations between power and social practices, rather than operating outside of power dynamics, as some people assume.

Popular, romanticized interpretations of spiritual experience depict it as private and transcendent—a haven from the tainted world. Yet contemporary spirituality is deeply intertwined with powerful, resource-rich religious and secular institutions, such as healthcare, education, business, and government, as well as political dynamics locally and globally. While theorists of religion have long explored the powerful impacts of these forces on religion, recent attention to spirituality, based in psychology, medicine, and public health, has largely neglected how spiritual understandings, practices, and experiences are shaped by fields of power.

Despite a long-standing and rich literature on the organizational and institutional foundations of social life, the bulk of scholarship on spirituality has yet to acknowledge the depth and breadth of such influences. Charles Perrow (1991) declared that we live in a “society of organizations,” which are constitutive of human experience through their structures, cultural logics, repertoires, and resources. Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam (2012) conceptualize society as comprised of multi-institutional fields that exert social power across different levels, ranging from macro to micro-level influences. States, for example, provide public and legal infrastructure, tax citizens directly and indirectly, and provide resources and services in return to citizens and organizations alike, while businesses supply what we eat and wear and dictate when we work and how we travel. In addition, as Roger Friedland and Robert Alford (1991) explain, each institutional domain has its own “logics

of action” and behavioral repertoires that shape individual and organizational preferences and actions within their purview. Jürgen Habermas (1984) suggested that in modern society, certain institutional logics, such as that of capitalism, have come to colonize the lifeworld of everyday interactions across domains.

While it may be challenging to discern spirituality in secular or multi-institutional contexts, its complicated relationship with the different contexts in which it abides make it all the more worthy of exploration. As Wendy Cadge and Mary Ellen Konieczny (2014) wrote, spirituality can often be “hidden in plain sight,” and, as scholars, we need to try harder to make “invisible religion” and spirituality visible (551). To do so, it is necessary to examine how spiritual practitioners forge together religious, secular, political, and other cultural meanings, practices, and beliefs, in specific historical moments and places with their own constraints and affordances.

By incorporating how organizations and fields affect spirituality, we can better understand the nuanced ways spirituality manifests in relation to social and institutional power psychologically, in interactions with others, as well as across organizations and fields. Under what conditions does spirituality draw upon and come to reinforce powerful social forces such as individualism/collectivism, capitalism, nationalism, science, or ideologies like racism and sexism? And when and how can spirituality instead operate as an empowering or transformative force? In what follows, we start to broach these questions by focusing on five aspects of the relationship between spirituality and power: spiritualities by contexts of secularization; capitalism; organizational dynamics; hegemonic influences and contestation of boundary objects; and social movements and societal change.

Spiritualities by Contexts of Secularization

Nations’ and locales’ particular historical and cultural pasts lead to “different paths to modernity and secularization,” making religion and secularity “inevitably bundled with distinct cultural meanings” (Di et al. 2021, 16). Depending on these histories and contexts, spirituality can operate either in alignment or opposition to the powers that be. Geopolitically, whether spirituality arises in post-Reformation, post-Enlightenment Western countries, in countries colonized by European nations, or in locations elsewhere in the world shapes people’s understandings of spirituality. Is spirituality part of religious practice in states favoring a particular tradition or in pluralistic states, like the United States? Or is it part of a search apart from and

in partial opposition to religious institutions (e.g., Ammerman, this volume; Di et al. 2021; Ecklund and Di 2017)? Is spirituality instead a way to maintain relationships with ancestors and local cultures in the face of competing global colonial, economic, or political forces (e.g. Sun, this volume)? Or rather, is spirituality a utilitarian means of self-development, which can enhance one’s social prowess and productivity at work (Kucinkas 2019)? It depends on the context in which spirituality is invoked and its relationship to hegemonic cultures and institutions.

While spirituality in Western countries is often intertwined with a culture of individualism, in other places it may be subject to other modernizing influences. Di and her colleagues (Di and Ecklund 2017; Di et al. 2021), for example, show how science and institutional and national contexts affect how spiritual practitioners construct alternative spiritualities. Historical relationships between religion and politics, and countries’ subsequent secular and religious landscapes, enable, constrain, and otherwise influence what forms of spirituality emerge. Both French and Taiwanese spiritual scientists, living in societies governed by elite discourses that considered “superstition anathema to civil society” (Di et al. 2021, 17), distanced themselves from the supernatural. Instead, building upon historical cultural streams in their respective locations, Taiwanese spiritual scientists understood their folk religious practices to be spiritual, while the French espoused humanism. By contrast, in the United States and United Kingdom, which had stronger civil religions and historically powerful Christian majorities, spirituality most often was described as “an alternative value system,” unaffiliated with a specific religious tradition and at times oppositional to Christianity (Di et al. 2021, 16). Rachel Rinaldo’s chapter in this volume further demonstrates how national and international political and religious authorities and opportunity structures shape when, how, and what forms of Sufi spirituality emerged in Indonesia over the past century.

Capitalism

Capitalism and political affordances shape spirituality in both explicit and subtle ways. Whether spirituality is economically supported by being part and parcel of national churches, or whether it receives national recognition, tax exempt status, and a host of other forms of political support, shapes how spirituality evolves. If spiritual teachers need to support themselves in a capitalist market, their teachings and practices will likely differ from those who are financially supported by a state or other groups. For example, Tibetan

Buddhist teachings look quite different today, when traveling Tibetan lamas convey their teachings around the world supported by private donations and book sales, than when monks learned and taught Buddhist teachings under the Tibetan theocracy. As a burgeoning scholarship on mindfulness, yoga, and other forms of spirituality in the West show, such contemporary programs are influenced in manifold ways by neoliberal capitalism (Carrette and King 2005; Jain 2020). Along these lines, Candy Gunther Brown's chapter in our volume shows how laws and economic motives influence how yoga is defined and portrayed in court cases in the United States.

Organizational Climates and Multi-Institutional Fields

There is interplay between spirituality and the organizations and institutions in which it is embedded. Within secular organizations and fields, spirituality may bring in religiously derived cultures or manifest as people sacralize daily activities. Spiritual practitioners' incorporation of spirituality into their daily lives in secular workplaces and institutions may challenge the secular status quo and generate conversation in such locations (Ammerman 2013; Lindsay and Smith 2010) or be used to uphold and reinforce the status quo (Islam et al. 2017).

These processes through which spirituality is locally constituted in secular contexts are "both constrained and enabled by particular organizational climates," occupations, and other hegemonic influences (Di and Ecklund 2017, 2). Secular pressures can operate in many ways, at different levels or "subspaces," of an institution. As Di and Ecklund (2017) found, for example, most Taiwanese scientists largely kept religion and spirituality separate from their research in their labs, which was a core part of their scientific work. Yet some spiritual scientists were willing to raise religious and spiritual concerns more openly in a "nonscientific" tier of their work where they did secondary parts of their job, such as mentoring students. These examples suggest that extant professional, organizational, and other normative social hierarchies, which esteem certain tasks and places, shape where spirituality can be brought and how it manifests. In this volume, Cadge and colleagues' chapter on chaplaincy education and Kucinkas's chapter on the movement of spiritual practices into secular institutions further show how spirituality morphs as it moves, in part to appeal to new audiences and fit within new institutions.

Engaging in communal spiritual practices contributes to one's likelihood of breaching secular norms to talk about spirituality at work (Ammerman 2013). Di and Ecklund (2017) also found that those who regularly attended

religious services were more likely to talk about spiritual and religious life with colleagues, while those who prayed (mainly privately) were less likely to do so. Thus, it is important to track not only the organizational hierarchies and norms in which spirituality manifests, but also practitioners' religious and spiritual backgrounds, and the interplay between the two.

Hegemonic Power and Contestation of Boundary Objects

Contestation may arise over spiritual content based on the group, institutional, and national settings in which spiritual practitioners abide. Spirituality is a "porous" cultural boundary object that sends, transmits and translates for receivers across social space and time and is "open to a wide range of interpretations and debates" (Pagis et al. 2018, 596). As an "empty signifier" (Laclau 1996, 36), it draws upon, encodes, and bridges "oppositional organizational elements" (Islam et al. 2017, 1). Spirituality is also polysemic; it can have different meanings, which teachers and practitioners can strategically employ in distinct ways to different audiences (Brown, this volume; Kucinkas 2019; Lindsay and Smith 2010). Spiritual and religious adherents can also creatively "circumnavigate moral dilemmas and conflicts of allegiance rather than incite conflict borne of religious conviction" (Lindsay and Smith 2010, 742). Due to the flexible, adaptive nature of spirituality, in some organizational contexts, such as corporate business, it can ultimately reinforce neoliberalism and other dominant professional cultures (Islam et al. 2017; Purser 2018). Spirituality is also often rooted in movements, organizations, and broader systems marked by gendered, racialized, and heteronormative hierarchies (Acker 1992; Jain 2018; Kucinkas 2020; Perry 2012; Ray 2019; Wilde 2018; Yukich and Edgell 2020). Despite the best of intentions, as Sam Perry (2012) contends, such systems can be integral to the moral habitus in which practitioners are a part, which may delimit or infiltrate the forms of spirituality possible.

Spirituality, Social Movements, and Societal Change

Spirituality can ground, infuse, and fortify social change efforts as well. Nonviolent activists in the American civil rights movement, for example, such as Rev. Martin Luther King and those trained in the Nashville schools, drew upon spiritual resources from the black church, Christianity, and Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence (Isaac et al. 2012; Morris 1986). Mary Pattillo-McCoy (1998) similarly showed how black spirituality infused political organizing in Chicago. More recently, Extinction Rebellion, a spiritually

oriented British climate change protest group, made headlines in 2019 with their traffic-stopping meditation practices (Abrahams 2019).

Spirituality may also operate as an innovative cultural force. As Andrea Jain (2018) shows, in recreating “exotic” Indian devotional practices, early twentieth-century yoga challenged the American Protestant moral establishment’s “mainstream cultural templates for sexuality” with its emphasis on “family-centered, reproductive marital sexuality,” by instead promoting “starkly contrasting sacred sexual values: sexual renunciation on the one hand or sexual liberty on the other” (34). However, Jain concludes that by the century’s end, yoga instead came to typify mainstream American cultural ideals of physical and spiritual well-being, rather than provide alternatives to them. Mindfulness has followed a similar trajectory. While it was promoted as “orthogonal” to mainstream capitalism as it gained popularity, it came to align more closely with the status quo in many places (Kucinkas 2019; Islam et al. 2017).

A common assumption among spiritual practitioners is that internal spiritual transformation will lead to social transformation. Scholarship on religion and spirituality suggests otherwise. Movements such as mindfulness and evangelicalism, which center upon personal growth and relational spiritual perspectives, rather than directly addressing systems, often have limited efficacy in addressing complex social problems (Emerson and Smith 2000; Kucinkas 2019; Marti et al. 2020; Perry 2017; Smith and Emerson 1998). Ultimately spirituality often tilts toward accommodating and reinforcing hegemonic cultural systems, unless maintained in minority or countercultural communities (e.g., Shelton, this volume) or bridging practices are developed to directly connect spiritual practices with social problems through movement tactics (Isaac et al. 2012).

Previewing the Chapters to Come

The first part of the book examines spirituality in context, both in terms of how the notion of “spirituality” is conceptualized in different global contexts, and in terms of its contextualization in the fabric of lived social experiences. Nancy Ammerman’s chapter discusses situated spirituality and its diverse expressions in various contexts of lived religious practice, and suggests that lived religion is “a fused whole where spirituality is but one dimension.” Linda Woodhead’s analysis of the reconceptualization of

spirituality in contemporary Britain focuses on the re-emergence of the polytheistic gods in the process of what she terms the “dereformation” of Europe. Anna Sun’s examination of the boundary work between the concepts of “religion” and “spirituality” in Chinese society centers on the relational nature of these concepts, whose dynamics are determined by the social and historical conditions of the Chinese religious landscape. Afe Adogame’s discussion of African spirituality shows how it is “a spirituality of the marketplace that encompasses a matrix of worldviews, belief systems and ritual practice,” influencing not only African life, but also “African diasporic communities in their new sociocultural locations.” Bradley Wright’s chapter suggests that methodological choices shape our understanding of spirituality and offers innovative new approaches for empirical studies of spirituality. Alyssa Rockenbach’s analysis of the changes in the “spiritual but not religious” identification among college students demonstrates that it is closely related to the context of one’s social and cultural environment. Jason Shelton’s examination of the racial differences in the way blacks and whites view themselves as “spiritual persons” offers an important account of the racial and ethnic context of spirituality in our everyday experience.

The second part of the book situates spirituality in distinct dimensions of practice. In her study of a vipassana meditation retreat center, Michal Pagis explores the social dimension of spiritual cultivation. She documents the microdynamics of “collective solitude,” showing the ways that shared spiritual settings—meditation centers, yoga studios, pilgrimages—create private experiences of transcendence that are facilitated by group practices. Melissa Wilcox examines embodiment in her chapter on leather/BDSM spirituality. She draws out the significance of embodied spiritual practices, including sexual ones, and embodied and affective empiricism for expanding our perspective on spirituality beyond belief and identity. In her chapter on rural Malawi, where spirituality can be easily subsumed by religion, Ann Swidler teases out the differences between the two. She argues that spirituality as lived is sought out when the demands of ordinary life become difficult to bear, links people to transcendent sources of power and meaning, and replenishes inner strength and vitality. Robert Brenneman looks at the discourse of spirituality in Central America, particularly how the terminology of spirituality is used in the context of efforts to reduce youth violence. He identifies four central meanings that, while distinct, all provide resources for describing and addressing complex social problems.

The third part of the book shows some of the manifold ways in which spirituality is influenced by the social hierarchies and fields in which it is embedded. Stef Aupers's chapter brings attention to how the overwhelming influence and power of institutions in shaping contemporary life can leave individuals feeling powerless and suspicious of the greater forces shaping their lives. As a result, spiritual seeking and conspiracy theories become appealing sources of sense-making and meaning. Candy Gunther Brown shows how yoga is socially constructed in different and sometimes contradictory ways in American courts. Yoga advocates define their practices as religious or secular, with different spiritual valences, based on what serves their interests in each particular case. Wendy Cadge and her colleagues describe how spiritual chaplaincy programs are constructed in an effort to bridge religious training with secular workplaces in pluralistic settings. Based on their respective religious traditions, these programs create distinctive curricula to help their students bridge differences and relate to people from other backgrounds. Moving across the world, Rachel Rinaldo's chapter discusses Sufism's contested status in Muslim countries generally, and shows in Indonesia specifically how its relation to powerholders has changed throughout the country's history. Spirituality and Sufism have experienced revival and increased appeal in recent years, in part due to their alignment with conventional Islamic practice. Jaime Kucinkas's chapter conceptualizes spirituality as a porous boundary object—or empty signifier—which changes as it moves from transmitters to receivers, in part based on their contexts. As an intermediary object, spirituality often maintains hegemonic power when situated in secular institutions. In the volume's concluding chapter, Brian Steensland develops a framework based on our volume's themes and our relational perspective on spirituality for addressing three persistent questions: What is spirituality? How does spirituality influence? And where is spirituality headed?

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