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Identity and Spirituality: A Psychosocial Exploration of the Sense of Spiritual Self

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The authors examined the structure and content of adults' sense of spiritual identity by analyzing semistructured interviews with 13 spiritually devout men and 15 devout women, ages 22 to 72. Individuals' responses to the Role-Related Identity Interview (G. T. Sorell, M. J. Montgomery, & N. A. Busch-Rossnagel, 1997b) were content analyzed and rated on the role-related spiritual identity dimensions of role salience and flexibility. Individuals were categorized as spiritually foreclosed, achieved, or in moratorium, on the basis of their motivational, affective, self-evaluative, and behavioral investments in spiritually defined roles and their reflectiveness about and behavioral changes in role-related spiritual identity. Similarities and differences within and between spiritual identity status groups were observed, suggesting a variety of ways that spiritual identity provides a sense of continuity as well as a domain for adult developmental change.

Keywords: identity, identity status, spirituality, adulthood

Significant advancements in the study of identity development have occurred in recent decades. This work, much of which has been grounded in Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1975) psychosocial theory of life span human development, has focused largely on identity formation processes, especially in the paid employment, relationship, and gender-role domains, during adolescence and early adulthood. Little attention has been directed toward understanding individuals' sense of their spiritual selves, particularly in the adult years. The absence of such research is notable in light of Erikson's profound interest in spirituality (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986), exemplified in his psychohistories of significant spiritual figures, such as Martin Luther, Gandhi, and Jesus (Erikson, 1958, 1969, 1996). Indeed, in his lifelong pursuit of how people know and understand themselves, Erikson (1962) juxtaposed faith with doubt and maintained that healthy adults nurture their spiritual tendencies.

Marcia (1966) stimulated early research on identity development and spirituality by explicitly drawing the ideological domain of identity to include both political and religious orientations. He also delineated exploration and commitment as interacting processes of all domains of identity formation, including religious identity. Following Marcia's innovative conceptualization, a number of studies assessed exploration of and commitment to religious ideology as components of overall adolescent identity status (Marcia, 1993; Markstrom, 1999). A few studies adopted this approach in investigations of identity development during adulthood (e.g., Josselson, 1987, 1996; Whitbourne, 1986). However, research linking an individual sense of ego identity to religion and/or spirituality during adulthood has been rare (Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 2001; Tisdell, 2002). Furthermore, these studies did not focus specifically on the content or structure of religious and spiritual identity. Our study contributes to filling this gap by examining the sense of spiritual identity revealed in the analysis of lengthy semistructured interviews with 28 spiritually devout adult men and women.

Following Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1975), we posit that a sense of identity is forged through the interaction of individual characteristics and experiences with historically specific societal mores, expectations, and opportunities, functioning to provide "both a persistent sameness within oneself (self-sameness) and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others" (Erikson, 1980, p. 109). Thus, we define *spiritual identity* as a persistent sense of self that addresses ultimate questions about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life, resulting in behaviors that are consonant with the individual's core values. This definition differs to some extent from other definitions of spirituality in the developmental literature. For example, Wink and Dillon (2002) defined

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spirituality as “the self’s existential search for ultimate meaning through an individualized understanding of the sacred” (p. 79). Similarly, Sinnott (2002) defined spirituality as “one’s personal relation to the sacred or transcendent, a relation that then informs other relationships and the meaning of one’s own life” (p. 199). Sinnott distinguished spirituality from religious practices, which “may be the external sign of a spiritual orientation, or simply a set of culturally cohesive practices, beliefs, and habits” (pp. 199–200).

Our definition of a sense of spiritual identity focuses on individual construction of a relationship to the sacred and ultimate meaning. However, in keeping with Mead (1934), whom we see as consistent with Erikson (1963, 1975, 1996), our definition posits that a sense of spiritual identity emerges as the symbolic religious and spiritual content of a culture is appropriated by individuals in the context of their own life. In other words, the content of one’s sense of spiritual self is individual, whereas the structure is inherently social and thus inevitably local and historically specific (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Mead, 1934). A sense of spiritual identity is a role-related aspect of an individual’s overall sense of ego identity (Côté & Levine, 2002). This conceptualization serves as the basis for a study designed to elaborate current understandings of adult men’s and women’s sense of role-related spiritual identity. In particular, we examine individuals’ narratives about their spiritual identity for *role salience* (the importance of spirituality to their sense of identity) and *role flexibility* (the extent to which they have considered changes in their spiritual identity). Hence, role salience and role flexibility distinguish the ways individuals give structure and content to their sense of spiritual identity. Salience and flexibility are conceptualized as adult-appropriate extensions of Marcia’s (1966, 1993) adolescent identity formation constructs of exploration and commitment (Whitbourne, 1986). Adults reveal the salience that a role has for them through the type and intensity of motivation and affect they have toward it, the time they invest in it, and the impact the role has on their self-evaluation. Adults reveal their flexibility in a role as they reflect on how their past, present, and future involvement in the role has changed or will change (Sorell, Montgomery, & Busch-Rossnagel, 1997a; Whitbourne, 1986).

Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1975) suggested that although ego identity formation during adolescence and young adulthood provides an initial psychosocial structure for continuity in adult life, a person’s sense of identity can be revised and transformed through ongoing experience and shifting contextual and historical circumstances. To the extent possible with cross-sectional data, we identify contexts, events, and circumstances that can be seen as precursors to current spiritual identity status.

Method

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 13 male and 15 female adult respondents. Respondents were chosen for their reputation as being devoutly spiritual and their capacity to articulate the significance and influence of spirituality in their life. Some respondents were associates on the campuses we are affiliated with, others were referred to us from an interfaith dialogue group, a few were identified through our own religious affiliations, and a few were respondents in the larger adult identity development project from which this study is derived. Although this sampling

approach limits generalizability, it is consistent with current sampling techniques in adult identity research (Bauer, McAdams, & Sakaeda, 2005; Josselson, 1987; Levinson & Levinson, 1996) and is appropriate for exploratory developmental studies.

Respondents ranged in age from 22 to 72 years, with the majority being young and middle-aged adults. The sample was predominantly European American but also included 4 Black respondents (1 African, 2 African Americans, and 1 India-born participant) and 1 Hispanic respondent. More than half the respondents identified themselves as Protestant; however, the sample also included 3 Muslims, 1 Jew, 1 Greek Orthodox, 1 Roman Catholic, 1 Buddhist, 1 pagan, and 2 who identified their religious preference as “none.” Almost all respondents had at least an undergraduate degree, and many were aiming for or already employed in a vocation associated with their spiritual convictions. Fourteen were married (none to each other), 10 were single, 2 were divorced, and 2 were remarried. Fifteen respondents were childless, and 13 had two or more children. Income levels varied considerably because a number of respondents were in school or semiretired. However, on the basis of their educational background and lifestyle, most of the respondents represented middle- to upper-middle-level socioeconomic status.

Procedures

All respondents completed a demographic data questionnaire prior to participating in a semistructured interview conducted by a trained interviewer. The interviews for this study, which lasted from 2 to 6 hr, were conducted at times and places selected by the respondents and were audiotaped. Interviewers began by handing respondents a blank, 5-in. (13-cm) pie diagram. Respondents were asked to section and label the pie according to each area of life that was currently important to them, with the size of the sections determined by their importance relative to each other. The number of slices and the size of each section were generated by the respondents, who also labeled each section of their pie. The Role-Related Identity Interview (RRII; Sorell, Montgomery, & Busch-Rossnagel, 1997b; available from Gwendolyn T. Sorell) schedule, described below, required the interviewer to ask questions in any area designated as “an important area of my life” by the respondent (e.g., community or volunteer roles, hobbies). In addition, several standard role-related identity areas were included in the interview, whether or not they appeared in the respondent’s pie (e.g., family, work, friendships, and spirituality). The present analysis focuses primarily on participants’ responses to questions about their spiritual identity. However, attention was given to all sections of the interview that were informative of role-related spiritual identity.

Measures

The RRII (Sorell et al., 1997b) was designed to assess adult identity and was adapted from a protocol developed by Whitbourne (1986). The questions included in the RRII were designed to probe the role salience and role flexibility of respondents’ identity in their religious and/or spirituality role, in addition to roles such as wife or husband, mother or father, sister or brother, daughter or son, homemaker or breadwinner, and waged worker.

Role salience questions inquired about the motivational, affective, self-evaluative, and behavioral (i.e., time commitment) aspects of social role involvement. In this study, the portion of the interview assessing spiritual identity¹ asked, “How does being [respondent’s chosen term for referring to the spiritual aspect of his or her life] affect what you do in everyday life?” and “What impact does this area of your life have on the way you feel about yourself as a person?” Role flexibility questions inquired about past, present, and future considerations of change, including the evaluation

¹ Chris Kiesling and Ronald K. Colwell constructed role-related spiritual identity questions and rating criteria.

and implementation of alternative ways of feeling and behaving in each role. Examples of role flexibility questions used in this study are "Have you ever considered other ways of behaving as a spiritual person?" and "What steps have you taken to implement the changes you are considering?"

Data Analysis Procedures

The labels assigned by respondents to sections of the pie diagram were classified as belonging to the categories of family roles, paid employment, homemaking/breadwinning, student/studies, friendship, romantic relationships, spirituality, and other. The latter category included such areas as community involvement, volunteer activities, and hobbies. We then scored the diagram by measuring with a protractor the number of degrees included in each area. If an area was not included in the diagram, it was assigned a score of zero.

The RRII rating manual (Sorell et al., 1997a; available from Gwendolyn T. Sorell) provides guidelines for generating informative descriptive data in small samples and data for statistical analysis in larger samples (Graham, Sorell, & Montgomery, 2004). Typed interview transcripts provided the data analyzed in the study. The analysis began with multiple readings of the interview transcripts by Chris Kiesling, following open coding procedures for content analysis detailed by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998). This procedure was used to identify the key components of respondents' sense of spiritual identity. The analysis was grounded in the phenomenological tradition (Creswell, 1998) and was used to compose a spiritual "psychohistory" on each participant. Next, these psychohistories were reviewed for elements pertaining to spiritual identity formation that indicated role salience and role flexibility, and these elements were used to extend the RRII's coding scheme into the spiritual identity domain. Finally, all interview responses to questions focused on family (daughter or son, sister or brother, wife or husband, mother or father), work (homemaker or breadwinner, paid employment), and spirituality identity and were rated by Chris Kiesling and Ronald K. Colwell according to guidelines contained in the RRII rating manual (Sorell et al., 1997a). The psychohistories and specific quotations from the interview were used to group participants into similar identity statuses. Hence, our analysis was informed by the rich information obtained from grounded theory methods but also reflected the theoretical framework within which the study was conceptualized.

The role salience identity components of motivation intensity, affect intensity, and self-evaluation intensity were rated according to continuously scaled numerical values (1 = low, 4 = high). Motivation quality for family roles was designated to one of the following categories: providing for instrumental rather than emotional needs of other family members, providing psychological benefits for other family members, participating in reciprocal care and support, or deriving psychological benefit. For employment roles, the motivation quality categories included financial rewards, convenience, positive work environment, and intrinsic rewards. Motivation quality categories for homemaker and breadwinner roles included necessity, convenience, secondary or derivative rewards, and intrinsic rewards. For spirituality roles, the motivation quality categories were obligatory, extrinsic, authority bound; relational reciprocal, communal; philosophical, ethical, ideological; and psychological benefit. Affect quality and self-evaluation quality were rated as negative, mostly negative, mostly positive, or positive. For spirituality role affect quality only, a few respondents were designated as paradoxical because they expressed both extremely positive and extremely negative emotional investments. Time commitment was rated as none or little, minor, balanced with other roles, or organizes living.

The role flexibility identity components of present/future and past reflectiveness were categorized as no doubts or questions; normative, expectable doubts or questions; prominent, problematic doubts or questions; or serious doubts, crisis, or psychological transformation. The categories of present/future and past behavioral change were no change, normative or expectable change, significant or nonnormative change, and self-initiated change. In the evaluation of role flexibility, reflective mention of expect-

able questions (relative to the participant's age), such as vocation or partner choice, or behavioral changes associated with expected life transitions, such as parenthood, loss of parents, or retirement, were considered normative, whereas reflectiveness implying deeper questioning or nonnormative change (e.g., evoked by one's own or one's child's health problems) was deemed nonnormative. Self-initiated change was designated, for example, to participants who sought to recover from addiction after a crisis or to transcend serious mental illness. The categorical assignments were made on the basis of the modal distinctiveness of overall responses because the categories are not mutually exclusive. For example, a respondent whose primary spiritual motivation was classified as psychological benefit might also be motivated, to a lesser extent, by philosophical, ethical, and ideological interest.

Reliability of ratings was established by consensus (cf. Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). Raters met periodically to determine their degree of consensus. When ratings differed, raters discussed the interview responses that were used as a basis for their evaluations. A third trained rater (Gwendolyn T. Sorell) was consulted when rating disagreements occurred.

The results reported in the next section derive predominantly from the content analysis of interview responses, with a specific focus on respondents' sense of role-related spiritual identity. Quantitative and categorical ratings and pie diagram scores were used as additional sources of empirical support for primary interpretations.

Results

Predictably, the theoretical dimensions of salience and flexibility from which the RRII was derived emerged as significant categories in the content analysis of the interview transcripts. Three themes, labeled *salience and meaning*, *influence and investment*, and *reflectiveness/continuity and change*, characterized the data from all respondents. In addition, the manner in which the respondents perceived and evaluated their sense of role-related spiritual identity suggested their classification into categories with a remarkable resemblance to three of Marcia's (1966, 1993) identity statuses: foreclosed, in moratorium, and achieved. Age groups were relatively evenly distributed across the three identity categories: Foreclosed participants ($n = 11$) ranged in age from 22 to 70 ($M = 46$), participants in moratorium ($n = 4$) ranged from age 26 to age 52 ($M = 37$), and achieved participants ($n = 13$) ranged from age 26 to age 72 ($M = 45$). Below, we describe the role-related spiritual identity characteristics of those classified in each of these statuses. In our descriptions, we name the respondents with pseudonyms to convey the personally grounded approach of our analysis.

Foreclosed Individuals

In Marcia's (1966, 1993) operationalization, the foreclosed designation characterizes individuals who are highly committed to particular options (vocational or familial roles or ideological orientations) without having engaged in exploration of other options. We found that this pattern aptly described 5 men (Asher, Jordan, William, Ira, and Peter) and 6 women (Miriam, Abbey, Polly, Danielle, Dawn, and Daisy). These respondents were enacting an ascribed role. Parental expectations, tribalism, ethnicity, or a particularly homogenous faith tradition defined these respondents' sense of spiritual identity. The content of their faith existed prior to the respondents' ascription to it, and these respondents felt compelled to sustain intrapsychic orthodoxy with their spiritual commitments. Living according to these ideals (a) protected these

respondents from identity diffusion, (b) allowed them to avoid negative identity fragments regarded as shameful in their social context, (c) guaranteed them contextual belongingness in the familial realm, (d) protected them from the anxiety of identity choices amid complex relationship matrices, and (e) provided them continuity with their historical self.

However, such a protected, ascribed faith was also recognized by some as carrying potential and realized liabilities. Because spiritual identity was formed via intersubjectivity with significant others, others retained enormous sway over these respondents' sense of self. For some respondents, moving through adulthood brought a growing sense that their spiritual identity was overly constrictive or overendowed. Some respondents, embedded and entrenched in ideals formulated by someone else, felt that individual expression and authenticity would be discounted or purchased only at the price of alienation and loss of continuity.

The spiritually foreclosed respondents had few questions or doubts about their identity commitments and were, for the most part, unreflective. Their concerns often focused on raising their family in a location where a pervasive plausibility structure for maintaining their heritage was not available (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Reflectiveness, when noted in these respondents' interviews, was often prompted during a period of adaptation to a new cultural context that offered little external support for their sense of spiritual identity.

Salience and meaning. The 11 respondents characterized as foreclosed described the spiritual domain of their life using such terms as "a foundation," "a grounding," "a center," "a compass," "a basic organic aspect" or "a grid of understanding values." Pointing back to their upbringing as a formative time, they often regarded their sense of spiritual self as something inherited. Peter commented about his Christianity that "I was born with it." Ira spoke of his role as a priest by simply saying, "It was the way life was." Reflecting on a childhood that he was now ambivalent about, Jordan nonetheless commented that his spiritual sense of self "grew up Catholic." Miriam responded, "I considered myself Christian before I was one." Abbey credited her current spiritual self to the reality that "it [spirituality] was an important part of growing up." These respondents talked about the salience of early experiences, naming family, family values, and the traditions of their upbringing as the most significant factors in their spirituality. The motivation intensity scores were generally high for these respondents, indicating that a sense of spirituality was an important role in their life. The rationale for spiritual practice and belief was largely "because that's the way I was taught." For example, William, a rabbi, spoke of his sense of spirituality as being "absolutely the same thing" as his being Jewish.

When asked what the consequences would be if they neglected or abandoned this part of their life, foreclosed persons frequently responded by naming this either as unfathomable or as an impossibility: "I can't imagine that. . . . [I eventually] would come back to it," "[You] couldn't get away from it," "I can't; it's an impossibility," "[I] couldn't totally abandon [it]." Spiritual identity was as irrevocable as childhood—a grounding that would always be a part of them.

For almost every foreclosed respondent, the motivation for a sense of spiritual identity was a relationship with God. This relationship was described in the language of intimacy and emotional need. The cherished presence of the deity was associated with the

provision of love, security, acceptance, and/or approval. Important to these foreclosed individuals was "a sense of being in the will of God," "never [being] alone," being found "worthy to receive the crown," "respect[ing] the Creator," being "who He wants me to be" or a "person He would be pleased with." These statements evidence striking similarity to the emotional attachment most foreclosed respondents had experienced in their family of origin. In describing their sense of spiritual self, foreclosed individuals sometimes drew on images of family relationships to describe their sense of spiritual identity: jumping into a father's lap, having a "childlike faith." However, the affect associated with their faith was not consistently positive, as self-evaluation left many with some degree of distress and regret about "falling short" (as noted below).

Influence and investment. Self-evaluation intensity scores for foreclosed respondents were very high, indicating that their sense of spiritual identity had a high impact on their self-perception and self-worth. This interpretation was corroborated by the recurrence of labels associated with spirituality and the relatively large proportionate segments respondents demarcated for their spiritual life in the pie diagram. For foreclosed individuals, family, ethnicity, and religious tradition combined to be highly determinative of self-evaluation. The people with whom foreclosed persons shared their spiritual commitments tended to be family and friends who affirmed their sense of self and ensured continuity in the transmission of spiritual tradition across generations. As models for their sense of spirituality, foreclosed respondents looked to parents and/or grandparents, the originator of the religion (e.g., Mohammed), or other recognized carriers of the tradition (teachers, professors, priests, or preachers). Similarly, when asked, "If someone wanted to develop their faith in the same way you have, what would you tell them?" a few of the foreclosed respondents pointed away from themselves to "someone more knowledgeable."

Although the quality of many of the foreclosed respondents' self-evaluations was positive, several indicated an ongoing struggle to attain their ideal spiritual self. Daisy spoke of an obligatory sense of self created by the expectations of significant others that "circumvents a lot of who I think I should be." Echoes of childhood anxiety were heard as she described spirituality as an "everyday pursuit to be the person you should be" and the accompanying feeling that "I'm not doing enough." Danielle, an African woman linked deeply to tribal and family configurations, described periods of prolonged prayer as a means of holding on to parts of herself that could be lost when communities called on her solely because she was Black or a woman. For several of the foreclosed respondents, the key identity task was to derive a sense of self that was bigger than yet inclusive of the ways a community or family tried to define them.

Turning points mentioned in the life of these foreclosed individuals frequently coincided with normative, sociological expectations formulated by their families or faith communities. Thus, being baptized at the apex of adolescence ("really putting my whole life on the line") or choosing the vocational role of a priest during the transition to adulthood represented normative but also formative transitions in which socialization encouraged a deeper affiliation with and internalization of the belief system in which they had been immersed.

In ratings for time commitment, over half the foreclosed respondents indicated that their role-related spiritual identity organized

their everyday behavior. Among the others were Dawn, Miriam, and Abbey, who reported that family activities surpassed spiritual activities in actual time spent, and Jordan, who reported that his paid employment took priority.

Reflectiveness/continuity and change. Those who fit firmly into the foreclosed status had experienced very little questioning of their own spiritual identity. Abbey admitted raising questions of theodicy but quickly dismissed them as “little questions.” Miriam said she desired a childlike faith because “a child never questions.” Asher, a devout Muslim, stated that faithfulness to Allah constituted a recognition that whatever is should be regarded as God’s will, as questioning reveals idolatry. When change did occur for foreclosed individuals, they typically sought it in an attempt to deepen that which they had claimed as a birthright. They pursued spiritual practices, consisting primarily of prayer and worship in a like-minded community, to take them “further up and deeper in.”

Individuals in Moratorium

In Marcia’s (1993) operationalization, individuals in moratorium are characterized as experiencing crisis in the form of high levels of exploration without having arrived at a place of commitment. Four respondents represented this status: Charlotte, Allen, Tom, and Naomi. In contrast to a foreclosed conformity to a prescribed role-related spiritual identity, Charlotte, Tom, and Naomi expressed asynchrony between the emerging internal sense of spiritual identity they were constructing and the external expectations perceived to be implicit in the conventional, culturally available spiritual identity roles mediated by organized religion or family custom. Allen spoke of the unencumbered freedom to explore ideology and spiritual practices and identities beyond what his first family and their denomination would have found acceptable.

Exploration among these individuals reflected diverse patterns. Sometimes a respondent exhibited a tentative, dispersed, and episodically impulsive attempt at ideological exploration, and at other times the search was highly intentional, broad, and systematic. Likewise, the affective intensity and quality were not at all uniform or consistent among individuals in moratorium. Affect fluctuated through several degrees of hopefulness, self-acceptance, forgiveness, and love to monumental self-doubt, insecurity, and self-contradiction.

Saliency and meaning. Like the foreclosed individuals, those in moratorium were given high ratings on motivation intensity, but they differed significantly from the foreclosed respondents in motivation quality. Whereas foreclosed persons emphasized intimacy and security in their relationship to deity, individuals in moratorium were driven either by psychological benefit (e.g., self-expression, personality change, recovery from crisis, purpose) or by philosophical and ethical concerns and intellectual pursuits (e.g., to be true to their conscience). These individuals often defined spirituality as an awakening to universal truth and love or spiritual health. When asked what terms they used to describe their spiritual identity, individuals in moratorium often used language denoting development: “life as a creative process . . . self-realization,” “movement,” “awakening.” Thus, unlike the foreclosed individuals, these respondents experienced spirituality as expansive, open, ever-widening investigation.

The 4 respondents in moratorium were rated as having positive or mostly positive affect associated with their role-related spiritual identity. However, Charlotte was rated as affectively paradoxical because she mixed extremely negative and extremely positive statements. In contrast to the affective set for foreclosed persons, which clustered around issues of security, approval, grace, and divine favor, the affective aspects of spiritual identity named by individuals in moratorium focused on freedom, independence, inner peace, nirvana, “life as a state of fascination, discovery,” “harmony . . . unifying thinking,” “letting go,” and “wanting to share that exuberance.” Nevertheless, Allen, Charlotte, and Naomi also mentioned passage through a “dark night of the soul,” “hitting bottom,” or “darkness” that required recomposing their spiritual identities, including their sources of reliance and ways of comporting themselves toward others.

Individuals in moratorium also differed from foreclosed respondents in reporting negative identity fragments of self that they sought to avoid. For foreclosed respondents, disconnection and disapproval provided the social and divine restraints compelling them to avoid becoming shameful to God, their family, their tribe, or their ethnicity. Of greater prominence for those in moratorium was avoidance of overwhelming fear, inauthenticity in role adoption, addiction, or intellectual or existential stagnation. Thus, for these individuals, negative identity fragments served to prompt rather than inhibit exploration and change.

Self-evaluation intensity ratings for individuals in moratorium indicated that their sense of spiritual identity contributed moderately or strongly to their views of their own self-worth. The values expressed as central to self-evaluation were reconstructed from a spiritual identity previously experienced as distressful and painful and/or from the excitement of breaking new ground in self-exploration. Ratings for self-evaluation were divided: For Allen and Tom, exploration had a fully positive effect; for Charlotte and Naomi, feelings of self-worth were mediated by negative evaluations of their spiritual identity explorations.

Rather than relying on authorities, as did foreclosed individuals, those in moratorium relied on themselves as sole arbiters of truth. Restlessness was linked with a sense of autonomy and adventure. However, closing the door on the conventional usually involved bearing the weight of someone’s disapproval. Naomi said of her mother, “She doesn’t want me to go to hell. I’m sure she thinks I’m already going there.” Charlotte said, “To the establishment I’m not willing to sell out to what the higher-ups think I should be doing with my life.” Tom accepted that he had significantly disappointed his father when he discarded an inauthenticating conventional professional role to eke out a living teaching yoga.

Influence and investment. For individuals in moratorium, the painfully sacrificed fit into the familial or societal ideal or the neglect of a previously valued parental tradition was accompanied by less ease in relating to the deity. Ratings for behavioral investment varied among the respondents in moratorium. Charlotte was rated as having only a minor investment in her role-related spiritual identity; Naomi was classified as having a balanced investment; and for Tom and Allen, the search for a consolidated sense of spiritual identity was what ordered their days. Consistent with this variability, responses regarding how individuals in moratorium balanced investment in the spiritual domain with other things that must be done varied from “It’s no trouble balancing” to “I don’t balance it, I probably should.” Furthermore, the behavioral

investments associated with moratorium individuals' search and self-exploration were diverse, including such things as visiting various churches and traditions; having dialogues over books; and creating personal rituals of burning, sketching African artifacts, or focusing mentally on a song. When asked about specific practices, Charlotte, Naomi, and Tom answered the question by reporting what they avoided. Their respective answers included the following statements: "I don't really go to church anymore," "I try to avoid 'rigid thinking'," and "My spirituality is private because I don't have to be accountable."

Reflectiveness/continuity and change. In marked contrast to the foreclosed respondents, individuals in moratorium received ratings for past reflectiveness, indicating that serious doubts and questions had occurred. Factors contributing to these ratings included the traumatic experiences of losing a parent to death or divorce prior to the teenage years, the lack of religious participation on the part of their family, liberal educational experiences, or breaking the pattern of denial hiding addiction. Individuals in moratorium made changes that were self-initiated, in contrast to patterns of normative, expected sociological change found among the foreclosed respondents. When responding to questions about change in the future, however, Charlotte said she had no expectation for change, Naomi commented on her desire and anxiety to find a way to express her discovery of spirituality with her family, and Allen said he expected serious doubts and questions to continue.

Achieved Individuals

Achieved identity is constituted in Marcia's (1966, 1993) scheme by those who have navigated a period of exploration or crisis and subsequently made personally defining commitments. Six men (Palmer, Wesley, Clay, Vaughn, Luke, and Apollo) and 7 women (Hope, Maggie, Becky, Eve, Diana, Erin, and Sally) were categorized as achieved. Most of the achieved respondents described experiences and beliefs that were different from or more intentional than those of their parents, indicating that their ascribed selves had been relinquished, modified, or elaborated. Rather than being embedded in these experiences and beliefs, they now reflected on them from an objective posture. They had gained their spiritual identity by exercising choice. The achieved individuals expressed an internally referenced assurance that they had found the spiritual place that was correct for them.

Saliency and meaning. Of all the respondents, those classified as achieved were the most articulate and elaborative in talking about their sense of spiritual identity. For many of these respondents, the pie diagram forced a misrepresentation of their perceived spirituality. Rather than assigning an apportioned amount of the circle to spirituality, a number of the achieved individuals contended with the diagram. Clay insisted that "a circle is finite and Allah is infinite." Diana explained that "it [spirituality] is not part of the pie, it is the pie!!" Others denoted this area of their life by writing outside the boundaries of the circle. Similarly, when describing the space of their spiritual sense of self, these respondents reached for superlative language, using phrases such as "ineffable," "a vastness transcending the self," "my lifeblood, deep, mysterious, intuitive . . . learning . . . what [God] sounds like, what he tastes like," "all-encompassing," and "Koranic consciousness." Compared with the metaphors used by individuals in

foreclosure and moratorium, the images for achieved individuals were more varied: a journey or pathway through perilous territory, a matrix that requires a different equipping to comprehend, or an ocean that encompasses and carries. The achieved respondents had discovered a different way of seeing and knowing, a cultivated awareness, and a transformed connection in "being with" others (cf. Heidegger, 1996).

Almost uniformly, the achieved persons in the sample received the highest ratings for motivation intensity. When asked what was important about their spirituality, the majority of achieved respondents cited enhanced interrelating: "sitting with" others in focused meditation, "going up" when engaged in spiritual conversation, not having to put on a face and still being accepted, celebrating feminine rites of passage, or writing poetry to bridge cultures and religions. Less frequent but recurring themes included disciplined efforts to be directed by and pliable to the will of God; attaining a sense of healing, well-being, and/or inner peace; avoiding alienation from themselves; and finding ways to be more in touch with their deepest personal truths.

The motivation quality categories provided less rating distinction for achievers than for individuals in foreclosure or moratorium. The raters had difficulty placing the responses clearly in a particular motivational quality category for more than 75% of these individuals. Either the respondents' motivation failed to match our categorical descriptions or the comprehensiveness of their motivation placed them in more than one category. For example, Maggie, Becky, Eve, and Wesley all mentioned dis-equilibrating events associated with psychological wounds that spirituality was helping them heal. Much of that healing was attributed to their relationship to God and/or their connection to a loving community. We found it difficult to choose between the mutuality, relationship, connectedness category and the psychological or intrinsic benefit category for these respondents. Similarly, Diana, Clay, Luke, and Palmer pointed to ways they had derived psychological benefit from their spiritual commitments but were also now engaged in educational or ministerial roles that constituted philosophical, ethical, and intellectual aspects of their spiritual identity.

With the exception of Becky and Erin, all of the achieved respondents were rated as exemplifying the highest level of affect intensity in their spiritual identity. Similarly, with Becky being the only exception, all achieved individuals indicated that their sense of spiritual identity had maximum impact on their self-perceptions, self-evaluations, and sense of self-worth (i.e., self-evaluation intensity was rated as high). The language accompanying these affective associations ("deep rest," "holy leisure," "settledness," "confidence," "freedom," "real and true," and "thankful") reflected a self that was increasingly accepting and at ease in relationships with a deity and with social contexts.

Not only did these respondents have high ratings on affect intensity, for more than 80% of the achieved respondents, affect was exclusively positive. Likewise, the high self-evaluation intensity ratings were associated with exclusively positive self-evaluations for half the achieved individuals. Affect quality for Vaughn, Becky, and Hope was categorized as paradoxical, indicating both extremely positive and extremely negative associations with their sense of spiritual self. Similarly, the ratings for self-evaluation placed Vaughn, Maggie, Hope, Becky, and Clay in the category of paradoxical, revealing a simultaneous tension between

extremely positive and extremely negative self-evaluations. The basis for classifying these respondents as paradoxical rather than mixed was the tone of their responses and their disclosures of high levels of self-acceptance, coupled with an exceptional willingness to confront undesirable characteristics and behaviors.

Achieved respondents were intriguingly varied in their self-attributions. Some declared unequivocally that their sense of spiritual identity was the ontological essence of who they were: "I am an embodied spirit," "My spiritual identity is so much more real and true than any of my other roles," "I see myself . . . as being in God." Others discounted themselves as spiritual persons, claiming that the designation belonged solely to the elite; that it named a contemplative, mystical orientation for which they had little capacity; or that spirituality was associated in their mind with fanaticism or self-righteous behavior.

Prevalent among those in the achieved status was the distinct connection of the development of their spiritual identity with the need to make meaning out of nonnormative traumas that were either self-imposed or thrust on them. Among the events and circumstances the achieved persons saw as catalysts to the development of their spiritual identity were unwanted divorce, a mother's death at an early age, a life-threatening car accident, sexual abuse, financial bankruptcy, an abortion imposed by a demanding husband, disillusionment with organized religion, alcoholism and depression, and the deprivation associated with being an ethnic minority. These kinds of experiences were associated with, in the respondents' words, "vacant spots," "wandering desires," "damaging and shameful" parts of the respondent's past, or the "dark side" of the respondent. For most of the achieved persons, the suffering associated with nonnormative negative events and circumstances promoted reflection and the construction of a sense of spiritual identity more hospitable toward themselves and toward others.

In contrast to foreclosed individuals, many of whom could not imagine a loss of spiritual identity, achieved respondents used strong language to describe imagined consequences of abandoning or neglecting the spiritual domain of their life. "Absolute damnation," declared Vaughn; "Hell in this life and the next," avowed Wesley; "I wouldn't give a damn about anything," confessed Palmer. For respondents for whom spirituality was the ontological reality of their sense of identity, loss of this spiritual self was envisioned as the greatest of all tragedies.

Influence and investment. Approximately two thirds of the achieved respondents invested enough time in their spiritual identity to regard it as the role that now governed behavior and dictated the scheduling of their days. The other third generally seemed to desire this type of investment but found that other demands and obligations prohibited such a commitment. On average, the achieved individuals named more time investments and more behavioral ways of expressing their spiritual identity than did those in the foreclosed or moratorium statuses. Inclusive of but beyond conventional activities, the practices that achieved respondents associated with their sense of spiritual self were chosen because they had taken on personal significance. In contrast, individuals in foreclosure engaged in spiritual practices because they were prescribed by authorities or because they constituted participation in a homogeneous community. The personally significant spiritual activities pursued by achieved respondents included trance dancing, psychosynthesis, closet cleaning, supporting the Humane So-

ciety, praying the divine office, working clay, jogging, wiccaning, voting conscientiously, participating in nature rituals, and taking part in rites of passage.

Achieved respondents talked about community in ways different from individuals in foreclosure and moratorium. Whereas foreclosed respondents looked to a homogenous community for validation and sanctioning of their sense of identity, some of the achieved persons treasured the heterogeneity of a community in which they could encounter voices different from their own. Consequently, achieved persons became interested in issues of justice, racial reconciliation, unity among peoples, harmony in the social order, and/or ethnic diversity in interpreting sacred texts. When asked who modeled for them what they would most like to become spiritually, achieved individuals were more likely than those in foreclosure or moratorium to focus on someone besides the recognized leaders of their own tradition and to name these people for a particular characteristic they possessed. Behind this seemed to be the recognition that these were not so much people to imitate but people to know because they embodied personal goodness. Thus, the respondents mentioned Gandhi, Jesus, or a civic leader because they "impersonated truth" or "sacrificed all for what they believed and were true to themselves" or the respondents admired them for their commitment to justice.

Reflectiveness/continuity and change. With the exception of Luke, all of the achieved respondents received high ratings for past reflectiveness and past behavior change, indicating nonnormative and unexpected experiences of the past. In regard to the future, 80% of the achieved participants anticipated only normative behavioral change, and 90% reported normative reflectiveness toward the present and future. The exceptions were Becky and Wesley, who expected no behavioral change, and Hope, who indicated that there might be the possibility for future nonnormative change. Evidently, having come to a place of ideological and spiritual commitment, achieved respondents saw their periods of crisis and searching diminish as they now experienced a more settled way of being. They had found a way of being at home with their spiritual identity and sought only further progress and faithfulness to themselves.

Discussion

This study offers a psychosocial exploration of spiritual identity and sheds light on Sinnott's (2002) provocative question, "How do the spiritual aspects of an individual's life relate to his or her development during maturity and old age?" (p. 199). By focusing on prototypes from a variety of faiths, cultural backgrounds, and communities, we highlight identity components that distinguish the many ways individuals impart structure and content to their sense of spiritual identity. The extent to which our respondents were able retrospectively to link their current sense of spiritual identity to childhood and adolescent experiences and commitments, as well as to role-related events in adulthood, suggests that the RRII (Sorell et al., 1997b) is a useful tool for examining individuals' recollections of identity continuity and change over a lifetime. Our respondents' descriptions of their spiritual identity formation processes were also usefully characterized in terms of Marcia's (1966, 1993) ego identity statuses. As such, they reveal similarities and differences in spiritual identity for respondents both between and within identity statuses.

The rich introspective accounts of our respondents confirm that role-related spiritual identity is important in constructing ego identity. This finding is congruent with Erikson's (1980) many discussions of the relevance of spirituality and religion for ego development and corroborates Josselson's (1996) report that religious ideology was a significant ego identity component for the women she interviewed. Furthermore, for almost all respondents except the foreclosed, spiritual identity construction and development continued beyond adolescence. The respondents who were in the moratorium and achieved categories indicated that they had been preoccupied with and had experienced changes in their sense of spiritual identity well into adulthood. The fact that many of these respondents attributed their revisions in spiritual identity to adversity or painful experiences corroborates Wink and Dillon's (2002) assertion that spiritual development in later adulthood is particularly characteristic of individuals who have transformed personal pain and sorrow into deeper understandings of life's mysteries. These individuals were often highly reflective, exemplifying the human capacity to draw on spiritual resources to construct meaning out of personal struggle (Park, 2005).

A look across the identity status categories in our sample suggests several broad conclusions about spiritual identity development in adulthood. First, spirituality offered our respondents a profound sense of connection—through a relationship with their deity, with a spiritual community, or with their most valued aspects of self. Second, consistent with Mead's (1934) social psychology, the spiritual meaning-making questions of our participants were answered largely through cumulative interactions with significant others in their life. Third, many in our sample spoke about how the struggle to continually realize valued aspects of the self and renounce aversive aspects of self had forged their sense of spiritual identity and motivated their continued involvement in spiritual practices and communities. Fourth, most participants reported that their spiritual identity required intentionality to cultivate and great effort to protect from encroachment by the demands of adult life. Finally, spiritual identity appeared to reflect patterns of both continuity and change, similar to other aspects of identity in adulthood (Josselson, 1996).

However, several caveats temper what can be inferred from this study. The content analysis, although constrained by guidelines and the consensus procedure, cannot be seen as free from subjectivity. Additionally, because our criteria for participants were purposely selective, our prototypes of spiritual identity are not representative of adults in general. Most notable is that because of our focus on individuals who saw themselves as devout, we were not informed by individuals who might be termed spiritually diffuse and who tend to avoid both belief-affirming and belief-threatening sources of information (Hunsberger et al., 2001).

Even though we had not anticipated classifying our respondents into identity statuses, the themes of foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement characterized the interview responses. The clarity with which respondents could be classified by identity status probably resulted, at least in part, from our use of an adapted form of Whitbourne's (1986) interview schedule. Whitbourne conceptualized the dimensions of flexibility and salience as adult extensions of adolescent exploration and commitment. She argued, as did Josselson (1996), that initial identity formation in late adolescence provides a gateway into adult life. The ideologies of adolescent identity formation, spiritual and otherwise, sponsor the

initial explorations and commitments that lead to role adoptions and enactments in adulthood. In the expansive but nevertheless bounded space of adulthood, individuals' levels of flexibility and reflectiveness interact with their existing role adoptions and role-related commitments to promote or constrain shifts in the salience of those roles and commitments. Despite the limitations imposed by methodology and sample size, the study provides useful and interesting findings that can perhaps be extended to other spiritually and religiously devout individuals and inform future studies of spiritual identity.

The unique contribution that our study makes to the developmental literature is that it captures the subjective content of the respondents' sense of spiritual identity and corroborates other scholars' findings of the importance, for many, of spiritual development across the span of adult life (e.g., Ray & McFadden, 2001). We join those who advocate assessing spiritual development with more complex practices than observing individuals' trends in religious service attendance or their social address of denominational affiliation (e.g., Hardy & Gustavo, 2005). Our biographical and narrative approach is in keeping with the current theoretical emphasis in the human development disciplines on linking structure and content, thereby contextualizing descriptive data (Lerner, 2002). As a result, our participants' contextualized narratives reveal how key aspects of adult development—resiliency, meaning making, and personal identity—can be aided by the exploration of one's spiritual sense of self.

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