Spiritual Identity: Contextual Perspectives

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Abstract

Examining how spirit develops as part of identity development can deepen our understanding of how meaning, purpose, connectedness, and authentic living contribute to human thriving – and what happens when they go awry. However, research in this field has been limited by a conflation of "religion" and "spirituality" both theoretically and empirically, limited data on spirituality outside of Western contexts or Judeo-Christian religious traditions, and an emphasis on individual development with little regard to interaction with developmental systems, ecologies, or contexts. By examining the intersection of spiritual development, identity development, and ecological approaches to human development, this chapter proposes integrating more robust understandings of spiritual development into current approaches to adolescent identity formation while also deepening theoretical approaches to spiritual development by grounding them in ecological contexts, including family; peers and mentors; school; youth organizations; religious communities; and the natural world. It draws on preliminary findings from a study of 7,200 youth aged 12–25 in eight countries that suggest that this integration may be fruitful for future research.

Some of the most exquisite and important phenomena of human life are also among the most difficult to investigate in the behavioral sciences. Among these are the following: (a) how persons explore the mysteries of the self and of the universe; (b) the capacity to apprehend beauty and benevolence; (c) the experiences of awe and wonder; (d) the inclination to seek community and connectedness; and (e) the capacity for persons to find joy, purpose, and hope in life. These phenomena themselves, and the processes that energize and guide them, are fundamental to what it means to be human.

Religion, in its many historical and contemporary manifestations, has informed these phenomena, but it is not synonymous with them (MacDonald, Chapter 21, this volume). These are manifestations of spirit (from the Latin *spiritus*, meaning breath). Spirit – or how one finds and

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expresses one's breath or life energy – is central to understanding humanness (Johnson, 2008). By examining how spirit develops and flourishes (or goes awry), we have the potential to tap the deep resources of meaning, purpose, connectedness, and authentic living that are embedded in what we call spiritual development.

There appears to be a growing international interest in the science of spiritual development among children and adolescents, bolstered in part by the emerging research suggesting that spirituality and spiritual development play important roles in human development and thriving. However, most current research on adolescent spiritual development has been constrained by critical limitations (see Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener, & Benson, 2006). These include the following: (a) conflating "religion" and "spirituality"; (b) limited data regarding spirituality among young people outside of Western contexts or Judeo-Christian religious traditions; (c) a preponderance of research that focuses on individual development with little regard to interaction with developmental systems or ecologies; and (d) conducting research with limited measures and without robust undergirding theoretical frameworks or foundations (Benson, 2006; Rew & Wong, 2006; MacDonald, Chapter 21, this volume).

This chapter seeks to address these limitations by examining the intersection of three concepts: spiritual development, identity development, and ecological approaches to human development. In doing so, we seek to make a theoretical case for both integrating more robust understandings of spiritual development into current approaches to adolescent identity formation and deepening theoretical approaches to spiritual development by grounding them in ecological approaches. Throughout the chapter, we offer findings with multi-country samples of adolescents that suggest that this integration may be fruitful for future research.

Definitional Issues in Spiritual Development

A major challenge is that, despite a number of helpful explorations (e.g., Hill & Pargament,

2003; Hill et al., 2000; MacDonald, 2000; Slater, Hall, & Edwards, 2001; Zinnbauer et al., 1997), there is little consensus on the boundaries or dimensions of the domain of spiritual development (or spirituality and other related terms). In the social sciences, spirituality was historically viewed as a dimension of religious experience (James, 1902). However, as Wulff (1997) suggests, the meaning of religion has evolved to focus more on the institutional, beliefs, and rituals and practices, with spirituality being increasingly seen as referring to experiential or subjective phenomena (see MacDonald, Chapter 21, this volume for a thorough exploration of the definitional issues).

Rather than focusing on beliefs, experiences, and practices (the typical approach to defining "spirituality"), we seek to identify and measure core processes in human development that can best be described as spiritual *development*. Drawing on Coles (1990) and Rizzuto (1979), and other scholars, this approach hypothesizes that spiritual development is a human wellspring out of which emerges the pursuit of meaning, connectedness to others and to the sacred, purpose in life, and contributions to society. Each and all of these functions can be informed and shaped by religious – and other – systems of ideas, practices, and cultural narratives. In addition, these core processes are integrally linked with identity development.

Several operating hypotheses have guided our work to date, including the following: (a) spiritual development is an intrinsic part of being human. It includes processes that are manifested in many diverse ways among individuals, cultures, traditions, and historical periods. (b) Spiritual development involves both an inward journey (inner experiences and/or connections to the infinite or unseen) and an outward journey (being expressed in daily activities, relationships, and actions). In this sense, it involves complex interactions between contextual variables and individual developmental processes. (c) Spiritual development is a dynamic, nonlinear process that varies across individual and cultural differences. (d) Although spiritual development is a unique stream of human development, it cannot be separated from other aspects

of development, such as physical, emotional, and cognitive development. And (e) spiritual development can be conceptually distinguished from religious development or formation, though the two are integrally linked in the lived experiences of many (though not all) people, traditions, and cultures (see MacDonald, Chapter 21, this volume).

Several of these assumptions or hypotheses merit further explication. First, it is important to unpack the relationship between spiritual development and religion. We propose that spiritual development can occur with or without explicit religious beliefs, practices, or community (also see Saucier & Skrzypińska, 2006). However, many people utilize or access religion as a guiding narrative and normative community for their spiritual development. When this occurs, one's spiritual development can be closely aligned with one's religious beliefs, identity, and worldview. However, one can develop spiritually without religious institutions, beliefs, or practices. Furthermore, the broader ecology of community, relationships, and social norms also shapes spiritual development. Thus, these two phenomena are related and overlapping, but they may also be different.

Another important framing of our approach to spiritual development has been to cast it as a component of optimal development, which is also called thriving (Benson & Scales, 2009) or flourishing (Keyes & Haidt, 2003). Often associated with positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Snyder & Lopez, 2005), this strength-based approach counterbalances an overemphasis in the social sciences on pathologies and deficits with a focus on identifying and nourishing human capacities, such as life satisfaction, hope, generosity, connectedness, self-regulation, and prosocial orientation. Within the field of identity theory and development, this approach particularly resonates with Waterman's (1993; Chapter 16, this volume) emphasis on personal expressiveness (*eudaimonia*).

This is not to say, however, that all spiritual commitments, beliefs, practices, and experiences are positive and life giving. As suggested by the inclusion of religious and spiritual problem in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV-TR) (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), certain forms of spiritual beliefs, practices, and experiences can distort reality or cause harm to self or others. These harmful effects can include narcissism, conflict-ridden or authoritarian spiritual practices, denial of reality, spiritual delusions, or terrorism (Hill et al., 2000; Wagener & Malony, 2006). Others have focused on meditative, mystical, paranormal experiences (such as precognition or communicating with the spirit world), psychedelic-induced trances (including using psychoactive drugs such as opiates or LSD), or other unusual consciousness events that can cause physical and psychological harm [which Grof & Grof (1989) describe as "spiritual emergences or emergency"].

Though we emphasize the positive potential of spiritual development, the social sciences through most of the twentieth century either ignored this domain of life or attended only to eclectic issues, including pathological expressions (MacDonald, 2000). So rather than minimizing the potential for pathology, we seek to articulate underlying developmental processes of *normal* spiritual development, which may be shaped, either positively or negatively, through a wide range of influences, beliefs, and practices.

Toward a New Framework of Adolescent Spiritual Development

In many respects, the scientific study of spiritual development is not new. Since the late 1800s, scholars such as William James, G. Stanley Hall, J. H. Leuba, Edwin Starbuck, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim have examined the role of religion (and, more recently, spirituality) in human development and society. However, for a variety of reasons, it was marginalized in social sciences through much of the twentieth century (see Davie, 2003; Paloutzian, 1996).

An important movement in reclaiming spirituality in the social sciences was transpersonal psychology, which emerged in the 1960s. This network emphasized on integrating Eastern and Western thought and studying mystical

and metaphysical experiences (e.g., Hartelius, Caplan, & Rardin, 2007). Though he no longer associates with transpersonal psychology, Wilber's (e.g., 2000) integrated theory of development has been particularly influential, though it is rarely cited in mainstream developmental and psychological studies.

In addition, a number of recent contributions in developmental sciences have advanced the literature on child and adolescent spiritual development. For example, for the first time since it began publication in 1946, the *Handbook of Child Psychology* includes a chapter on spiritual development in its sixth edition (Oser, Scarlett, & Bucher, 2006). That same year, Sage released the first *Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence* (Roehlkepartain et al., 2006) and the *Encyclopedia of Religious and Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence* (Dowling & Scarlett, 2006).

In 2006, Search Institute launched the Center for Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence to develop grounded theory and systematic research aimed at explicating an understanding of spiritual development as an integral component of human development, particularly during childhood and adolescence. To begin these theory-building efforts, we conducted extensive focus groups with youth, parents, and youth workers in 13 countries (Kimball, Mannes, & Hackel, 2009) and engaged an international network of 119 scientific, theological/philosophical, and practice advisors in a Web-based consensus-building process around the processes of spiritual development (Roehlkepartain, 2009). Using a Web-based adaptation of the Delphi Technique (Dalkey, 1969), advisors ranked potential dimensions of spiritual development to identify those that they believed were most important. This process yielded the broad, if preliminary, outlines of a theoretical framework shown in Table 22.1.

Though this process did not result in a consensus definition of spiritual development, one definitional approach that generated significant support was that *spiritual development is a constant, ongoing, and dynamic interplay between one's inward journey and one's outward journey*. In other words, spiritual development presses us to look outward to connect or embed our lives with all of life, while also compelling us to look inward to accept or discover our potential to grow, learn, contribute, and matter (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, Chapter 17, this volume; Waterman, Chapter 16, this volume). This approach, then, may suggest that "spirit" is an intrinsic capacity that propels young people to link their discovery of self and the world in pursuit of a flourishing life.

This framework shares many features of other multi-dimensional models of spirituality, including MacDonald's (Chapter 21, this volume) work. The unique contribution of the proposed theoretical model lies in (a) its focus on adolescence; (a) its grounding in qualitative data from youth in multiple contexts and cultures; (c) the engagement of experts from multiple disciplines, contexts, and traditions in developing this shared conceptual approach; and (d) a focus on core developmental processes, rather than spiritual beliefs, practices, or experiences (all of which interactively influence and give expression to these core processes in a bidirectional interplay). In other words, the core developmental processes dynamically interact with the beliefs, practices, relationships, and contexts in which the young person is embedded, with each influencing the other (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Scales, in press; Benson & Scales, 2009; Lerner, Roeser, & Phelps, 2008).

These emphases make the approach we outline below somewhat distinct. As the field matures and additional testing of various models and approaches is completed in diverse cultures and contexts with diverse populations, we would anticipate that the most robust elements of various models will emerge. In the meantime, we propose the need for ongoing exploration by different scholars, with each seeking to be clear about the underlying assumptions and theories behind a particular approach. Such a discovery process offers great potential to enrich the field's overall understanding of this dimension of human development.

Table 22.1   Theoretical framework of dynamics of spiritual development

Awareness or awakening – Developing an awareness of one's inherent strength as well as developing an awareness of the beauty and majesty of the universe. This involves both (a) awareness of one's inherent strengths and capacities (self-awareness) and (b) awareness of the world, including awareness of the beauty and majesty of the universe, often experienced through the awe and wonder that draws one to see self in as part of something larger (Shiota, Keltner, & Mossman, 2007). Dimensions include the following:

- Accepting, seeking, creating, or experiencing a reason for being or a sense of meaning and purpose
- Being present to oneself, others, the world, and/or one's sense of transcendent reality
- Forming a worldview regarding major life questions, such as the purpose of existence, life and death, and the existence or the non-existence of the divine or God
- Living in awareness of something beyond the immediacy of everyday life
- Experiencing enlightenment, awakening, liberation, salvation, or other experiences of transcendence or deepening
- Accepting or discovering one's potential to grow, contribute, and matter

Interconnecting and belonging – Developing the perspective that life is interconnected and interdependent, and seeking, accepting, or experiencing significance in relationships to and interdependence with others, the world, or one's sense of the transcendent (often including an understanding of God or a higher power). This may include the following:

- Experiencing a sense of empathy, responsibility, and/or love for others, for humanity, and for the world
- Finding significance in relationships to others, the world, or one's sense of the transcendent
- Finding, accepting, or creating deeper significance and meaning in everyday experiences and relationships
- Linking oneself to narratives, communities, mentors, beliefs, traditions, and/or practices that remain significant over time

Living a life of strength – Developing a life orientation grounded in hope, purpose, and gratitude so that one authentically expresses one's identity, passions, values, and creativity through relationships, activities, and/or practices. This may include the following:

- Engaging in relationships, activities, and/or practices that shape bonds with oneself, family, community, humanity, the world, and/or that which one believes to be transcendent
- Living out one's beliefs, values, and commitments in daily life
- Experiencing or cultivating hope, meaning, or resilience in the midst of hardship, conflict, confusion, or suffering
- Living out an orientation to life in response to that which one perceives to be worthy of dedication and/or veneration
- Attending to spiritual questions, challenges, and struggles
- Expressing one's essence, passions, value, and creativity in the world as a way of showing veneration or expressing one's sense of transcendence

Findings from Recent Global Research

The framework of core spiritual developmental processes outlined in Table 22.1 (above) provided the conceptual foundation for a survey instrument that we, our colleagues, and our research partners administered to more than 7,200 youth (ages 12–25) in eight countries in 2008 (Australia, Canada, Cameroon, India, Thailand, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States). Though this field test involved convenience samples in only a few nations (and thus might not be generalizable beyond those samples), it involves a culturally and religiously diverse sample of young people, allowing for preliminary insights into patterns of spiritual development in their lives (Roehlkepartain, Benson, Scales, Kimball, & King, 2008).

We have begun using this data set to test the theory of core spiritual developmental processes posited through our consensus-building process and grounded in findings from focus groups with youth (Kimball et al., 2009). We explore several

hypotheses: (a) there are core developmental processes or tasks that are salient across traditions and cultures (including the eight nations and five self-reported religious affiliations in our sample: Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, and agnostic/atheist/none); (b) young people's experiences of these processes correlate with positive developmental outcomes; (c) these processes explain variance in youth outcomes over and above young people's self-reported religiousness; and (d) these processes tend to become more integrated as young people age.

We began our analyses using items associated with the major constructs identified through the consensus-building process with advisors described above and shown in Table 22.1. We then conceptually and theoretically divided the concept of "awareness" into two constructs (self and world). This yielded four measures that approximate the terrain of spiritual development that grew out of the consensus-building process with international advisors (shown in Table 22.1): awareness or awakening: self; awareness or awakening: world; interconnecting and belonging; and living a life of strength. Several of our initial hypotheses have been supported by preliminary analyses. However, ongoing analyses are needed to either confirm or challenge the first hypothesis (regarding the salience of these spiritual developmental processes across all eight countries as well as the diverse religious traditions in the sample).

Evidence supporting the second hypothesis (b) is clearer (and consistent with previous research): young people reporting higher levels of various components of spiritual development consistently report lower levels of high-risk behaviors and higher levels of academic success, physical and psychosocial health, and civic engagement. Indeed, the results of 85% of analyses testing the effect of spiritual developmental processes on developmental outcomes were in the hypothesized direction. These patterns generalized across the samples in the eight countries and across religious affiliations. Furthermore, youth who most successfully integrated the four dimensions of spirituality proposed here (as evidenced by scoring high on all four) exhibit relative strength on this same range of outcomes.

Third, as hypothesized (c), the integration of these four processes described above can occur without active engagement with religious and spiritual traditions. After controlling for gender, age, and religious engagement, the four dimensions of spiritual development significantly explain variance on each of the indicators of thriving, health, and risk behaviors included in the study. This suggests that these four processes of spiritual development – both individually and collectively – have explanatory value over and above religious engagement and belief. Indeed, about 20% of the aggregated sample reported high levels of the four dimensions of spiritual development but were not affiliated with organized religion.

Fourth (hypothesis d), healthy development, we would argue, moves in the direction of integration (see Soenens & Vansteenkiste, Chapter 17, this volume), with the four core processes of spiritual development becoming increasingly interrelated. One proximal test of this is to examine whether the percentage of youth who demonstrate this integration (evidenced by higher scores on all four dimensions) increases with age. This hypothesis is supported when comparing youth ages 12–14, 15–17, 18–21, and 22–25 who score high on all four of the processes (see Table 22.2).

Although this was a cross-sectional study, and so *developmental* processes can only be inferred, integration becomes stronger with each advance in age, suggesting promising grounds for further investigation with longitudinal samples. In addition, we recognize that this is only one way to show "integration," and one theoretically could have high scores without these dimensions/processes being integrated or interacting with each other. It is also true that "integration" might not even require a "high" score on each process, because developmental systems theory would suggest that the optimal level of each of these processes would vary with the individual and her or his relation to context. Thus, high levels of interconnectedness and living a life of strength might be necessary for optimal spiritual development in one specific person–context system, but a high level of cognitive awareness of self might not be.

Table 22.2 Youth scoring high on four spiritual developmental processes, by age

Age of respondent	High score on all four processes (%)
12–14	16
15–17	18
18–21	21
22–25	27

In another case, connectedness and a life of strength might be impossible without a high level of self and world awareness. In both cases, though, person–context systems are "integrated" in a way that effectively promotes growth. So, further analyses are needed to shed light on the nature of the relations among these processes, both variable-centered analyses that illuminate group averages and person-centered analyses that uncover the diverse meanings of the descriptor, "integrated."

The core spiritual developmental processes on which the above analyses are focused provide a starting point for theoretically exploring the person–context interactions underlying spiritual development. How are these processes shaped by family, peer groups, mentors, religious communities, and their narratives; the mass media; music; art; and the social norms that permeate and potentially connect multiple socializing systems? What happens when these processes are shaped primarily by harmful or misanthropic forces? Or how is healthy development augmented when young people's own sense of agency and vocation is positively nurtured and reinforced by life-affirming people and places? With these kinds of questions in mind, we now turn to a theoretical exploration of some of the contexts in young people's "spiritual ecologies." These potentially link with the growing theoretical and empirical literature that embeds identity development within a dynamic ecological context.

Person–Context Dynamics in Spiritual Development

Three persistent critiques of current theory and research on spiritual development (which echo discussions related to identity development) are (a) that they too often reflect an individualistic, Western worldview that focuses narrowly on the self and self-fulfillment; (b) that they presume that a spiritual tradition or identity is "inherited," rather than being actively shaped by the person as agent of her or his own development; and (c) that they describe linear, predictable pathways that do not account for the dynamic processes of spiritual formation or the interplay of persons and their contexts. The theoretical framework described above begins to address this question. In addition, a number of identity development theories further illuminate the dynamic interplay between individuals and their environments.

Spiritual Development as Relational, Socially Embedded Processes

The individualistic focus of many conceptualizations of spirituality reflects what Markus and Kitayama (1991) describe as the "self-ways" dominant in English-speaking, Western societies. This bias "has obscured attention to the powerful ways in which religion and spirituality guide and influence relational life" (Mattis & Jagers, 2001, p. 520; also see Mattis, Ahluwalia, Cowie, & Kirkland-Harris, 2006; Templeton & Eccles, 2006).

In contrast, most contemporary theorists agree that identity formation occurs through countless interactions between persons and their physical and social environments (e.g., Bosma & Kunnen, 2001). This understanding draws on ecological–developmental approaches, such as ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), developmental systems theory (Ford & Lerner, 1992; Lerner, Lerner, De Stefanis, & Apfel, 2001), co-constructionist perspectives on identity development (Berman, Schwartz, Kurtines, & Berman, 2001), and identity capital (Côté, 1996), or other current theoretical approaches. Similarly,

a growing number of approaches to spirituality and spiritual development (e.g., Hay & Nye, 1998; Ho, 1995; Nicolas & DeSilva, 2008) are consistent with these perspectives.

Baltes and Baltes (1990) offer a key theoretical approach to understanding the interaction between the person and the world, one that is relevant to spiritual development. Called "selective optimization with compensation," this theory holds that persons select, from among a range of potential resources, a subset that can help them to reach their own personal goals. This process of selection involves both one's preferences *and* the availability of options within one's social ecology. Compensation emphasizes the ways in which one adapts to maintain functioning in the face of losses or barriers that limit options. Similarly, self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, Chapter 17, this volume) describes how social conditions impact whether people become actively engaged and proactive or passive and alienated.

Although these theories were not focused explicitly on spiritual development, the principles apply, particularly when efforts are made to optimize broader environments in which spiritual development can flourish. For example, persons, communities, and contexts that seek to nurture spiritual development may or may not be "in sync" developmentally with adolescents. Furthermore, both adolescents and the contexts in which they function must adapt to changing sociocultural dynamics, including the increased diversity of religious and spiritual beliefs, practices, and narratives.

Young People as Active Agents in Their Own Spiritual Development

To say that spiritual development is embedded in relationships and through the dynamic interplay of person and context in no way minimizes the active role that young people play as agents of their own development. Indeed, personal agency is foundational to identity (and spiritual) formation (Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005).

How personal agency is manifested informs how we understand the processes of spiritual development.

Numerous identity theorists have conceptualized identity development as involving both active and passive processes (Blos, 1979; Erikson, 1968). For example, Marcia (1966, 1980) argued that adolescents form identity passively by accepting the roles and self-images provided by others (foreclosure). Blos (1979) described passive identity formation as resisting making choices about identity (diffusion). Active identity develops based on a searching process and is associated with self-assurance, self-certainty, and a sense of mastery (Adams, Gullotta, & Montemayor, 1992). Luyckx, Goossens, and Soenens (2006) have advanced our understanding of identity development by identifying four structural dimensions of identity formation: commitment making, identification with commitment, exploration in depth, and exploration in breadth that integrate identity formation and identity evaluation and embed them in a developmental context (see Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, Beyers, & Missotten, Chapter 4, this volume).

In addition, Waterman's (1993, Chapter 16, this volume) focus on personal expressiveness (*eudaimonia*) offers important possibilities for enriching how theories of spiritual development approach active personal agency. Waterman summarizes the goals of identity formation as discovery of personal potential, choosing purposes in living, and finding opportunities to live out that purpose. This structure resonates with our theoretical framework that links self-awareness and other awareness with living a life of strength. Similarly, Benson and Scales (2009) have described the theory and measurement of *thriving* in adolescence as involving the identification and nurturing of one's deep personal interests or "sparks" (akin to our awareness process, or Waterman's discovery of personal potential), the support received from others to pursue them (our interdependence/aconnection process), and the contribution one makes to others and to society through the pursuit of one's sparks (part of the process of living a life of strength and

purpose). One of the strongest thriving markers for both middle- and high-school students was their affirmation of a transcendent force and the importance of their spirituality in affecting daily actions. Thus, this conceptualization of thriving explicitly connects aspects of identity development with aspects of spiritual development.

Several researchers have focused on religious identity processes (not specifically spiritual development), finding that individuals tend to proceed toward achievement during emerging adulthood (Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, & Vollebergh, 1999), particularly if they have an intrinsic religious orientation (DeHaan & Schulenberg, 1997). Sanders (1998) found that college students with a diffused religious identity (low commitment and low exploration) reported lower levels of faith maturity than did those with a religious identity characterized by moratorium, foreclosure, or achievement. Those reporting achievement (high commitment and high exploration) were most likely to be engaged in service to humanity.

We would anticipate that similar patterns would be evident when examining dynamics of spiritual development as distinct from religious identity. In focus groups with 171 adolescents (ages 12–19) in 13 countries, participants often reported that they are rarely encouraged to engage in active spiritual exploration; rather, they are typically expected to adopt the religious beliefs, practices, and worldviews of their families and traditions (Kimball et al., 2009), with "commitment" to a particular worldview or religious tradition and "discovery" of one's own path and worldview being perceived as competing, rather than complementary, goals.

Spiritual Development as Dynamic, Nonlinear Processes

Finally, these multiple, interacting influences and variables challenge understandings of spiritual development that build on linear or stage theories. Meeus et al. (1999) note that unidirectional interpretations of identity development that move from lower to higher statuses are

inadequate. A similar critique has challenged approaches to spiritual development that focus on stages of development (Fowler, 1981) or progressive/maturational models of spiritual development (Scarlett, 2006). Theory and research on spiritual development is less advanced, however, in articulating the possible pathways and patterns of development through adolescence. We anticipate that trajectories could parallel the stable, regressive, progressive, and fluctuating patterns of identity formation that van Hoof (1999) identified and that Meeus and colleagues (2010) demonstrated in a five-wave longitudinal study of ages 12–20.

Exploring the Ecologies of Spiritual Development

Young people interact with multiple ecological resources, influences, and contexts as they shape their own personal and collective (or social or group) spiritual identities. Individuals actively or passively exercise their personal agency in shaping, and being shaped by, the people and places around them, with those closest to them likely having the greatest influence. In this section, we introduce a range of illustrative contexts, resources, and influences that young people selectively optimize for their own development, beginning with interpersonal contexts (e.g., families, peers) and social–structural contexts (e.g., institutions, culture, and place).

Family

Family (including parents, siblings, grandparents, and other extended family) is a primary context for spiritual development (Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks, 2006; Dollahite, Marks, & Goodman, 2004; Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001). In Search Institute's exploratory study of spiritual development in eight countries (described above), young people surveyed were most likely to point toward family when asked to identify who helps them most in their spiritual life. In total, when forced to select the single

most significant influence, 44% of the youth surveyed selected this option, compared to just 14% of youth who indicated that their religious institution (church, synagogue, mosque, temple, or other religious or spiritual place) helped them the most (Roehlkepartain et al., 2008).

Through parental modeling, rituals, narratives, conversations, and other family practices and dynamics, the family plays a vital role not only in the direction, formative interactions, rituals, and practices that shape spiritual development and identity but also in socializing adolescents to seek out (or not to seek out) other resources, relationships, and opportunities that will further affect the adolescent's development. These may include the kinds of activities in which he or she participates and the people with whom the young person spends time.

The centrality of the family is particularly salient in a relational, ecological approach to spiritual development. Indeed, Black (2004) noted that, in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions (as well as others), "self" is defined as a part of a family, not primarily as an individual person who is influenced by family. Thus, individual autonomy, valued more in the West, carries less weight than does an internalized sense of interconnectedness and following family traditions, teachings, and guidelines (also see Smith, Chapter 11, this volume, on cross-cultural perspectives).

Boyatzis et al. (2006) adopt a sociocultural approach to families and spiritual development, moving beyond "transmission" models that focus only on parental influence on their children's spiritual (and religious) development. Shifting to bidirectional, transactional models changes one's assumptions about power dynamics in families as well as the place of the child within the family. For example, Boyatzis and Janicki (2003) found that children initiated half of all family conversations related to religion. This shift also reflects an important emphasis on the adolescent's agency in actively shaping spiritual identity, both of the self and the family.

Another vital dynamic in the family's role in spiritual development is generativity (Boyatzis et al., 2006; Scabini & Manzi, Chapter 23, this volume). "Generative spirituality is a

transcendent connection with the next generation that flows from and encourages convictions of abiding care for that generation" (Boyatzis et al., 2006, p. 304). These scholars point to three aspects of generative spirituality for families: a shared spiritual paradigm, shared spiritual practices, and a shared spiritual community. As a result, although generativity does not necessarily involve spirituality, it can nonetheless transmit spiritual attitudes and orientations.

Recent research has also begun to emphasize the role of the extended family in spiritual and religious development. For example, a three-generational longitudinal study in the United States found that grandparents, independent of the influence of parents, influence their grandchildren's religious beliefs and practices into young adulthood, suggesting that grandparents serve as independent and joint agents of *religious* socialization (Bengtson, Copen, Putney, & Silverstein, 2009). Whether and how extended family shapes *spiritual* development remains untested, but theoretically important.

Peers and Mentors

Extending beyond the family, young people are embedded in a broader web of relationships and interactions that also are integral to spiritual development. Though there is a long history of (and strong theoretical rationale for) recognizing the role of non-family adults and peers in shaping spiritual development, research examining these relationships has been scant. Schwartz, Bukowski, and Aoki (2006) examined the multiple ways in which peers, mentors, and spiritual leaders can complement (or compensate for) family interactions in shaping spiritual development and suggested that these relationships may be not only transactional but also transformational, with friendship enriching spiritual development and spirituality strengthening friendships. For example, having friends and mentors who both model and verbally share their spirituality has been found to strengthen young people's own spiritual commitments (Schwartz et al., 2006). From the other direction, many of the expressions of

a spiritual life and commitment (e.g., joy, compassion, empathy, care, justice) can enrich and deepen friendships, even when the content of those friendships is not explicitly spiritual.

Community-Based Socializing Institutions

Beyond the interpersonal relationships in families and with mentors and peers, a variety of socializing institutions are also important contexts that interact with young people's spiritual lives. Each of these, alone or in combination, potentially informs spiritual developmental processes through norms and rituals, the relationships that form between the young person and the people in these social institutions, the narratives and belief systems that are present, the physical space and aesthetics, and other factors. We introduce several of these contexts as illustrative, recognizing that there are others and that the most salient institutions vary by culture, tradition, context, and young person.

Schools. The role of schools in spiritual development is a matter of considerable debate and varies considerably across different societies and nations. For example, Letendre and Akiba (2001) found that Japanese teachers were much more likely than US teachers to say that students' spiritual development impacted their academic abilities. In fact, US teachers rated it as having the least impact, whereas Japanese teachers rated it as having a relatively strong impact. The authors attributed this difference to a cultural norm in Japan where spirituality permeates the culture as a whole, whereas in the United States, mandates regarding separation of church and state are perceived as precluding addressing spiritual issues in schools.

Much of the research and practice related to schools and spiritual development has occurred in Europe, particularly the United Kingdom, where education in spirituality has become part of law (Minney, 1991). Within this environment, Meehan (2002) reviewed a variety of educational practices that likely create conducive environments for spiritual development (as a core part of

human development) without promoting a sectarian religious agenda. These include an emphasis on quality relationships, encouraging youth to ask and pursue questions, promoting imagination and creativity, and offering silence and reflection. He also highlights a number of places where spiritual development can be explicitly integrated into the school curriculum, including arts, mathematics, language arts, and science. If we understand spiritual development as involving young people's sense of themselves and their place in the world, their sense of meaning, purpose, and contribution, their curiosity and quest for understanding the world around them, their sense of connectedness to others and to the universe, then it becomes more self-evident how schools affect, either positively or negatively, the spiritual journey.

Youth development organizations. In many contexts, young people have opportunities to participate in sports, arts, outdoor education, camping, leadership development, service clubs, and other programs and organizations focused on providing positive opportunities and relationships for youth outside of school. Many of these organizations recognize the importance of holistic development, and they may even have mandates to nurture young people to grow in body, mind, and spirit. But with few exceptions, they struggle with how to address the spiritual dimension of development, particularly if they seek to engage young people from a wide variety of religious and cultural traditions (Garza, Artman, Roehlkepartain, Garst, & Bialeschki, 2007). Among the challenges is the lack of clear guidelines, understanding of lines of authority, or consensus on appropriate practices to guide whether and how to acknowledge or attend to young people's spiritual development (Green, 2008; Pittman, Garza, Yohalem, & Artman, 2008).

In addition, Green (2008) argues that the emphasis on measurement and behavioral outcomes for youth programs undermines their strength in nurturing development, character, and values. She writes, "Classic youth work is voluntary and predicated on the principle that the young person is in control and has the resources or can get the resources he or she needs, and

the role of the youth worker is to facilitate this process" (p. 64).

Engaging in young people's spiritual development has the potential to reclaim a central role in youth development programs and practices in attending to deeper issues of character and identity. This engagement could take many forms, depending on the nature and purpose of the program. At a basic level, it might involve equipping youth workers to be open to and supportive of young people's spiritual questions and journey without imposing their own beliefs on the young people. It could also involve creating time, places, and opportunities in which young people can reflect on and nurture the core spiritual developmental processes of awareness, interdependence/connecting, and living a life of strength and purpose. This may include, for example, opportunities to engage in social action and reflecting on these experiences in light of their spiritual paths. Most important, however, may be to create contexts in which youth find their own voice and are active agents in shaping their experiences in partnership with the adult allies.

Religious communities. In some senses, religious congregations (churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, ashrams, and others) are the institutions in many societies with a specific and unique commitment to nurturing the spiritual life, albeit within a particular narrative, ideology, and community of practice. Thus, they represent a crucible for exploring the dynamic interplay of numerous processes in spiritual development (Roehlkepartain & Patel, 2006).

A number of studies have documented the contributions of religious institutions to identity formation, religious development, spiritual development, and other life outcomes. King and Furrow (2004) explored religious communities as sources of social capital, which involves interpersonal, associational, and cultural social ties and resources that are embedded in particular contexts. King and Furrow found that much of the relationship between religious commitment and moral outcomes is mediated through the amount of social capital present in religious institutions (also see King, 2003; Smith & Denton, 2006; Wagener, Furrow, & King, 2003). A national

study of US adults identified part of the mechanism for this role of social capital. Adults who more frequently attended religious services were much more likely than those who attended infrequently or never to rate a variety of ways of engaging with young people (e.g., having meaningful conversations with them, talking about personal values and religious beliefs, offering guidance on decision making) as important, and also to say that the adults they knew engaged with youth in these ways. That is, religiously involved adults felt more personal and social motivation to engage with other people's children in a number of ways that help shape the youths' identities (Scales et al., 2003). Thus, young people who participate in religious communities have access to the structural, relational, and cognitive dimensions of social capital that is embedded in religious institutions, which, in turn, contributes to their moral development.

Similarly, other researchers in the United States have found that involvement in religious institutions uniquely contributes to identity development when compared to involvement in other youth activities such as sports, arts, or service to others. For example, 66% of youth who described their experiences in faith-based activities endorsed the item "This activity got me thinking about who I am," compared with 33% of students who described their experiences in the other organized activities (Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006) (The sample was divided based on self-reported levels of engagement, and respondents focused their responses on particular activities, even if they are involved in several).

These studies each point to the potential of religious communities to contribute to the development of spiritual identity, potentially offering their members a sense of connectedness to each other and something beyond themselves, a shared narrative and worldview, and a role model and expectations for how one lives one's life. The question remains, of course, about the extent to which religious communities actually fulfill this potential for young people, particularly in light of declining youth participation in religious contexts in many parts of the world. In addition, much less is known about how specific beliefs

and practices within a particular religious context (such as extreme authoritarianism) may undermine or misdirect healthy spiritual development.

Physical Place and the Natural World

Though it is often overlooked as a resource and shaping context, physical place appears to be particularly salient in young people's spiritual development. Search Institute's international survey found being outside and in nature to be a primary place where many young people say they nurture their spiritual lives (Roehlkepartain et al., 2008) – a much more common response than being in a religious community. Other research has shown that youth consider camping to be a spiritual experience, whether or not the camp is religiously affiliated (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2008). These findings resonate with Sheldrake's (2001) case for "place" as a factor in identity development. He writes, "The concept of 'place' refers not simply to geographical location but also to a dialectical relationship between environment and human narrative. 'Place' is any space that has the capacity to be remembered and to evoke what is most precious" (p. 43).

Of course, the notion of a sacred connection to earth, water, and animal life has a rich history in many indigenous cultures (Abrams, 1997), and specific places take on spiritual significance in every community, whether it is called "spiritual" or not. Weil (1977), a philosopher, wrote, "To be rooted [firmly established and having a sense of belonging] is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul" (p. 41). Giving young people access to such places (particularly in settings where the streets are unsafe or unwelcoming) becomes an important resource for young people's spiritual development.

Shared Myths and Narratives

The myths and narratives that shape life and meaning making involve a lifelong creative process in which persons actively create (whether consciously or not) a story, using source material

that can come from many institutions, places, and relationships (McAdams, 1993, Chapter 5, this volume). For some, this source material includes the myths, narratives, sacred texts, symbols, and worldview of their religious tradition. For others, political and philosophical narratives are most formative. Often, these narratives live in the music, art, rituals, and stories told by elders, and in the crucible of relationships.

Culture, Ethnicity, and Globalization

Individuals potentially participate in, learn from, respond to, and integrate multiple cultures. There may be national culture and cultures of identity and religious cultures, each providing scripts and norms shaping the spiritual developmental process. Culture informs inherited texts, narratives, stories, language, symbols, rituals, and norms that shape identity – and are central in spiritual development.

Taking multiple cultures seriously has great potential to strengthen the theory and research on spiritual development by challenging both the assumption that worldview and practice are essentially the same (and presumed to be like one's own experience) and, on the other hand, avoiding approaching other worldviews as either "exotic curiosities" or antidotes to the "spiritual emptiness" (Ho, 1995, p. 115) they may experience within their inherited tradition or culture. For example, Mattis et al. (2006) challenge the widespread enlightenment assumption that assumes a separation between sacred and secular domains of life, noting that, for many cultural groups, religion and spirituality are perceived as inextricably bound and interwoven with each other and with the whole culture.

Taking these cultural differences seriously both enriches and challenges our assumptions about spiritual development. Gottlieb (2006) illustrates this potential through her anthropological examination of the place of the spirit in the Beng culture of Ivory Coast in West Africa. Gottlieb describes a society where children are viewed as closer to the spirit world because of the cultural assumption of reincarnation. Rather

than being an abstract concept, this worldview permeates their respect for children, how adults interact with children, and virtually all areas of community and family life. Other similarly rich examinations of particular people, times, and places will enrich the field as scholars broaden our understanding of spiritual development in its many manifestations.

Beyond the issues of examining specific and diverse cultures as a way of enriching our understanding of spiritual development, scholars have begun turning their attention to globalization and its potential impact on identity (Arnett, 2002; Jensen, Arnett, & McKenzie, Chapter 13, this volume). Globalization provides a broader array of influences, narratives, and relationships from which young people draw in shaping their identities and spiritual paths. Arnett (2002) argues that many people now develop bicultural identities (also see Huynh, Nguyen, & Benet-Martínez, Chapter 35, this volume) that include a local identity and an identity linked to the global culture. Jensen (2003) views this globalization as presenting both opportunities and challenges for identity formation, as young people seek to integrate diverse, sometimes conflicting, beliefs and behaviors from different socializing influences. At the same time, they have the opportunity to develop new skills and attitudes that equip them to function effectively in a multicultural world. A solution to this challenge may lie in what Erlich (2000) called "ethical neopluralism," which consists of "a healthy mix of wide moral consensus and tolerance for diversity of ethical positions within that consensus" (p. 304). This could involve synthesizing a worldview from various belief systems, or it could stimulate deeper exploration of one's own tradition or philosophy, prompted by genuine engagement with other perspectives (e.g., Avest, 2009; Patel, 2007).

Significant Life Events and Changes

Finally, spiritual development is shaped by a wide range of personal, historical, and cultural events. Elder's (1999) life-course theory reminds us that specific times and places shape the content, patterns, and directions of people's lives. Furthermore, different people experience historical change in different ways, which uniquely shapes their developmental trajectory and life course.

Thus, age-related developmental tasks inform goals and priorities and what one chooses to select and to optimize. In addition, life events – some representing the tragic side of life and some representing its generous and healing side – can have a powerful impact on a person's spiritual pathways. In this sense, Antonovsky's (1991) concept of sense of coherence has important implications for the intersection of spiritual and identity development. This theory sheds light on how individuals comprehend and manage internal and external stimuli, and how they make meaning from those experiences. How young people begin to understand themselves and their place and purpose in the world based on what happens around them and to them is central to their spiritual identity formation. These issues also lie at the heart of how humans develop a coherent worldview that helps them manage stress and contributes to their overall health and well-being.

Conclusion

Though the underlying dynamics of spiritual development have been part of the human experience for millennia, the social sciences are in their infancy in seeking to understand the developmental processes underlying spiritual identity formation in adolescence, particularly within a global context. Much of what is known is limited to particular disciplines, contexts, or traditions. Developing a multi-disciplinary and global field of inquiry and network of scholars remains an important challenge for the field.

Emerging theory and research continue to underscore the salience and power of this dimension of human identity development in the lives of young people, their families, and their communities. By grappling with this understudied dimension of human identity, we enrich our understanding of what it means to be human and the conditions under which young people – and the families, communities,

and cultures in which they are embedded – can flourish.

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