Though the editors may not have intended it, the subtitle of this book, *Meaning-Making in an Age of Transition*, could be interpreted as consisting of two double entendre: first, around the task of meaning-making and, second, around the focus on transitions.

A core developmental task of emerging adulthood is to grapple with issues of meaning-making and identity as a core part of religious and spiritual development. At the same time, the field of religious and spiritual development remains in a formative stage of shaping its own identity, struggling with what Zinnbauer et al. (1997) described almost two decades ago as a “fuzzy” concept with multiple, sometimes competing, meanings and laden with cultural, ideological, theoretical, and methodological assumptions. Contributors to this volume were tasked with making meaning from often-conflicting data, theories, values, and expectations associated with research on religious and spiritual development in emerging adulthood.

Furthermore, the book’s intended emphasis on transition depicts a core feature of emerging adulthood, highlighting the tremendous change that is part of moving from adolescence into adulthood (at least in a Western context). At the same time, one could argue that both scholarship and lived experience in the realm of religious and spiritual development is also in transition in the United States (the focus on this book), moving from a perceived dominant religious context (Western Christianity) toward recognition of more pluralistic expressions in a more secularized society.

This transition in the field is pressing scholars to examine new questions with different populations, methods, and assumptions. Carolyn McNamara Barry and Mona M. Abo-Zena take on this challenge by bringing together leading scholars at the intersection of religious/spiritual development and emerging adulthood. Their volume establishes the state of the field while also opening the door for a new generation of theory, research, and practice. This review highlights key insights from each chapter in the book, and then proposes some opportunities for moving the field forward.

**Foundational Perspectives**

Following a brief overview chapter (Chapter 1), Barry and Abo-Zena offer a concise review of the field by unpacking the nexus of religious and spiritual development with current conceptions of emerging adulthood, including a theoretical grounding in developmental systems theory or biocultural models of development (Chapter 2). They argue that emerging adulthood is a key period in religious and spiritual development due to the cognitive development of this age group and the diverse and changing social contexts in which emerging adults work out their spiritual or religious identities. During the third decade in life, emerging adults shift their social contexts as most move away from parents and establish their distinct identities and practices, often in their own families.

The authors survey a number of definitional approaches to spirituality, adopting Pargament et al. (2013) widely used definition of the “search for the sacred”. They grapple with the multiple and diverse theoretical models, including stage (or continuous) theories and non-stage theories (discontinuous), ultimately concluding that “the field needs to utilize both continuous and discontinuous theories of religious and spiritual development to yield a more complete picture” (p. 29).
They conclude by briefly examining the intersection of religious and spiritual development with key developmental domains, including physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development. This review foreshadows other chapters in the book that focus on specific dimensions of development. The majority of the research they review focuses on religious and moral development, highlighting the gaps in the field in advancing understanding of spiritual development as integral to other domains of development.

The volume then moves to Gina Magyar-Russell, Paul J. Deal, and Iain Tucker Brown’s examination of the potential benefits and detriments of religiousness and spirituality to emerging adults (Chapter 3). Focusing primarily on religious beliefs and participation (the focuses of the preponderance of extant research), they note potential benefits of religiousness on reducing risk behaviors (e.g., substance use and potentially dangerous sexual behaviors) and in enhancing mental health and social connectedness. They also note areas where research has identified negative associations, such as a quest orientation to spirituality being associated with lower self-esteem, increased prevalence of out-group prejudice among highly religious emerging adults.

Less clear, however, are the mechanisms by which religion and spirituality influence outcomes, though the authors make the case that participating in a religious or spiritual community creates norms behaviors that influence the outcomes in question, noting that “without a communal environment,… emerging adults may lack sufficient continuity to guide them through the rebuilding process” (p. 51). Because the authors focus on religious development (and an assumption of adopting religious beliefs as positive), they frame issues of doubt as potentially detrimental to development. Missing, to my mind, is an exploration of the extent to which processes of shaping meaning, connectedness, and an awareness of the transcendent or sacred might emerge from the exploration and quest of emerging adulthood, even if it does not lead back to orthodox religious beliefs.

**Contexts and Socializing Agents**

The second section of the book focuses on contextual influences, both individuals and organizations or institutions. This begins with Larry J. Nelson’s exploration of the role of parents, noting the earlier socialization role of parents (Chapter 4), and whether and how parents continue to influence religious and spiritual development during emerging adulthood. He reviews the role of parents’ own religiousness and religious socialization during childhood and adolescence as formative, and highlights the disruption of these patterns when the emerging adult leaves home, develops new support systems, and seeks greater independence.

Perhaps the most insightful section of Nelson’s chapter, however, offers directions for future work in which he highlights the need to disentangle whether and how parents may or may not have direct influence on emerging adults’ religiousness and spirituality (for example, through the use of technology). He also presses for greater attention to the ways that emerging adults’ characteristics and contexts affect the ways that parents (and the dynamics of family life) influence emerging and spiritual development.

In the same way that influence shifts from parent to peers, the next chapter (Chapter 5) by Barry and Jennifer L. Christofferson explores the influence of siblings, friends, romantic partners, and other peers on spiritual and religious development during emerging adulthood, either reinforcing one’s emerging spiritual and religious identity and practices, or creating dissonance with one’s own values and practices (which may stimulate deeper exploration). The authors highlight the need for dialogue to sort through these questions with peers, though many emerging adults do not have relationships or settings where these conversations occur. Though the chapter usefully explores potential areas of influence by different peers, the authors highlight a relative paucity of research on the role of peers in religious and spiritual developing during this pivotal period of life when peers typically become dominant influences, albeit within the context of other socializing systems and relationships.

A key context for peer relationships among emerging adults is the Internet and online media, which is examined in Piotr S. Bobkowski (Chapter 6). Bobkowski presents the Media Practice Model as a tool for “identifying and organizing how emerging adults’ religious mosaics affect media practices, and the ways in which these practices, in turn, shape religious mosaics” (p. 94). The model focuses on three media practices: selection, engagement, and application. It proposes that individuals engage in these practices based on their present and hoped-for religious identities. The chapter surveys the types of media emerging adults choose, how they engage with diverse, often contradictory media, and the ways media messages either reinforce or undermine religious beliefs and attitudes.

The author focuses exclusively on the media’s role in religious socialization, which leaves unexplored a number of questions about whether and how the ecology of the Internet may be shaping spiritual development (beyond religious socialization) in emerging adulthood through the opportunities to interact around a wide range of issues of meaning, purpose, the nature of the sacred and profane, and one’s sense of place and belonging in the world, including the “cloud” in today’s rapidly changing technology landscape.
A part of the socializing force that is often neglected in social science volumes is the legal context in which spiritual and religious development are shaped. That is the topic Roger J. R. Leveque tackles (Chapter 7). Leveque notes that emerging adults are legally considered fully responsible and eligible for the freedoms that are deemed appropriate for adults but not children, yet they do not yet see themselves as fully adults. Within this context, the chapter unpacks the legal history of religious freedom and regulation in the United States, noting the often-contentious legal thread-weaving between concerns for protecting religious liberties (including the liberties of those who are not religious) and the secular concerns of the state (such as child protection and health issues).

The author concludes that “emerging adults certainly enjoy important religious freedoms, but their freedoms may be much more curtailed than they might expect” (p. 130). This interplay between the legal context and emerging adults’ religious and spiritual development offers fertile ground for further investigation in how the liberties and constraints of the state influence the opportunities and paths for religious and spiritual development among the youngest legal adults. As important is to consider the ways in which emerging adults’ spiritual and religious identities, attitudes, and priorities may propel them to engage with the legal context in ways that continue to reshape it for future generations.

Chapter 8 turns to examination of the role of religious congregations and communities in shaping religious and spiritual identities during emerging adulthood. William B. Whitney and Pamela Ebstyne King focus on identity development as a core task of this life stage and, subsequently, how religious congregations (formal assemblies) and communities (more informal and diverse gatherings) either “provide stability and an opportunity for emerging adults to clarify their own beliefs” or are seen as “compromising [emerging adults’] opportunity to think for themselves, involving too much commitment, or compromising their independence” (p. 135).

The instability of emerging adulthood in general is reflected in the decline in religious participation (as well as civic and nonreligious institutional activities), with about one in three emerging adults attending religious services at least twice per month. Yet, the authors note that the spectrum of participation ranges from those who are devout (at least weekly) to those who are disengaged (never attend). Those who attend regularly are characterized by attending. Those who attend regularly are characterized by those who are devout (at least weekly) to those who are disengaged (never attend). Those who attend regularly are characterized by being more engaged civically and in contributing to community life.

The heart of the chapter, however, moves beyond demographics to examine religious congregations and communities as ecologies for identity development, providing structure and resources that shape beliefs and worldviews. This includes not only the ideological or moral content but, just as importantly, the social context of influence as well as the transcendent context in which one’s orientation is shifted from a focus on self to a focus on others, including a profound sense of connection to others and, often, the Divine. When effective, these resources in the ecology can allow emerging adults to “draw a sense of belonging, strength, and devotion from being part of this group of people” (p. 147).

The final context that is examined in this volume is higher education (Chapter 9). Perry L. Glanzer, Jonathan Hill, and Todd C. Ream review the history of higher education in the United States, focusing on the historical shift from before the Civil War when the vast majority of higher education institutions were religious to today, when most college students attend secular (public or private) universities. (Three-fourths of students attend state institutions.) Thus, students are much less likely to be exposed to religion in their coursework, though many are engaged in religious co-curricular organizations. At the same time, there is a diverse array of religious institutions affiliated with a wide range of traditions. Yet, studies have found little substantial difference between secular and religious institutions in students’ religious beliefs, though there is a range of differences in religious practices between students on secular versus religious campuses. The authors do not examine the extent to which a selection bias may be at work, with more religious students selecting religions versus secular institutions.

The chapter concludes with an examination of the impact of college on students’ religious beliefs and practices, noting that “college is neither poison nor panacea for most” (p. 162). For most students, the authors contend, students arrive on campus with relatively weak religious commitments, and that does not change while they are in college. The authors call for more research focused on understanding the influence of college on the subgroup of students who are most devout as fruitful grounds for future research.

It is surprising that this chapter mentions but does not delve into Astin et al. (2011) examination of the spiritual lives of college students. Astin’s research would suggest that a greater proportion of college students are actively engaged in spiritual quests than would be assumed by the chapter’s review of religion on college campuses. For example, three-fourths of students in Astin’s study indicated that they have discussions of the meaning of life with friends. Those findings are not incompatible (since the chapter focused on religious commitment), but Astin’s work suggests that there is a broader theoretical terrain that merits exploration.

This section of the book usefully surveys a number of key contexts in which emerging adults shape their religious...
and spiritual lives. As the authors readily acknowledge, it does not (nor could not) examine every context—particularly since the research in these contexts is likely quite thin. For example, two formative contexts that are not examined are the world of work (both for those who begin work as they enter this developmental period as well as those who move into the workforce following their college education) and the independent living experiences of emerging adults, either with other peers or with their partners and families that many form in the third decade of life. These and other contextual resources suggest that this volume only begins to examine rich and changing contexts for religious and spiritual development during emerging adulthood.

Variations

The volume then turns to a series of chapters that examine individual variations in religious and spiritual development based on demographic differences and social location, focusing primarily (though not exclusively) on populations that tend to be overlooked in broad studies of majority populations. Jacqueline S. Mattis begins this section with a provocative interrogation of the ubiquitous assertion in religious research that women are more religious and spiritual than men (Chapter 10). She argues that these assertions have not been adequately examined across the spectrum of emerging adult experiences, particularly those beyond the educated class that is reflected in research on college students. She also argues that these studies have not adequately addressed diverse religious and spiritual commitments (with most research rooted in Western Christian assumptions). In addition, the extant research has not grappled with critical questions that have been raised in gender and feminist studies, such as “the complex ways in which gender, religiousness, and spirituality may co-construct each other for both gender-conforming and gender nonconforming young adults” (p. 173).

Mattis concludes by calling for integrated models for examining gender and religious and spiritual development in emerging adulthood. Such models would take into account the complexity of both emerging adults’ identities and lived experiences and their religious and spiritual beliefs and practices, recognizing that “all gendered identities and practices are classed, raced, ethnically and developmentally bound, and historically, socio-politically, and contextually situated” (p. 179). Only by tackling this more complex understanding of gender through multiple lenses and methods, Mattis contends, can we come to a more complete understanding of the ways in which gender identity shapes and is shaped by religious and spiritual development during emerging adulthood.

Following Mattis’ chapter, Tara M. Stoppa, Graciela Espinosa-Hernandez, and Meghan M. Gillen examine the interplay between religious and spiritual development and the sexual lives of heterosexual emerging adults (Chapter 11). They note that, compared to other age groups, sexual activity is high among emerging adults, both within and outside of committed relationships, including higher levels of high-risk sexual behaviors, including unprotected sexual activity that can lead to sexually transmitted infections, mixing alcohol and sexual activity, and casual sexual encounters.

After surveying correlations between religious commitments and various sex-related issues (such as contraception, abortion, pornography, and co-habitation), the authors explore how emerging adults “negotiate and make meaning of intersections and potential conflicts between the religious dimensions of their lives and sexual experiences” (p. 193), particularly focusing on the conflicts with organized religious commitments (which may create the greatest conflicts). They note that a minority of emerging adults may integrate and synthesize their sexual lives and their religious commitments with little conflict. (The authors assert that this option is reflected primarily in those who abstain from premarital sex based on their religious beliefs. They do not examine whether and how integration may occur for emerging adults with more progressive religious beliefs.) A second option involves choice and suppression in which emerging adults find themselves being forced to choose between different aspects of their identities and experiences (as is often the case with sexual minority youth whose background is in non-affirming religious traditions). Other emerging adults may compartmentalize their religious and spiritual lives from their sexual lives, while still others may create intentional dissonance between them as a source of challenge or excitement. How emerging adults navigate and negotiate these dynamics remains a fruitful area for continuing research, particularly in expanding both the populations considered and the conceptualization of religious and spiritual development beyond the dominant focus on religious commitment.

Such an exploration is advanced in Geoffrey L. Ream and Eric M. Rodriguez’s examination of sexual minorities, particularly lesbians, gays, and bisexuals (Chapter 12). They note the clash between the identities of these emerging adults and the non-affirming religious institutions, including religion-based harassment of sexual minorities, and they explore the ways in which progressive religious groups seek to reconcile religious commitment and emerging adults identities as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. They note the particular and unique developmental challenge of coming out as a sexual minority, including, for those who are religious, coming out to their faith communities. These processes typically involve extensive self-questioning and, often, conflict, potentially leading to a reintegration of both sexual orientation and religious
beliefs, typically within the context of an accommodating religious community.

However, the authors note that not all sexual minority emerging adults experience a conflict between their religious commitments and their sexual identity because either they have not experienced religion as conflicting with their identity (or haven’t internalized those anti-gay messages) or they readily reject the conflicting religious teachings. When they do encounter conflict, they may emerge from it with greater clarity and an integrated identity that has been tested and strengthened through the challenges. Of course, as the culture around sexual minorities shifts in the United States (including within a number of religious traditions), the opportunity to examine how these changes in the social-political-religious context may reshape the challenges and opportunities for integration of their religious and spiritual identities for sexual minority adults during this formative period of their development.

In Chapter 13, Abo-Zena and Sameera Ahmed move the conversation to a discussion of the interplay between religion and culture among emerging adults, particularly focusing on the experiences of emerging adults in minority cultural groups, such as immigrant groups. That said, the authors call for a broader approach for understanding culture that, in contrast to dominant methods, is person-centered (recognizing the varied experiences and responses of persons in interaction with their environment), fluid (to better capture the complexity of emerging adults’ experiences), and contextually grounded. Though the chapter might be considered more foundational for the whole book, rather than part of a section on individual variations, it productively presses for expanding the field’s research endeavors to become more responsive to the dynamic interplay of multiple factors in shaping the religious and spiritual identities of emerging adults, particularly those who have been on the margins of much of the research.

Nonreligious and atheist emerging adults are often overlooked, marginalized, or seen primarily as deviant in much of the research on religious development. Luke W. Galen seeks to deepen understanding of the beliefs and practices of this growing segment of the U.S. population (Chapter 14). He begins by delving into the “unaffiliated” or “nones” category (which define the population by what they are not; that is, affiliated with a religious tradition) and shows the diversity within this group, ranging from those who are disinterested to those who actively engage in secular or atheist organizations and belief systems. Most striking is the reminder of the judgmentalism inherent in the language describing these groups (e.g., “apostates”) even within social science research, rather than recognizing the active agency subgroups within this broader catchall population play in actively engaging in religious and spiritual questions.

Across the board, Galen demonstrates that these emerging adults tend to be more than just not religious; they “tend to be undogmatic, open-minded, and low on authoritarian characteristics” (p. 241)—though one could question these qualities among a subset of ardent atheists. Galen goes on to examine a number of areas of well-being in which religious and secular emerging adults do not differ based on belief systems. Notably, secular or atheist emerging adults who are active in civic or humanistic organizations may, in fact, experience many of the positive socialization benefits that religious people experience in their religious congregations and communities.

What is not addressed in this chapter is how the processes and dynamics of spiritual development might occur in the lives of seculars, humanists, or atheists. The question itself challenges definitions of spirituality that assume a higher power or even the notion of “sacred.” However, if spiritual development is seen as a core human developmental process involving meaning-making, identity, and creating a sense of belongingness in community (e.g., Benson et al. 2012; Roehelempartain et al. 2006, 2011), then the question remains robust, calling for exploration of the ways in which this nonreligious spiritual path is shaped within narratives, worldviews, communities, and belief systems that do not share the assumptions of traditional religious beliefs and practices.

Abo-Zena and Barry conclude the volume (Chapter 15) highlighting key themes through the multiple chapters, such as the salience of the field for this life stage, the diversity of expression and experience, and the importance of person-context fit across multiple contexts. As they look to the future, they call for many of the same directions that are alluded to in this review, including the need for more robust measures of religion and spirituality, interdisciplinary approaches, and examination of these dynamics in populations beyond those usually examined (e.g., white, middle-class college students). They recognize the need to explore these issues outside of traditional religious contexts, including the everyday contexts of the lives of emerging adults. These efforts, they hope will encourage “more sophisticated scholarship on this meaning-making process, which then should inform practice and policies that promote emerging adults’ positive development” (p. 268).

Opportunities for the Future

Building on Abo-Zena and Barry’s concluding chapter, this volume offers a compelling synthesis of the state of the field in understanding religious and spiritual development among emerging adults in the United States, reflecting the current state of the field and foreshadowing its future directions. The editors and other contributors have done a great service to the field in carefully laying this foundation.
Yet, as the editors and other contributors repeatedly articulate, the volume also reflects important theoretical and methodological limitations in the field. Below, I propose three opportunities for moving forward that merit exploration, most of which reflect or build upon the directions proposed by various contributors to this book. They are offered here in the spirit of continuing the conversation that these authors have productively launched.

Continue to press for conceptual, definitional, and measurement clarity on the dimensions of and the relationships between religious development and spiritual development. Several of the contributors to the volume grapple with the definitions of and relationships between religion and spirituality, though the majority focus on religion—which may be inevitable in that most were interpreting post hoc data that were gathered for other purposes and thus did not offer robust, theory-informed datasets that allowed for more nuanced explorations—with notable exceptions being the studies by Astin et al. (2011) and Smith (2009). As noted several times in this review, the lack of clarity about the domains of interest in understanding spiritual development (if not a shared definition that can be operationalize in measures and methods) hampers the ability to link concepts and studies across populations, studies, and contexts. There have been attempts to build such a consensus (see for example, Benson et al. 2012), but, as this volume represents, such efforts have not yet reached fruition.

Only when the field moves to greater consensus about the definition and domains of spiritual development will it be in a better position to address important and fascinating questions about spiritual development in emerging adulthood. For example, how are emerging adults constructing their spiritual identities both within and beyond the moorings of religious community, beliefs, and practices? To what extent and under what circumstances is religious participation and commitment a facilitator of or a hindrance to the formation of an integrated spiritual identity? In what ways is an integrated spiritual identity shaped outside the purview of religious socialization and commitment?

Examining these questions will press for interrogation of the widespread assumption in the field that an orthodox religious identity is normative, with other expressions being viewed as having deficits when, in fact, one hypothesis might be that humanistic worldview and values may be a better fit in the interplay of person and context for some emerging adults. This final point bridges to the next opportunity for the future.

Take more seriously the bidirectionality of development by exploring emerging adults’ personal agency and self-regulation in their religious and spiritual development. Whether focused on peers, technology, family, university, faith community, or other influence, the volume emphasizes the socializing role of contexts in emerging adults’ religious and spiritual development. However, it rarely mentions or explores the extent to which emerging adults are active agents in shaping their own spiritual and religious trajectory and (consistent with the bidirectional influence that is fundamental to developmental systems theories) in influencing the people and contexts around them.

This gap results in an implicit imbalance in power, with the assumption that contexts and socializing agents hold disproportionate influence on individual development, essentially reducing the role of individual to variations in demographic factors with little room for agency based on one’s identity and capacities. This corrective reflects the shift that Bronfenbrenner himself promoted when he re-named his theory a “bioecology” of human development (2005) as a refinement of his original theory of the “ecology” of human development (Bronfenbrenner 1979). In making his case, he wrote: “To a greater extent than for any other species, human beings create the environments that shape the course of human development… This agency makes humans—for better or for worse—active producers of their own development” (Bronfenbrenner 2005, p. xxvii). Thus, he argued, there is a constant need to attend to both the individual and the environment, recognizing that each shapes the other. Such a perspective has yet to shape the theory and research base of spiritual development in emerging adulthood.

If spiritual and religious development are indeed bidirectional, then the field must pay much more attention to how emerging adults are co-creating their experiences and path, and shaping those around them and the contexts in which they are constructing their own identities through their own agency and autonomy. For example, emerging adults may be consuming content from the Web, but they are also actively engaged in creating their own contexts and information online, thus influencing the online ecology for themselves and others.

Similar examples could be drawn from other contexts, including family, higher education, religious communities, workplaces, media, politics, and others—all of which are contexts in which emerging adults can have significant roles in shaping their environments to reflect their religious, spiritual, social, and moral commitments and beliefs. Indeed, few social movements have occurred in the United States that have not featured emerging adults as key actors. In addition, innumerable artistic, athletic, and other areas of accomplishment flourish during this developmental period, with clear potential interactions with identity, meaning, purpose, and transcendence. This gap in the field represents a significant opportunity for new research that will enrich and expand understanding of spiritual and religious development among emerging adults.
Complement the current variable-centered and quantitative approaches with more person-centered and phenomenological studies, particularly to begin understanding the diverse ways that emerging adults are engaging with their contexts and relationships in order to construct their religious and spiritual identities. Though these explorations may be particularly valuable for understanding the lived experiences of persons who have been at the margins of dominant research on spiritual and religious development (such as religious minorities, cultural minorities, and sexual minorities), they are also relevant for shedding light on the diverse and changing ways that a wide range of emerging adults are negotiating the changing dynamics of religion and spirituality around them—particularly if the field is able to develop more robust and consensus-based theories of the definition and dimensions of spiritual development that can inform the design, execution, and interpretation of these inquiries.

In our exploration of spiritual development at Search Institute between 2006 and 2010, we and our partners undertook two studies with adolescents (ages 12–25) in multiple countries and cultures around the world that could foreshadow future opportunities (recognizing the clear limitations of these specific efforts in shedding light on the unique dimensions of spiritual and religious development during emerging adulthood).

The first study involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 30 youth and emerging adults (ages 12–21) in different countries around the world who had been nominated as “spiritual exemplars” by key advisors (King et al. 2013). These young people represented a range of worldviews, including orthodox believers from different religious traditions (particularly Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism) as well as agnostic and atheistic youth. Analysis of the qualitative data identified several common themes, including transcendence, or “a strong sense of awareness of something beyond the mundaneness of life” (p. 11); fidelity, or clear commitments to their beliefs, worldviews, and values (whether religious or humanistic); and behavior or intentional living grounded in their sense of fidelity and transcendence. This intentional living included a focus on contribution, leadership, and morality. This study provided insight into the spiritual lives of diverse young people, offering grounded insights into the ways that spiritual development is manifested in their lives, both within and beyond a religious worldview and community context.

The second study involved an exploratory quantitative study of spiritual development based on a survey of 6,725 youth (ages 12–12) in eight countries involving diverse religious and cultural traditions, including young people who do not identify as religious (Benson et al. 2012). The study sought to validate measures of dimensions of spiritual development that were identified through a consensus-building process with more than 100 advisers from multiple disciplines and contexts. The framework identified three core developmental processes: Awareness or awakening (aligned with King’s emphasis on transcendence); connectedness and belonging; and a way of living (aligned with King’s focus on fidelity).

However, in addition to conducting the needed variable-centered analyses to better understand the relationships among the domains in the survey, person-centered analyses (Latent Class Analysis) were conducted to identify profiles of spiritual development across the sample and within different traditions, building on the theoretical model. Out of these analyses emerged six latent classes, which we labeled as: All High; High Developmental; Discovery and Action; Mindful-Prosocial with Identity; Mindful-Prosocial without Identity; and All Low. Those young people who best fit the All High class strongly endorsed all seven dimensions of religious and spiritual development in the analyses. However, the High Developmental group shared a high endorsement of what were deemed to be spiritual development processes (without specific religious referents), including a prosocial connection with others, discovering meaning, mindfulness, and alignment of values with action. However, these youth did not identify themselves as religious or as engaging in explicitly spiritual or religious practices.

Whether these profiles would remain meaningful in person-centered analyses of emerging adults in the United States remains an open question. However, the study suggested the potential of building person-centered typologies of the spiritual lives of emerging adults that both integrate religious beliefs and practices but also engage a broader developmental and cultural landscape that has the potential to enrich our understanding of spiritual and religious development in ways that advance theory, research, and practice.

Barry and Abo-Zena began their volume with an explicit recognition that the field itself is emergent and in transition, grappling with a range of epistemological, theoretical, methodological, and analytical issues and questions. The contributions they assembled not only bring the field up to its current state, but they foreshadow future prospects for research and practice. One hopes that future efforts can build on this contribution to move the field forward within the dynamic domain of spiritual and religious development within this pivotal period of human development.

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