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Cultural Psychology of Religion: Spiritual Transformation

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Abstract Cultural psychology as a field has emerged over the past 30 years, but little effort has been expended in extrapolating its findings to transformative religious experiences. This essay posits a model of cultural psychology of religion and then uses it to assess Rambo and Farhadian's (2014) *Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*. The collection of essays in this handbook provides extensive and diverse perspectives on significant life changes labeled as such by the individuals involved and/or their communities. Instances of alignment with and departure from a cultural psychology of religion perspective are discussed, with careful attention given to the implications of indigenous views of selfhood, community, and religion for the phenomenon of religious transformation. We present cultural psychology of religion as a mutually constelling network of cultural, psychological, and religious phenomena. Spiritual change, then, is a movement, be it subtle or extreme, from one cultural/psychological world to another. In expounding this view, we will refer for support to three exemplars of spiritual change (one each from the Muslim, Protestant, and Jewish traditions), the literature from the handbook, and other studies on the cultural psychology of religion.

Keywords Cultural psychology · Religion · Conversion · Spiritual transformation · Change

In 1897 Mark Twain cabled from London to the Associated Press: "The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated." The same telegram could be sent today to pundits of secularism who predicted the demise of religion in the 20th century. In spite of ever-present secularism, religions continue to grow, most notably Pentecostal Christianity in the southern hemisphere and Islam worldwide. This persistence of religious sensibility

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underlines the importance of the recent volume by Rambo and Farhadian (2014) entitled *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion.*[1] Our focus, however, will not be on conversion per se but on religious/spiritual transformation, of which conversion is but a special case.

We begin with three stories of profound spiritual experience drawn from a study of spiritual exemplars in the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian traditions (Dueck and Reimer, unpublished data):

> The biggest challenge was coming to United States and keeping the same [religious commitments] that I had in Turkey. This is still a big concern to me and my family. In Turkey, in my old country, everyone talks about Islam, and almost everybody around you is, in their own way, providing some encouragement. They give you the feeling that you are part of a large community that feels the same, shares the same beliefs and ideals. But here it is different. It is a very different place. It is not a Muslim community, and things that supported your beliefs, supported your commitment in Turkey, they are absent here. So to overcome this I try to get together a small but close circle of friends, and things that we cannot do alone we try to do them together just to feel [like] a community. We spend time together and study the Koran together and talk about things. This was the biggest help I had to keep my spirit alive.
>
> —a 36-year-old Muslim male

> I had grown up in the church and it had been important to me to a certain extent, but I had not gone to church very much when I was in college. I had some friends who were very strong in their Christian faith. So I went to another city to study for summer school, and I went with one of these friends and I started going to church with her. And this was a church where people had very strong faith and kids my age. I was not used to that, and at first I thought it was great. And then I began to have a terrible feeling that I really was not a part of this experience. So I felt very sad and depressed, and I talked to my friend and she just, in a very simple way, explained to me about receiving Christ. And all of a sudden Jesus became very real to me. It was like my world had changed into Technicolor from black and white. It was like, I am going to have this relationship and that is what it was for me. Later, I got all of the theology and stuff, but this was the big and important thing. So that was a really big turning point in my life.
>
> —a 42-year-old female Protestant

> I will share an event that changed me, and impacted who I am and how I think about things both as a person and as a Jew. It is a program that is sponsored by the German government that brings Jews over to experience modern Germany in the face of its history, mainly the Holocaust. I participated in it with a group from one of my graduate programs about a year and a half ago, and was so inspired by it that I worked with this German group to get a group from my synagogue to go. It kind of opened my mind to how to engage in dialogue with somebody or some entity that is mired in such a horrible history. And how do

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[1] Hereafter this volume will be referred to as the OHRC.

you hold the people accountable, or do you hold them accountable? And how do you forgive, or do you forgive? Or how do you be in relationship with people who are the grandchildren of those people? And how do you interact with a society that is struggling with this and in the last ten years struggling with reunifying itself as well? It was just such a valuable experience. It has had all kinds of ripple effects. So, whether it made me to be a better person of the Jewish faith I do not know. Although you could argue that anytime you learn those kinds of things it makes you a better person and a more enlightened person and a more thinking person.

<div align="right">—a 36 year-old Jewish male</div>

These three stories of transformation reflect different cultural contexts, psychological processes, and religious scripts. The first focuses on the experience of maintaining one's faith in a new cultural context. The second is a personal narrative of an individual who had a mystical experience of religious transformation (referred to as a conversion in this person's tradition) that was the consequence of a decision made by an individual. The third story is deeply embedded in the history of the Jewish people, the holocaust of the 1940s, and the relationship of Jews to contemporary Germany. This story is experiential, but it is also replete with political issues, a clear ethical edge, and the hope for reconciliation.

From an etic point of view, we think that, in part, the differences in these stories of coming to greater faith are a function of the cultural, communal, and religious contexts that impact the psychological nature of a religious/spiritual change experience. They vary on a host of sociocultural dimensions: the presence of a history of genocide vs. a shift in cultures, urban vs. rural communities, homogeneous vs. pluralistic societies, hierarchical vs. democratic governments, relationship-saturated vs. relationally sparse societies, nations rich in social capital vs. impoverished nations, and dense networks vs. fragmented relational ties. These cultural textures result in a variety of emergent narrative forms of religious experience, as demonstrated in these narratives.

From an emic point of view, the explanations proffered by the participants differ significantly. The Turkish male points to the significant role of similarity of belief and religious fellowship in nurturing his Muslim faith and feelings. The female Protestant also notes the strong faith of caring friends, but a personal encounter with Jesus is the reason she gives for her radical spiritual transformation. The Jewish male describes his spiritual transformation in terms of dialogue with former enemies, of forgiveness, of relational reconciliation—all consistent with Judaism although the author does not necessarily describe his change in Jewish language. Our model is one in which religious transformation is viewed from a cultural psychology point of view. The emic perspective requires that religious transformation viewed/labelled as conversion is appropriate in Christian groups but that this language is alien to Judaism and Islam (Taves 2009).[2]

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[2] As is apparent above and will be evident in subsequent analyses, we think both the etic and emic perspectives are valid and important. Each represents an epistemological community and each is relatively incommensurable in the rationalities and the problems they think are worth researching. Emic research begins with the culture and rationality of the individual, whereas the etic approach takes a transcendent, external perspective. The latter is not necessarily more objective. We use each, in a sense, to critique the other. And, beyond that, we acknowledge moral and theological biases that color our interpretation of the research on spiritual transformation. Our religious convictions regarding religious pluralism extend to an epistemological pluralism. The dialogue between etic and emic perspectives is shaped by a meta-perspective (Tekke et al. 2016) of what is peaceable, what contributes to greater social harmony (Dueck and Reimer 2009).

From the perspective of a cultural psychology of religion (CPOR), this essay reflects on the rich oeuvre provided by the OHRC. We find considerable support for our understanding of CPOR in this tome. The task of reviewing a handbook is daunting, and we are quite aware of our limitations as we roam across disciplines to develop cultural and psychological scaffolding for understanding religious/spiritual transformation. We will therefore focus on particular chapters and insights we find congruent with a culturally sensitive understanding of spiritual transformation.[3]

Though this edited collection of essays does not focus directly on cultural psychology as a paradigm for understanding religious experience/change, it does address, in varying ways, the components of this model. We will examine in turn the cultural context, psychological processes, and religio-ethical dimensions of the model. Cultural psychologists tend to begin with the following assumptions:

1. Culture, personality, and biology are mutually constelling, dynamically interacting dimensions (Shweder 1990);
2. The copresence of culture, self, and neurology is evident, for example, in emotions experienced and expressed; cognitive and learning styles (Nisbett et al. 2001); the meaning of secure attachment (Rothbaum et al. 2011); and the recognition, expression, and treatment of social/emotional problems (Watters 2010); and
3. Epistemologically, cultural psychology seeks to correct the hegemony of etic over emic explanations through a recovery of the indigenous voice (Sundararajan 2015).

A cultural psychology of religion suggests:

1. What the individual refers to as religious/spiritual is copresent in his or her cultural, personal, and neurological history (Belzen 2010; Jeeves and Brown 2009)[4];
2. The narrative an individual or community constructs is a reflection of these mutually constelling "elements" (Weber 1958); and
3. Culture and religion are not homogenized essences but rather function as forces that move the individual toward or away from moral and religious maturity as defined by a normative community (Fuchs 2009; Geertz 1973).

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[3] Throughout this essay we will refer to transformative experiences as religious/spiritual. We are aware of the distinction that has been made repeatedly in Western literature between religion and spirituality. Zinnbauer and his colleagues (Zinnbauer et al. 1997) have been most clear about the distinction. They conclude:

> There is evidence to suggest that the terms religiousness and spirituality describe, in part, different concepts. In terms of the previously outlined hypotheses, religiousness and spirituality have some different correlates. As predicted, religiousness was found to be associated with higher levels of authoritarianism, religious orthodoxy, intrinsic religiousness, parental religious attendance, self-righteousness, and church attendance. In line with predictions, spirituality was associated with a different set of variables: mystical experiences, New Age beliefs and practices, higher income, and the experience of being hurt by clergy. (p. 561)

This conclusion comes as a result of research conducted in the United States and may not hold cross-culturally. The distinction will not play a significant role in our review as our focus is on both religiousness and spirituality as cultural manifestations, as will become apparent below.

[4] Although we acknowledge the role of the neurological in human experience and religious transformation, we will not address that aspect, though the OHRC does have a chapter by Kelly Bulkeley (2014b) entitled "Religious Conversion and Cognitive Neuroscience" (Chapter 10).

A cultural psychology of religious/spiritual change proposes that:

1. Religious transformation can be construed as a shift in cultural loyalty and personal orientation over time in terms of core beliefs, valorized emotions, congruent relationships, and normative practices/behaviors consistent or in opposition to their social, religious, and cultural contexts (Belzen 2010);
2. A personal narrative may label experiences as religious, which is reflective of the convictions and vocabulary of the individual's normative community and tradition (McAdams 2013);
3. The religious dimension can serve to critique, affirm, and/or transform the cultural and individual dimensions (Niebuhr 1951; Stassen and Gushee 2003; Dueck 1995).

The remainder of this essay is composed of two parts. In the first, we discuss each of the components of the CPOR model. In the second part, we show how this scaffold contributes specifically to the study of religious transformation. Throughout both parts, we indicate instances of agreement with, and departure from, the authors of the essays in the OHRC.

Culture, psychology, and religion

What do we mean by culture, psychology, and religion, and how are they related? We will begin by addressing how we will use the term *culture* and then reviewing the cultural psychology paradigm that will frame our discussion of spiritual transformation later in this essay. Then we will apply the CPOR paradigm to religious experience and review a few creative studies that have emerged from the integration of culture, psychology, and religion. Finally, in this section we will suggest implications for an understanding of spiritual transformation from the CPOR paradigm. Although the cultural psychology paradigm has emerged over the past three decades, only a handful of scholars have applied it to religion and fewer yet have explored its implications across cultures. When psychology in general, and psychology of religion in particular, neglect culture, they do so at their own peril, with a potential result being an emergent provincialism.

Culture

Traditionally, culture is viewed in terms of the common beliefs, attitudes, and practices of a particular society, group, place, or time. In our model, culture includes that which creates vitality. Culture functions like a grammar of emotions that may lead to flourishing (Sapir 1924; Scruton 2007; Sundararajan 2015). As a conceptual space, it is largely implicit, functioning at a level below consciousness. Culture is a backdrop that gives meaning to our utterances. If we live in different cultures, we are living in different linguistic worlds with different logics (Dueck 2012). Cultures and communities develop unique cognitive styles, types of emotional expressivity, etc.

In the CPOR paradigm, culture is not an entity separate or external to the person. The relationship between psyche and culture is one of mutual constitution. Bruner (1990) stated boldly that it is impossible "to construct a human psychology on the basis of the individual alone" (p. 12). Mind and culture "live together, require each other, and dynamically, dialectically, and jointly make each other up" (Shweder 1990, p. 1).

In this model, culture, psyche, and religion are not separate dimensions viewed in an essentialist fashion. The individual is, then, a perambulating instantiation of his or her cultures, personal history, and biological constitution at a given point in time. Religion is a manifestation, a mutual constellation of culture, personality, and neurology (Geertz 1973; Ali and Penney 2010). Mind is not simply a mirror image of a neurological blueprint but rather is emergent in an ongoing engagement with society, culture, history, and biology. For example, according to Fiske (1991) culture and behavior are correlative in that the cultural environment provides the niche that triggers culturally shaped behavioral scripts that in turn change culture.

The CPOR model is more organic in that it talks less in terms of causal relationships between discrete entities. Does culture cause change? Gooren (2014) reports that Protestant growth in Guatemala between 1976 and 1986 was *caused* by a combination of factors: "Anomie was constantly high, many new churches were built, missionaries poured in after the 1976 earthquake and conducted evangelization activities, the civil war created higher urbanization rates, and popular Catholicism with its *cofradia* cargo offices had lost its domination" (p. 94). Gooren does question mono-causal theories, but he still affirms a causal model. If we reify culture, then it is possible to talk about how culture causally shapes, influences, or changes an individual. If we begin with a model in which culture, personality, and religion are co-emergent, then it is problematic to isolate these dimensions and identify which dimension is causing specific changes in the other(s).

Culture is better viewed not as monolithic but as constituted by the activity of individuals engaged in everyday life, which reproduces a larger cultural reality of dynamic and objective institutions, rituals, and practices (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940; Gluckman 1963). Culture, psychology, and religion are then emergent, non-reified entities. We find support for this dynamic conception of culture and mind in research that demonstrates the mutual constitution of culture, emotion, and moral understandings (Markus and Kitayama 1994); affective orientations and children's books (Tsai et al. 2007); culture, stress, and expression of pathology (Hinton and Hinton 2002); strong-tie communities, secure attachment, and spirituality (Dueck and Hong 2015); motivational orientations and constructions of success and failure situations (Kitayama et al. 1997); personal identity and societal master narratives (Hammack and Cohler 2011); and national identity and constructions of history (Carretero and Kriger 2011).

The CPOR model qualifies the individualist position that privileges what is inside the person and marginalizes the social context. Richard Shweder (1990) has perspicaciously pointed out that psychologists presume that within the individual there is a central core processor that is universal and that culture is only an overlay that superficially influences the core processor. Paul Bloom (2010) has argued against essentialism, which is when "people have a default assumption that things, people, and events have invisible essences that make them what they are" (p. 28). A similar point has been made by Nisbett (2015). In the CPOR model, our thoughts, feelings, actions, values, religious beliefs, and relationships are constituted as we interact with our cultural environment. Our meanings, attitudes, images, representations, and cultural products are constellated by interpersonal interactions, institutional practices, and social systems. This notion is consistent with Lévinas's idea that the self is constituted in the gaze of and encounter with the other (Lévinas 1998). The relationship between the personal and the cultural is dialectical; both the individual and the culture are in a

process of dynamic change. Thus, within the cultural psychology paradigm, culture and self are emerging processes, not entities. Kurtiş and Adams (2013) comment:

> As an antidote to problematic reifications of culture and self, the mutual constitution framework emphasizes the ongoing, dynamic production of culture and mind. From this perspective, cultural participation is less about conscious indoctrination into bounded systems of timeless traditional values than it is engagement with particular cultural-ecological patterns: that is, the structures of everyday worlds—including institutions, practices, artifacts, and discursive tools—that scaffold psychological experience.... At the same time, cultural worlds are not static, timeless entities, but reflect and require culturally grounded actors who continually reproduce them with the psychological charge of their particular desires and beliefs. (p. 2)

Psychology

Since cultures differ, then, from the perspective of cultural psychology, there will be significant differences in individuals coming from these different cultures. Identities are not the same across cultures. Sundararajan (2015) has developed a helpful model to understand culture through the eyes of psychology such that culture acts as a "repository of emotional knowledge" (p. 3). Cultural differences in emotions, she argues, cannot be explained with resort to simple binaries such as individualism versus collectivism. Such a breakdown is fundamentally etic and ignores indigenous styles of cognition and understandings of corporate identity. Sundararajan posits instead a model of culture in terms of symmetry breakdown and restoration, synergy versus scarcity-based societies (Katz and Murphy-Shigematsu 2012), communities with strong ties rather than weak ties (Granovetter 1978, 1983), communal sharing rather than market-based relationships, focusing on developing relationships rather than controlling the environment, holistic versus analytic cognitive styles, low cognitive control versus high cognitive control, etc. Given this plethora of dimensions that separate cultures and communities, the task of understanding religious transformation and change is complexified. Little empirical research has been conducted to test this multi-dimensional model of culture, but there is some research underway that applies it to religious transformation or experience (L. Sundararajan, personal communication, October 15, 2015).

Since hundreds of studies have used self-construal as a way of describing cultural differences, we reference two models of adult self-construal (Kitayama and Cohen 2007; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Markus and Conner 2013). These psychological syndromes are clusters of independent and/or interdependent behaviors that are associated with communities and cultures that differ in the ways described in the previous paragraph. We do not assume that the self-other emphasis is necessarily a cultural trait, but we do assume that it impacts the orientation of individuals, couples, neighborhoods, communities, institutions, and societies. Cultures can encourage both independent and interdependent orientations depending on whether they have communities with strong or weak ties, engage in communal sharing and instrumental relationships, or are relationally thick or thin (Sundararajan 2015; Fiske 1991).

The two self-construals, the independent self and the interdependent self, are related to other cultural differences mentioned above such as cognitive styles and the texture of relationships. In the first, where the person is the center of attention, it is hoped that this individual will grow to be autonomous, authentic, respectful of others, and from this position

of independence will develop significant relationships with others. At best, this individual possesses self-confidence and is unique, assertive, expressive, and intentional (Markus and Conner 2013).

In other communities, and even within the individual, there is an emphasis on the whole of which the individual is a part. Here, social harmony is highly valued. The healthy individual is one who is aware of the needs of the other and is willing to accommodate them. The larger whole is acknowledged more often than the individual part. The model individual is one capable of controlling his or her own emotions, sacrificing on behalf of the other, belonging, fitting in, maintaining harmony, and promoting others' goals (Kitayama et al. 2007; Markus and Kitayama 1991).

In a key article on the cultural psychological paradigm, Markus and Kitayama (1991) report on research that demonstrates that people from different cultures have profoundly different construals of the self and of others and that these construals often determine "the very nature of individual experience, including cognition, emotion, and motivation" (p. 224). In terms of cognition, a sample of Asian participants in a study categorized objects and events in terms of their interconnections but a sample of Western participants focused on individual properties (Nisbett et al. 2001). The fundamental attribution error (overemphasizing dispositions relative to contextual explanations of behavior) is more evident in Americans than Asians (Wu et al. 2014).

Culture is incarnated in the individual as well as institutions (Ratner 2012). From the CPOR perspective, the mature individual is one who can successfully engage the intricate systems of meaning, ethical demands and expectations, customary practices, and honored institutions that populate a person's everyday life.

Religion

If culture and personal experience are mutually constellated, one would expect that the psychological nature of religious experience would also be implicated. If culture is evident in the nature and quality of emotions, cognitions, behavior, and relationships, one would expect that religious experience, which involves all of these, would be similarly affected.

Cultural psychology can correct one of the oldest mistakes of traditional psychology of religion, which is the failure to understand religion as a phenomenon of culture. Clifford Geertz (1973) in his *Interpretation of Culture* makes the case that religion is profoundly cultural in nature. Jakob Belzen (2009) proposes that the CPOR perspective should take into account the specific form of life (Wittgenstein 1958) in which the subjects are involved.

> The results obtained are not valid for every person and/or group in every religion... as there is no such thing as religion-in-general, but only specific forms of life going by the label "religion," and... the psychology of religion should try to detect how a specific religious form of life constitutes, involves and regulates the psychic functioning of its adherents. (pp. 50–51)

The synonymy of culture and religion/spirituality was articulated by Sapir some 90 years ago. Sapir (1924) averred that a genuine culture is one that "gives its bearers a sense of inner satisfaction, a feeling of spiritual mastery" (p. 420). He suggests that culture is a collective spiritual effort. Sundararajan (2014) concludes: "Genuine culture may be operationally defined as ideals and aspirations that apply across contexts and that inspire continuous striving for excellence" (p. 3).

Well-designed empirical studies to test the co-creation of religious experience and culture are only beginning to emerge. A stellar example is the research by Cohen and Hill (2007). They theorized that religious cultures vary in emphasis on the individual or on the community. They demonstrated that religion for Jews is more about community and biological descent, but for Protestants religion is about personal beliefs. Using the familiar intrinsic and extrinsic scale for religious motivation, Cohen and Hill discovered that Jews, Catholics, and Protestants endorsed the scales differently. This supported their view that religious cultures with intrinsic religiosity focus on personal religion, whereas religious cultures that scored high on extrinsic religiosity stressed community and ritual. Significant life experiences are more likely to be social for Jews, whereas Protestants are more likely to focus on a personal God.

Cultural psychology points to the mutual constitution of cultural and psychological dynamics. Religion is not a tertiary construct but rather a particular form of this dialectic. The CPOR model, therefore, moves beyond the limitations of singular disciplinary approaches to religion/spirituality by situating religious change within the broader cultural-psychological dynamic in and from which it emerges.

Cultural psychology of religious/spiritual transformation

The model described above leads us to a mutually constelling view of spiritual change as a cultural, psychological, and religious phenomenon. The three individuals whose stories we began with illustrate the point we want to make in this section. Religious transformation is not simply an individual process. The individual narrators are cultural beings. Thus, spiritual change involves a cultural psychological shift to something new, such as a new religious language, which is also cultural and psychological in nature and which is perceived as spiritually more meaningful. Religious transformation is then construed as an individual or group moving toward, adopting, or adhering to a normative culture or dimension of culture different from the one the individual or group was socialized into. The model proposes that the psychological dynamics implicit in religious experiences of transformation or conversion reflect or react to the cultural ambience, giving the individual a mutually constelling sense of identity. The person converting to Christianity is not only accepting a belief system but may also be entering or deepening a commitment to one of the many subcultures of Christianity (Southern Baptist, Presbyterian, mystic, generic evangelical, emerging church, etc.). From an emic point of view, this paradigm suggests that the religious community or ethos provides a script that attests to the validity and veracity of the conversion experience.

What might be the specific implications of a cultural psychology perspective for the study of religious transformation and conversion?

1. Shweder and Bourne (1984) demonstrated that Oriyan Indians place more emphasis on actions vs. abstract traits than do Euro-Americans. A cultural psychologist of religion might ponder whether a religious/spiritual transformation that reflects the individual's culture would appear psychologically as more practical in some subcultures and more mystical in other cultures. The example of the Muslim male struggling to find a faith community to nurture his religious commitment touches on this issue. Important for him were the pragmatic enactments of his faith in the context of a community.

2. Tsai (2006) has demonstrated that there are significantly different perspectives on hierarchy in Asian societies compared to Euro-American societies. Hierarchy is generally respected in the East and denigrated in the West. How might religious transformation be construed differently in hierarchical or less hierarchical cultures? For example, the violent history of abuses of power such as that of Nazi Germany has created suspicion of hierarchy in the West. That history, with its implications on the role of hierarchy, features prominently in the experience of the Jewish exemplar above.

3. The empirical literature on structural differences in cultures and communities (Kitayama and Cohen 2007) repeatedly points to the significant role of independent vs. interdependent self-construals. Is it possible that interdependent persons interested in converting are more attracted psychologically to communal religions in societies that are more collective? Conversely, are independent conversions more attractive to interdependent persons who are weary of the demands of interdependence (Jindra 2014)? The movement between styles of self-construal can be subtle. The Muslim exemplar discussed above was forced to adapt to a more independent style of living that had implications on how his religious commitments could be fulfilled. The Jewish and Protestant exemplars, on the other hand, are marked by more fluid associations with other members of the faith community.

4. Culture constellates emotions (Bedford and Hwang 2003; Sundararajan 2015) in terms of what triggers an emotion, how it is labeled, the behaviors it evokes, etc. Emotions do not simply vary in degree across cultures but may be qualitatively different or even absent. Given that a religious experience can evoke considerable emotion, how does culture affect the emotions a convert reports or chooses to nurture? The case of the Protestant female illustrates how spiritual transformation can involve new styles of emoting that are normalized, if not idealized, within a particular sociocultural context. Those emotive styles can in turn serve as a litmus test for the authenticity of the spiritual/religious transformation.

With the CPOR paradigm as the scaffold for reflection on spiritual transformation, we will proceed as follows. We outline a cultural, psychological, and religious interpretation of transformation in light of the research provided in the OHRC. In each of the following sections we focus on one of these dimensions and its relationship to the other two. We find considerable congruence between our perspective and the findings reported in the OHRC. We hope the CPOR model will serve a heuristic function, illuminating gaps where more theory and research are needed.

Religious transformation from a cultural perspective

From an organic perspective, we will examine how culture functions in relationship to the individual in the process of religious transformation. In this approach, religious transformation can reflect, counter, and/or reinforce the ambient culture. Moreover, the understanding of individual change takes on different meanings depending on the cultural context. Converting in religiously pluralistic America may well be different from a religious/spiritual shift taking place in Mauritania, where 90 % of the population is Muslim (Johnson 2014, p. 49). Hefner (1993a) notes that an individualistic Christian message is less appealing to communities that see the individual as socially embedded. However, where social cohesion is in decline, "The individualism of the Christian message may be powerfully appealing, legitimating

nonconformism and the organization of new forms of social relationships" (as cited in Gooren 2014, p. 89). Further, Peter Wood (1993) points out that "Christian belief makes little to no headway in circumstances, such as appear to be widespread among Amazonian and some Mexican Indians and among Australian Aborigines, where the universe is conceived as fundamentally fixed. The native religions in such cultures emphasize conceptual and ritual congruity" (p. 309, as cited in Gooren 2014, p. 90).

Cultural kindling

Cultural context shapes the texture of religious transformation. Cassaniti and Luhrmann (2014) apply the notion of "kindling" experiences to cross-cultural patterns of spiritual experiences. Cultural kindling is a process by which "people pay attention to what they sense and feel in search of evidence of the spiritual and [lower] the threshold of its identification through the body" (p. S341).

> These are events of the body that happen in many social settings but are only identified as religious in those social settings when they afford, or make available, an interpretation that makes sense in a specific religious tradition. Everyone cries, but only in settings when strong emotion makes sense as an experience of divinity will crying be "deemed religious." (p. S334)

The process occurs in the way certain bodily experiences are perceived and labeled as spiritual. For example, members of the Vineyard Church in the United States are likely to conceptualize sudden bodily pains and changes in air temperature as a demonic presence, whereas Thai Buddhists are less likely (20 % versus 70 %) to report experiencing the presence of a "bad spirit." In the same study, sleep paralysis, which has entered the psychiatric literature only recently, was not labeled by 33 % of Vineyard Church members as an explicitly spiritual experience, in comparison to 55 % of Thai Buddhists who had a name for this experience (Phi Am) and tended to talk at length about it as a spiritual event.

Individual conversion as migrating to new cultures

From a cultural perspective, religious transformation involves entering a new tradition, a sudden or gradual transition between two or more cultures by an individual or a group. It is the process whereby a person or group adopts the practices, ethos, symbols, beliefs, and attitudinal perspectives of a new community/culture. At this level, conversion is not simply the result of an individual decision. Rather, conversion is seen as an aspect of religious change that is itself a "particular form" of the constant mutual constitution of culture and psyche. A conversion is then an instance of a conception of psychological change that is broader than a model Protestant conversion.

Marc David Baer (2014, pp. 25–47) suggests there is a progression from adherence to the beliefs of a new religious culture to a full transformation or saturation of the psyche by the adopted religious culture. Matteo Ricci couched Christianity in China in language consonant with Confucian principles, arguing that conversion to Christianity was at first syncretistic; the religious traditions were practiced in parallel with the Confucian tradition. However, Baer points out that over centuries converts and their descendants may return to their native culture,

reject their native culture, adopt the new religious tradition while retaining some older cultural traditions, or immerse themselves fully in the new religious culture.

In the experience of the first author (Dueck), Islam is the foreign religion that has most adapted to Chinese culture. This is consistent with Baer's (2014) observations:

> In China and Africa, syncretistic religious beliefs and practices were often the norm. Traders as well as rulers lived complicated lives keeping two competing value systems in play. Arabs gave Islam a Chinese origin, linked Chinese mythology to Islamic history, claimed the father of monarchical China was a Muslim, and promoted the common origins of Islam and Confucianism as well as the similar aims of Buddhism and Islam. Chinese Muslims used incense, Chinese texts, and local languages in worship, adorned their mosques with Chinese Qur'anic quotations, and wore Chinese funeral dress. Over the course of centuries, Muslim Arabs were Sinicized, and some turned away from Islam. (p, 31)

Religious change may take place when the culture an individual seeks to adopt is similar to the one left behind. Mexican anthropologist Carlos Garma (2001) points out that faith healings, miracles, dreams and visions, charismatic religious leaders, and dramatic ritual performances in Native American traditions are similar to those found in Pentecostalism. This similarity in rituals played a role in Pentecostalism becoming an attractive option for Native American converts.

Unconscious processes, history, and culture

One fascinating example of the mutual constellation of culture, history, and individual religious converting is the role of culture and dreams in the process of transformation. Patricia Davis (2005) examined dreams and visions of Anglo-Saxons in the 7th and 8th centuries. Davis proposed that dreams served an instrumental purpose in the integration of Christianity as the populace encountered Christian teachings (as cited in Bulkeley 2014a, pp. 268–269). Using a wide range of sources from ecclesiastical culture to cultural analyses, the data included dreams relating to the birth of a child; vocation dreams; dreams that inspired people to create poems or songs; and dreams of temptation and consolation, otherworldly journeys, prophecies of death and destruction, and saints and relics. The affinity of the dreams to the Christian message is evident. Missing in her analysis, however, is a historical developmental process to demonstrate a more direct relationship to the community's learning about Christianity, followed by individuals experiencing the dreams, and finally the acceptance of Christianity by a large segment of the population.

Although Davis's research provides a good illustration of the symbiotic nature of culture and psyche, we think the relationship is more dialectical than linear when dreams are reflecting and reinforcing the historical process. Lohmann's (2001) case study in Papua New Guinea showed that the "relatively sudden and complete Asabano conversion to Christianity was greatly facilitated by dreaming" (p. 128). Lohmann obtained dream reports of belief patterns remembered from precontact days, the conversion process, and current beliefs and then demonstrated that dreaming is "a catalyst for cultural transmission, providing personal experiential verification of incoming information" (p. 112). Lohmann concluded: "In cultures that embrace the classic belief that dreams are true experiences of the soul, evidence from dreams can be a necessary factor in the cultural transmission of religious beliefs that lack

direct physical perceptive verification" (p. 128). This is evidence of the process of a mutual constellation of cultural and psychological processes in becoming religious.

Individual and communal understanding

Individualistic understandings of religious change are problematic when we take culture seriously. The authors in the OHRC studiously avoid simplistic explanations of conversion in terms of personal autonomy and agency. In an individualistic model of religious transformation, communal rituals are emphasized less, social responsibility is muted, and culture creation is not emphasized. Anthropologists and psychologists in the past have often construed religious experience largely in terms of individual psychological categories. Hefner (1993a, p. 20) stated: "At the very least—an analytic minimum—conversion implies the acceptance of a new locus of self-definition, a new, though not necessarily exclusive, reference point for one's identity" (as cited in Gooren 2014, p. 89). American anthropologist Susan Harding (1987) defined religious change as the process of acquiring a specific religious language and joining a particular narrative tradition.

Furthermore, the individualism of American society reinforces individualistic conversions. Evangelicalism in the West and the missionary movement over the past several centuries made the individual experience of conversion central. From Billy Sunday to Billy Graham, individuals in huge audiences were invited to come forward to publicly declare their faith and make the decision to be followers of Jesus Christ. Missionaries from the 'field' sent home reports detailing the number of new converts added to the fold. Consistent with their Western culture, conversion was seen primarily as an individual act; the cultural context seemed irrelevant.

Change as universal or particular

From the CPOR point of view, universal models of religious transformation are eschewed in favor of particular, indigenous descriptions. Anthropologist Anthony Wallace (1956) developed a model of change he thought was universal that included five invariant stages of religious revitalization: a steady state, increased individual stress, cultural distortion, revitalization, and a new steady-state. Tippett's (1977) group model of conversion offers a systematic heuristic tool for understanding conversion processes that he thought was applicable all over the world. Based on their extensive ethnographic research with Pentecostal and Black power movements, Gerlach and Hine (1970) identified the following stages in change: (1) initial contact with a participant, (2) focus of needs through demonstration, (3) re-education through group interaction, (4) decision and surrender, (5) the commitment event, (6) testifying to the experience, and (7) group support for cognitive and behavioral changes. They too believed that the key factors influencing the development of religious and social movements were universal. Saroglou (2011) proposed the following as universal dimensions of religion: believing, bonding, behaving, and belonging, but he suggests that each of these dimensions varies when culture is added into the mix.

In contrast, cultural psychologists place explicit emphasis on particularity but avoid the urge to generalize prematurely. The psychological impact of culture on emotions, reasoning, decision-making, motivation to develop a worldview, pathology, and healing appear to be both varied and profound (Markus and Kitayama 1991, 1994). To the degree that a religious change involves any of these dimensions, quick generalization across cultures is problematic.

In our view, the CPOR model would begin with indigenous understandings of religious transformation. As indicated above, the CPOR paradigm moves us to greater emphasis on indigenous understandings of spirituality. Appropriately, Baer emphasizes an emic epistemology (Baer 2014). That would suggest that conversion should be interpreted from the perspective of the local psychological anthropology, the local understanding of modernity (Robbins 2001), and the particular indigenous religion. The research presented by Baer is largely and narrowly shaped by the discipline of cultural anthropology, and thus the psychological and religious correlates are made less explicit.

Collectivism and globalization

Sundararajan (2015) offers an example of how indigenous categories can be a corrective to supposedly universal models. She challenges Western configurations of individualist-collectivist explanations of global differences in social organization and self-construal by suggesting that Western "individualism" can, in fact, be interpreted as a type of collectivism. "There are two types of collectivism—collective (group-based) versus relational (relationship-based). Group-based collectivism focuses on adaptation to the group through paying one's dues and conforming to group norms; relational collectivism capitalizes on involvement and commitment in personal connections" (p. 40). She goes on to show how similar distinctions account for distinctly American styles of collectivism that differ from Asian styles of collectivism. Thus, she deconstructs the notion of Western individualism, making room for a plurality of collectivisms within a global context.

This resistance to simplistic binaries of global differences resonates with other accounts of Christian conversions in China. Fenggang Yang (2005), reporting on a series of ethnographic interviews conducted with Chinese Christians between 2000 and 2003, says, "For the Western-oriented Chinese, Christianity is not something traditional, conservative, or restrictive. Rather, it is perceived as progressive, liberating, modern, and universal. For Chinese converts, Christianity is a faith that provides peace, certainty, and liberation amid bewildering market forces and a stifling political atmosphere" (p. 425). Yang goes on to suggest that these characteristics of "modernity and cosmopolitanism" are shared with McDonald's, the hamburger restaurant.

Many of Yang's interviewees requested to meet at McDonald's where they could enjoy a private table to discuss their faith. Christians in the area were in the practice of holding Bible studies and other religious gatherings at McDonald's. "It was noisy," Yang says, "But the noisiness itself seemed to be a layer of protection—we did not need to worry much about the listening ears at nearby tables. As religion remains a politically sensitive topic in today's China, these kinds of precautions seem necessary" (p. 437).

The symbolic significance of McDonald's and Christianity is not a simple matter of Westernization, "but more for a sense of connecting with the outside world, reflecting the Chinese desire for global integration and modernity.... In a symbolic sense, adopting Christianity and eating at McDonald's make the Chinese feel they have gained an equal footing with the Americans and other Westerners as modern world citizens" (p. 438).

Modernity, colonialism, and tradition

The CPOR model would recognize that religious transformations occur in, and are a response to, a particular host culture seen as alien or congenial. While it may be overemphasized in anthropological literature, the cultural context of modernity cannot be overlooked. Robin Horton (1971) proposed that the boundaries of traditional communities become more porous as the lesser local spirits are replaced by the one Supreme Being. He argued that the success of the world religions of Christianity and Islam in Africa is related to encroaching modernity. From the CPOR perspective, change might lead to the adoption of the colonizer's vision of society. Robert Berkhofer (1963) reported that as the number of conversions increased in Native American communities between 1760 and 1860, the social structure of the native community broke down and the new tribal political organization was modeled on American society, with written constitutions and elected officers. The CPOR perspective would recognize the critical impact colonization and oppressive governments might have on the texture of religious transformation. The religion that Constantine imposed on his captives is the archetypal Western example of forced conversions. Religious colonization in the next millennium followed suit. The influence of Western colonialism on conversion meant that becoming a Christian often meant the rejection of one's cultural heritage (Hefner 1993b). Anthropologist Birgit Meyer (1998, p. 9) in her study of the Ewe of Ghana points out:

> Baptism implied that a person had to choose a new Christian—preferably Biblical—name, to reject any 'connection with idol-worship': to refrain from participation in 'heathen ceremonies': and to take off all *dzo* ('medicine/magic') strings and amulets.... Every Sunday congregations had to attend church punctually and neatly dressed." (as cited in Gooren 2014, p. 90)

The constellation of culture and religious transformation includes teaching by the older generation and modeling behavior consistent with the community's ideals. Conceivably, spiritual transformation in more interdependent, collectivist communities will involve membership in a spiritual community with agreed-upon sets of practices and a normative story. We imagine there would be the constellating influence of family, clan, and persons in authority. A change in religious affiliation can come as the result of an encouraging network of friends (Rambo 1993). That is, transformation is bringing one's religious behavior into alignment with family and friends (Stark and Finke 2000). Spiritual transformation would include the willingness to subordinate oneself to a tradition. Whether temple, church, mosque, or synagogue, institutional religion carries spirituality. This spirituality may be concerned with an ethical understanding of religion where loss of self is encouraged.

Gervais and his colleagues (Gervais et al. 2011) grant that the transmission of religious concepts depends on evolutionary cognitive biases that influence the individual to selectively attend to spirituality in their environment (Barrett 2004). However, they also believe there are inherited cultural factors that are integrated into a person's cultural beliefs. Cultural explanations help us to understand why some deities, such as Zeus, are perceived as fictional characters in a myth but other deities evoke belief, commitment, and devotion. Henrich and McElreath (2003) comment: "Our species is addicted to culture, and the vast bulk of preferences, emotions,

attitudes and beliefs are—or can be—influenced by transmission from other members of their social group.... We argue that a scientific understanding of the origins of religious faith would be incomplete without considering this critical dependence on others as sources of information" (p. 4). Gervais and his colleagues state:

> Most religious people adopt the religious beliefs of their parents and surrounding communities, rather than coming to believe in every memorable or attention-grabbing supernatural agent to which they are exposed. If most of the people in a learner's environment—and especially if the most successful people in the area—say that Zeus throws lightning bolts, or that Yahweh will judge people for their sins, it is likely that the learner will come to believe these propositions, just as the learner will come to adopt the styles of dress or cuisine also demonstrated by the rest of the community. (Gervais et al. 2011, p. 10)

Gervais and his colleagues argue that the content of beliefs not only emerges naturally but also is dependent on the context of cultural scaffolding. Harris and Gimenez (2005) found that when the death of a grandparent was framed in religious terms, Catholic children could successfully recount a religious conception of death, including the notion of immortality, but only after they had had some religious teaching and were cued to do so.

Evidence from the World Values Survey data reveals that of the 86,209 individuals in the survey who reported having had a religious upbringing, 84 % became explicitly religious. But of the persons raised without religion (16 %), less than half became explicitly religious (Gervais et al. 2011, p. 16). Moreover, people come to believe in the religious beliefs of those who embody those beliefs (Henrich 2009).

Summary

Cultural psychology frames the dialectic within which instances of religious change emerge. Universal models of conversion dampen the richness of local instances of religious transformation. Such phenomena can best be accessed by examining indigenous understandings of the particular constellation of cultural, psychological, and religious processes that are unique to the community.

Religious transformation from an individual psychological perspective

The second dimension in this mutual constellation model of religious transformation is the emergent individual. To focus now on the individual may give the impression that we are able to extract the individual from a constantly oscillating dynamic with culture and religion. We will talk about the individual for the purposes of exploration but do not assume that existentially the individual, culture, and religion are separable; they are copresent (Saroglou, 2011). In this section we focus on the individual's experience of culture, community-mediated religious change, transformation that imagines a different social reality, and conversions that are fundamentally interdependent rather than only individual. We imagine that persons from different religious cultures and subcultures might construe and experience religion differently in their transformation experiences.

If it is the case that culture constellates different modes of individual forms of thinking, emoting, learning, deciding, etc., then the converting experiences of individuals should vary widely across cultures. If adult spirituality has been found to be related to the individual's attachment experiences (Granqvist and Kirkpatrick 2004), what is the impact of culture? If religious transformation is a form of personal meaning-making (Paloutzian 2014), does not culture provide the cognitive frames and the linguistic apparatus? To be sure, converting often involves a profound emotional experience, but the particular emotions experienced may be filtered and prioritized by the community in which the conversion takes place. The notion that one can be spiritual but not religious may reflect cultures that are more religiously pluralistic, more secular, and/or more psychological (Madsen 2014). Finally, if culture functions unconsciously, religious transformation may also be a process hidden to consciousness.

Attachment, emotion, and religious culture

When individual attachment processes are not understood from a cultural point of view, religious change is viewed as an extension of individual developmental processes. Granqvist and Kirkpatrick's (2004) meta-analysis of a series of their studies examined perceived attachment to caregivers in relation to converting. Attachment was assessed by ratings of vignettes that described a caregiver as consistently warm and predictable to hurtful and unpredictable. Participants were asked to rate the quality of their own parents' caregiving. Converting was assessed by responses to questions about whether they had experienced a major change in religious beliefs and whether that change was sudden or gradual. A third measure assessed emotional closeness to God. They found that gradual conversions were related to a secure history and socialization-based religiosity, and sudden conversions were linked to an insecure history and emotionally based religiosity.

The points we wish to make here are several. First, this view of attachment is indigenous to the Euro-American social context in which the research was conducted. The attachment paradigm of Bowlby and Ainsworth has been demonstrated to be specific to cultures and communities that place greater emphasis on the individual than do other cultures and communities (Rothbaum et al. 2011). Attachment processes in more relational cultures are quite different as the ultimate goal is to socialize the individual into a more interdependent culture. Second, the authors use an individual definition of religion as personal belief in and emotional closeness to a transcendent being, a view of religion that is individualistic and non-ethical. One wonders whether attachment processes in more interdependent communities might lead to transformative religious experiences that are more social in nature (Dueck and Hong 2015).

Culture, emotions, and transformation

There are ligaments between culture, emotion, and moral/religious transformation. Some emotions reflect cultural and community values, and experiencing these emotions reinforces cultural, communal, and personal identity. Cultures and communities can constellate those emotions that are consistent with self-construal, a culture's moral texture, and the emotions emphasized by a particular religious community. The range of emotions available to the individual in terms of labels and their importance varies with the cultural and religious context. Also, different cultures/communities make

different emotions salient, and experiencing these emotions in their own culture/community is what individuals find morally and spiritually satisfying.

If some emotions are preferred over other emotions in a particular culture, one might ask of any religious/spiritual change the extent to which culturally valorized emotions are implicit in the transformation experience. The cultural code determines emotion in a variety of ways:

(a)   The kind of situation in which an emotion (or perception or self-concept) is elicited;
(b)   The strength of the emotion;
(c)   The kind of emotion—anger, guilt, and/or depression;
(d)   The concrete quality of the emotion—tinged with superiority or egalitarian; and
(e)   The dynamic of the phenomenon—how it is generated through concepts and related emotions. (Ratner 2012, p. 14)

Emotions experienced, then, are culturally constelled—unique to some cultures but not others. This would suggest that some religious cultures emphasize emotions differently from other religious communities, and this in turn could impact what constitutes a genuine converting experience or religious transformation.

One way cultures mediate the impact on emotions is self-construal. Kitayama and Markus (1990) discovered that independent and interdependent self-construal is correlated to personal- and other-oriented emotion words in Japanese. The independent person assumes that emotions are a unique configuration of internal attributes, that they are ego focused (e.g., "I was treated unfairly"), and that they reinforce individual autonomy. The individual may nurture these emotions, privilege them, express them, and behave accordingly. Hence, independent individuals would create distance from others so as to reduce others' influence and increase internal influence. We imagine that the independent person values such emotions as happiness, success, uniqueness, control, romance, and personal satisfaction. Since there is much separation between people, the emotions serve an integrating function between the individual and culture.

Emotions experienced by persons with a self-construal that is interdependent are different (see Kitayama and Markus 1990). Interpersonal and intersubjective emotions such as shame and deference receive greater attention. An interdependent individual committed to taking the perspective of the other might find emotions such as feelings of affiliation, calmness, connectedness, sympathy, and humility as self-validating and culturally appropriate. They may be so other-focused that they are unaware of their own emotions (Markus and Kitayama 1991). Matsumoto (1989) found that individuals from more hierarchical interdependent cultures rated lower the intensity of emotions such as fear, anger, and sadness displayed in photos than did individuals from less hierarchical independent cultures.

Given the above analysis, the emotions attendant upon a religious transformation experience may well be different across cultures. Cultures vary in terms of emotional suppression and rules for which emotions to express. They differ in the emotional vocabulary available for describing an emotional experience. The English language has over 2000 emotion words, but the Chewong of Malaysia have only seven (Howell 1981). Americans valorize happiness, but other cultures prize harmony (Kitayama et al. 2000). One would then expect that the emotions expressed in a transformative religious experience would vary with the emotions prioritized in a particular culture or religious community. Emmons and Paloutzian (2003) comment: "Forgiveness might be

expressed or even defined differently in various cultural contexts and communities. Individualistic models of forgiveness would tend to construe forgiveness as a personal decision or choice, whereas individuals in collectivistic cultures would tend to operate according to strongly proscribed social norms" (p. 387).

Converting that takes place within a particular religious culture or community may unconsciously reflect the latter's dominant emotions. Christians, for example, prefer high-arousal positive states such as excitement, whereas Buddhists value lower-arousal positive states such as calmness (Tsai et al. 2007). In their study on nine discrete emotions among Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, and Jewish participants from about 40 nations, Kim-Prieto and Diener (2009) found that Christians listed love more often, whereas Muslims listed sadness and shame more frequently. Saroglou (2011) comments:

> Religious preferences for specific emotions may parallel cultural specifics in emotions. However, one cannot exclude the alternative idea that religious emotions complement what culture emphasizes in emotions. For instance, in collectivistic societies people may need to practice meditation and experience interiority in order to transcend group barriers and focus on the individual self. In individualistic cultures, people may need collective rituals to transcend the self's limits and isolation and experience collective emotions of belonging to larger groups. (p. 1329)

Individual reactions against a host culture

The CPOR model of religious conversion/transformation/change is sensitive to an individual's reactions against his or her host culture or culture of origin. Ines Jindra (2014) argues that the background experiences of those who convert are important, pointing out three ways that such experiences play into converting: experiences of not enough structure (too open/disorganized cultural milieu), too much structure (closed cultural milieu), and feeling at home in one's milieu of origin (pp. 61–68). Accordingly, religions that offer contrasting (for the too open or too closed) or familiar (for those who feel at home) cultural milieu will be more attractive. Thus, the flexibility of more liberal religions might be seen as freeing to individuals who have had negative experiences of an overly conservative culture or family background, and a more conservative religion might be seen as safe and protective to those from an overly liberal background. Those who experienced their cultural or familial backgrounds as positive are likely to convert to religions that offer a sense of structural continuity.

Language, cultural narratives, and scripts

The CPOR model of religious transformation takes seriously the role of language, narrative, and meaning-making. Language, culture, and converting are related. Stromberg (2014) makes a significant case for the role of language in religious transformation. Taves (2009) has argued that a religious experience is one that a person deems as religious. Hence, an experience of conversion is religious because the individual and his or her community deem it so. If the community is religious, its construal of the transformative event or process will perforce be religious in nature. For those who view religious conversion as meaning-making, it is important to remember that the meanings of similar words in different religious traditions might

be quite various. In this regard, Wittgenstein's (1953) assertion that linguistic meaning is community dependent is relevant.

The definition of conversion by Western psychologists has long been implicitly Protestant. If one begins with a Christian conversion, this may involve the individual's response to God's love, forgiveness, and faithfulness. Christian conversion is assumed to be uniquely individual in that it is a radical turning from sin, self-centeredness, and disobedience to forgiveness, love, and submission. Choice is involved. The converts are engaged in accepting the truth into their heart, sharing their experience with others, and separating themselves from an evil world. Conversion involves a change of heart and is thus inward. It results in the satisfaction of some of an individual's deepest longings to be loved, forgiven, and remembered. It is an act that confirms the essential dignity of the person in the eyes of God.

The Protestant bias is evident in the assumption made by psychologists of religion that conversion is a sudden, individual act, like that of the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus or of Augustine alone in a garden hearing the words "Take up and read." In 1902 William James delivered the Gifford Lectures in Scotland that resulted in his book *Varieties of Religious Experience* (James 1908/James 1990). James's view of religious experience was largely focused on ecstatic, individual, spiritual experiences reflecting Protestant religious culture. For over a century this book has shaped Western research on conversion as a psychological experience. The Protestant bias in explanations of conversion is also evident in the assumptions of the early psychologist of religion Edwin Starbuck, who proposed that conversion would be preceded by a negative psychological state that included anxiety depression, guilt, doubt, and unhappiness. That could have been written about Luther's conversion. Paloutzian (2014) points out that contemporary psychology of religion is no longer focused only on conversion in orthodox Protestant groups but now includes converting to traditions such as Orthodox Judaism, Islam, Jehovah's Witnesses, Unitarian Universalism, or atheism.

The CPOR model of religion would predict that since self-construal in Western societies and communities tends toward independence, this would be reflected in more individually oriented conversion narratives. Independent individuals will seek a form of spirituality or religion that is personally and emotionally fulfilling. A psychologized conversion emphasizes the importance of the individual coming to awareness, making a personal decision, having a personal relationship with transcendence, and living an authentic moral life consistent with his or her convictions. The more independence is valued in a culture or community, the more an individual is apt to say "I am not religious but spiritual." The independent person would experiment with different forms of spirituality. Psychologists have construed conversion from an agentic perspective with a focus on change in belief. Above all, the potential convert is assumed to be able to choose a form of spirituality among a plethora of options.

The CPOR model would predict that individualistic conversions would be biased against institutional and communal forms of religion. Existentialists and individualists experience religious traditions as relatively oppressive, legalistic, dogmatic, exclusionary, and rigid. A community that emerges because its members have a common vision, a commitment to voluntary sacrifice of personal interests for the sake of others, and a common language with which and through which to describe the world is readily perceived by the individualistic convert as demanding conformity. When the older generation explicitly, and the ethos implicitly, encourage the development of a common vision that emerges from the history of the community, the individualist who has not experienced that history may experience alienation and judgment. Communal expectations are perceived as legalistic. The separation from other communities that is a natural consequence of a particular vision, set of commitments, and

network of beliefs is viewed as provincial and sectarian. The desire to maintain continuity with the preceding generations is rejected as conservative and traditional. The order and predictability that develop over time in any culture are perceived by the disenchanted as reflecting an overprotective, secure environment that requires no risk-taking and is suspicious of novelty and variety.

Identity and self-construal

The CPOR understanding of religious transformation allows for both independent and interdependent models of converting, given the hybrid nature of cultures and communities. Specifically, a cultural psychologist can imagine forms of converting that are more social in nature. We imagine that conversion may well be different in more collectivistic communities. In 1999, Charles Taylor gave the Gifford Lectures, in which he addressed William James's individualistic perspective. In Taylor's (2003) religious subculture, Catholicism, religion is more communal and tradition sensitive, something that was left unaddressed by James. We think that Guatemalan anthropologist Ricardo Falla's (2001) more social perspective is moving in the right direction: "Conversion is a moment in a process of adaptation by an individual or a group to the environment, whether it be the world of nature, such as land, water, and all resources, the world of surrounding society, or both" (p. 253, as cited in Gooren 2014, p. 93). Italian American anthropologist Salvatore Cucchiari (1988) views conversion as a creative "transformation of the self, marked by new awareness, *new social being* [emphasis added], and a new relationship to the sacred" (p. 418, as cited in Gooren 2014, p. 100). Fan and Chen (2014) discuss the social structure of traditional Chinese folk religions. They point out:

> In institutional religions like Christianity, participation customarily depends on membership, which characteristically involves personal choice. The diffused religiousness of the Chinese culture does not require an explicit decision to join an identifiable group; no call to personal conversion stands as prerequisite for participation.... China's religious practices vary from locale to locale, but in each setting, ritual behavior is highly organized by the community. Local people recognize that there is a proper order to be followed and believe that observing this order is necessary for the ritual to be effective. Normally, temples and their gods have acquired symbolic character, with specific functions involved in the everyday life of the local community. The most common social base for religious activities in China is the "natural village"; by being born in a particular village, people inherit its traditions and responsibilities, which are naturally and permanently a part of their lives. Neither a baptism nor any other formal membership ceremony is necessary for people to be involved in the community rituals. (p. 558)

From a culture and community perspective, a conversion can be a reaction to deficits in the host culture that lead the convert to acquire a new social identity in a contrast society. In addressing how existing social relations are changed by religious conversion, Yang and Abel (2014) describe how converts are socialized into a "new religious identity" (p. 146). They cite Carolyn Chen's (2008) work in Taiwan:

> Immigrants in either Buddhist or Christian groups are sometimes freed by their new religion from unwanted aspects of traditional culture. This is most

conspicuously the case for the women in her [Chen's] sample, who rely upon their newfound religious orientations to free themselves from burdensome traditional expectations for women. Her striking finding that members of such dramatically different religions as Buddhism and Christianity experience the same pragmatic benefits suggests that in some cases conversion may be a way of separating oneself from certain aspects of a previous group affiliation or identity. (Yang and Abel 2014, p. 146)

Just as a more individualistic Western church accommodates the Western independent religious believer, the deep communality and coherence of the Chinese Protestant church, official or underground, attracts the more traditionally interdependent Chinese seeker living in contemporary China with its kaleidoscopic changes and the fraying of traditional social linkages. In her essay "China's 'Christianity Fever' Revisited: Towards a Community-Oriented Reading of Christian Conversions in China," Katrin Fiedler (2010) argues that community is the underlying factor in the growth of Protestant Christianity in China. Accessibility to church gatherings, group dynamics and perceptions, leisure activities offered by the Church, and the role of the family contribute to making Christianity attractive to converts. Yang and Abel (2014) corroborate Fiedler's observations:

Although some Chinese Protestant worship services are (according to congregants) dull, potential converts may be attracted by other aspects of congregational life. Chinese Christians employ a slightly different etiquette—that is to say, different interactional rituals—than is typical among Chinese; church members routinely break with the traditional protocols used by Chinese to make new acquaintances. Such behavior among Chinese congregants catches the notice of recruits. Those who convert often report that it was personal qualities seen in the behavior of church members that attracted them to the church and to conversion. For instance, Chinese Christians routinely extend favors and gifts anonymously, to perfect strangers, persons of lower status, and with no expectation of return. It is common for such behavior to be interpreted as Christian Love and for converts to mention how well they were treated in their conversion accounts. (p. 145).

The CPOR perspective would predict that conversions are different depending on the kind of ties the individual has to the community into which he or she enters upon conversion. In a less individualistic conversion, the individual may be attracted to a new religion because of the rich and dense network of relationships to or within a community.

Given the prominence of network theory in the scholarly literature, we appreciated Timothy Steigenga's (2014) chapter in the OHRC entitled "Political Science and Religious Conversion," where he discusses the role of social networks in conversion. He reviews the work of Smilde (2007) in Venezuela, who argues that the personal problems that Pentecostalism helps converts to address do not provide a sufficient explanation for conversion. Instead, Smilde found that networks played an important role; persons who were living away from their families were more likely to convert than those who were not. These individuals were more likely to innovate. Some people actually construct the networks that eventually lead to their conversion.

Religious transformation from indigenous cultural and psychological perspectives

Our approach to cultural psychology honors religion, in contrast to the approach of many psychologists and anthropologists in the Western world who are dismissive of religion even though 83 % of the world's population professes some form of religion. Anthropologists have brought their own anti-Christian bias to their research. Cannell (2006) points out that "Christianity was the last major area of religious activity to be explored in ethnographic writing" (p. 8, as cited in Gooren 2014, p. 103). After the publication of William James's (1908/James 1990) *Varieties of Religious Experience* and G. Stanley Hall's (1917) *Jesus, the Christ, in the Light of Psychology*, there was a 30-year hiatus in psychology of religion research until the groundbreaking work of Gordon Allport (1950) in the late 1940s and the emergence of APA Division 36 that showcased psychology of religion research.

Religion as an analytical category

For those social scientists who were interested in religion, Christian concepts of religion dominated the understanding of conversion as sudden and individual. And, religious content related to the convert's tradition was often missing from the theories comparing different religious communities. In spite of the anti-Christian bias, Western anthropologists were heavily influenced by the Christian concepts of religion dominant in Western societies.

What is the role of religion in our mutually constellating paradigm of culture, psychology, and religion? There is a long history of religion perceived as a psychological experience, but, as we have indicated above, religion can also be construed culturally. Religion functions as a culture by providing meaning and purpose through its sacred texts, rituals, normative practices, and celebrations (Geertz 1973). However, we are also following the lead of John Caputo (2001) and of Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1963). Smith argued vigorously against the use of the notion of religion itself. He sees it as a category constructed by academics. There are only individual, particular religious traditions. To take religious culture and language seriously means not to generalize from one religious tradition to another but to interpret religious change from within the religious tradition, i.e., theologically (see Belzen 2010). Following Wittgenstein (1990), words take on meaning in the context of the community of users.

Indigenous models of religious conversion/transformation/change

The CPOR perspective places emphasis on an emic analysis of conversions. Building on Asad (1993) and Lambek (2002), Gooren comments:

> The most abstract theories of conversion, like Horton's, were Eurocentric because they projected Western notions of rationality onto non-Western tradition religions. Most approaches failed to properly theorize the indigenous understandings of religious change and conversion. Most were reductionist in that they ignored specific religious factors in conversion. (Gooren 2014, p. 103)

Failure to work from within specific religious traditions can result in distortions that etic explanations create, distortions that often reflect a larger cultural bias. We have come to realize that we have read Paul's account of "conversion" through the lens of Augustine and Luther

(Stendahl 1976) rather than the lens of Paul's own Jewish tradition. In the former view, Paul suffers from a deeply troubled conscience, and on the road to Damascus he encounters the living Christ who forgives his sins.

How might we interpret Paul's experience if we were to set aside our projections and begin with his cultural and historical context? Paul describes himself as an upright Jew with a robust conscience. In his words:

> If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. (Phil. 3:1–6, NRSV)

Clearly, the story records a turning point in Paul's life, but as his life unfolds, the experience is more a call to a specific task than an achievement of emotional equilibrium. The task was the reconciling of Jews and Gentiles and the creation of unity in the early church (Stendahl 1976; Wright 2013). Shifting to the context of Paul's experience moves us from a psychological to a more social and ethical understanding of his "conversion." From excluding and persecuting the emerging church, he became a leader in reconciliation. The hegemony of Western individualism since the Renaissance has influenced our view of Paul's conversion as an individual act for the sake of personal peace and precluded the possibility that it was an ethical act with communal consequences.

The emic emphasis of CPOR means that the theories employed in understanding a phenomenon like religious conversion should be congruent with the religious culture of the convert. In the study of conversion, anthropologists bring their specific Western biases to bear. Robbins (2007) makes the point that anthropologists, using a science of continuity, look for sameness over time in symbols, meanings, logics, structures, and power dynamics. Conversion, then, is a reflection of this sameness if it is viewed as, for example, an adaptation to modernity. However, whether Christian or Muslim, converts are taught that radical discontinuity from a past life into a new way of being is a possibility. Anthropologists committed to explanations of continuity are then ill equipped to understand converting as a process of radicalization and hence assume that underneath nothing has really changed (traditionalism, modernity, materialism, or power) (see Gooren 2014, p. 126).

Religious change as a normative/ethical stance

A cultural psychology that assumes that religion is cultural in nature with normative expectations does not only view converting as an emotional experience but also as the gradual adoption of the ethic of the new tradition. Spiritual/religious transformation is then a process in which the individual is socialized into the particular ethical practice and ethos of another tradition as a whole being. Some anthropologists have studied conversion without taking seriously the content of the religion itself. Gerlach and Hine (1968) stressed

> the constant interaction and feed-back between individual concerns and actions and group structuring and reinforcement. Individual needs are focused and (re)educated by the group, until the individual surrenders and makes a public testimony. The religious group then supports subsequent cognitive and behavioral changes. (Gooren 2014, p. 103)

Our view of religion and culture is that both are normative/ethical. Bourdieu (1990) has defined culture as *habitus*, as a set of normative practices. That is also apparent in the writings of Lévinas (1998), and, in the words of Goodman (2012), the self is a demanded self.

Saroglou (2011), as indicated above, proposes four psychological dimensions of religion: (a) meaning and truth, (b) emotional self-transcendence, (c) self-control in morality, and (d) belonging to transhistorical groups. He wonders whether religious cultures/communities have prioritized one or more of these dimensions:

> We can suspect the social dimension to be highly present in Orthodox religiosity in Balkan countries as well as among Israeli Jews, the emotional dimension to be partic-ularly invested among Western Buddhists (see the meditation practice), the believing dimension to be salient in traditional liberal Protestantism, and the moral dimension to be salient in the context of conservative U.S. Protestants. (p. 1330)

The CPOR model is sensitive to the fact that individuals and communities may develop critical perspectives on both the goodness of culture and the character of the individual within that culture. Religious traditions do not exist in isolation but in the context of one or more other religious traditions and a larger host culture. Religious traditions develop perspectives on the host culture. Pluralistic societies provide competing ideologies/religions from which the individual may choose. If that culture is congruent with the individual's religious tradition, the culture may well be reflected in the religious experiences of members. The CPOR model assumes that the individual may develop or follow an alternate conception of a culture that is more liberating. Conversion to a specific religious community that is influenced by liberation theology in Latin America is a good example of this. Influenced by a Marxist perspective of economic processes and the accumulation of capital, the convert is faced with the possibility of tension with the norms of the dominant society. If, however, the host culture is oppressive, a religious tradition may seek alternative forms of existence for the individual or community. When 16th-century Anabaptists chose to be rebaptized as evidence of their new religious sensibility and thereby distanced themselves from the church-state unity, the result of their conversion was death and persecution.

Conclusion

The CPOR model articulates culture, individual psyche, and religion as dynamically interre-lated, mutually constellated, and in constant flux. The complexity of the model makes generalization about religious change across communities and cultures difficult. We feel that an inability to generalize is an appropriate response to attempts at explaining religious conversion through the artificial simplicity of singular, compartmentalized disciplinary lenses. There is no longer a question as to whether or not religious conversion/transformation/change is syncretistic. Religious experience is an act of constant negotiation and renegotiation between psychological and cultural modes of being. It is always syncretistic and, therefore, cannot be addressed mono-dimensionally.

The CPOR model recognizes that any theory of conversion/transformation/change is an indigenous artifact of a particular discursive practice belonging to a larger collective community. Having tested this model using the data provided by the *Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, we think that idealized models of

conversion that transcend culture are less than helpful and tend to encourage construing conversion from within the author's host culture. Rather, we seek to honor the pluralistic yet integrated nature of human culture, psyche, and religious phenomena.

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