A return to the varieties of religious experience:

Research notes from India and America

Robert W. Roeser
Mrinalini Rao
Yogita Hastak
Ayesha Gonsalves
Mukti Shah
Ruhi Berry

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Talk overview

- Issues of identity...
- Issues of culture and history...
- Issues of social contexts...

...in the study of spirituality and human development
Questions of Identity

• The personal, the professional
• The positive, the problematic
• Defining spirituality: Us, them
Personal, Professional

Does the existence (or non-existence) of a scholar’s spiritual life conflict with, or perhaps complement, his/her ability to do rigorous science on spirituality and human development?

“Managing subjectivity”
Variety in strongly felt meanings and scientific hypotheses

Religion / spirituality as source of...

- Freedom
- Wisdom and community
- Solace and meaning
- Social participation / contribution
- Social control
- Social conflict
- False hope and belief
- Superstition and exclusion
- Oppression

...in human development
Variety in Outcomes:
The positive, the problematic, the perennial

- Positive psychology, positive youth development, health and well-being vs. Developmental psychopathology, illness and distress

- “Two-tailed tests” needed within same study

- Focus on perennial issues of human existence
  - How do individuals question/make sense of that which encompasses both
    - Life and death
    - Health and illness
    - The existence of human suffering and joy / fulfillment
    - Shared existence with and distinction from other sentient beings
    - Individual salvation and social service
Defining “Spirituality”

- **Multiple points of view**
  - Cultural-religious views
    - Expert practitioners’ and religious’ perspectives
  - Research participants’ views
    - Youth perspectives
  - Scholarly views
    - Spirituality as (self-) transcendence
Scholarly Perspective

*It is fruitful to conceptualize spirituality at the individual level, perhaps especially during adolescence, as fundamentally related to issues of self / identity development.*

*This requires that we know, and can operationally define, what self/identity is and how it develops!*
Self / identity in Psychology

**William James**

The self as both “I” and “me”

Awareness and self-representations

*Individual self-sameness*

**Erik Erikson**

The “I”, “me” and “we”

Awareness, self-representations, and social participation

*Psycho-social identity*
Basic Aspects of Self-in-Context (BASIC) Model

Roeser, Peck & Nasir (2006)

I. Level of individual
   (I-self, me-selves, emotions and moods)

II. Level of social interaction
    (Embodied and afforded identities)

III. Level of social institutions
     (Social and institutional identities)
BASIC Model and Spirituality

- **Social and institutional identities**
  - Self-identified or assigned religious / ethnic affiliations
  - Ties to spiritual / religious communities of practice

- **Embodied and enacted identities**
  - Age and pubertal status
  - Biological sex
  - Engagement in spiritual practices

- **I-self and Me-selves**
  - Self-regulatory capacities (mindfulness, attention and emotion regulation)
  - Spiritual representational (symbolic / iconic) beliefs / worldviews / narratives
  - Spiritual emotions and moods
  - Temperamental characteristics
Questions of Diversity and History

• Mainstream Christian America
  Alternative, immigrant and non-dominant communities
  The United States as “outlier”
  *Economically developed, highly religious*

• The international community
  Non-Christian populations and other nations
  Economic development and globalization
  Conceptual complexity in non-Western nations
Varieties in Spiritual Worldviews

Theistic
Paths of Forms
(God-centered)

Dualistic metaphysics
(Sacred/Secular)

Relation of self and sacred

Spiritual Worldviews

Non-Theistic
Paths of the Formless
(Consciousness-centered)

Monistic metaphysics
(Spectrum)

Relation of self and sacred
Varieties in Modalities of Religious/Spiritual Practice

- **Raja Yoga**
  (Path of Meditation)
- **Karma Yoga**
  (Path of Moral Action)
- **Jnana Yoga**
  (Path of Rational Inquiry)
- **Bhakti Yoga**
  (Path of Love and Devotion)
Questions of Social Context

• Spirituality as both
  - culturally-constituted and transmitted over time
  - individually construed and transformed over time

• Focus on institutions, people and practices

• Contexts of reflection and silence
Qualities of Awareness, Mind in Culture, Brain and Behavior, History and Society

Contemplative Psychology (I-self awareness)

Cognitive-affective Neuroscience (Brain-Behavior)

Spirituality

Socio-Cognitive-Cultural Psychology (Me-selves in Cultural Contexts)

Social Contexts, Societies & History
Thank you