



The Cultural Kindling of Spiritual Experiences

Author(s): Julia L. Cassaniti and Tanya Marie Luhrmann

Source: *Current Anthropology*, (-Not available-), p. S000

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#) on behalf of [Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/677881>

Accessed: 30/11/2014 16:49

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The University of Chicago Press and Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Current Anthropology*.

The Cultural Kindling of Spiritual Experiences

by Julia L. Cassaniti and Tanya Marie Luhrmann

Online enhancement: appendix PDF file.

In this paper we suggest that it is important for the anthropology of Christianity and the anthropology of religion more generally to develop a comparative phenomenology of spiritual experience. Our method is to distinguish between a named phenomenon without fixed mental or bodily events (phenomena that have specific local terms but are recognized by individuals by a broad and almost indiscriminate range of physical events); bodily affordances (events of the body that happen in social settings but are only identified as religious in those social settings when they afford, or make available, an interpretation that makes sense in that setting); and striking anomalous events. We demonstrate that local cultural practices shift the pattern of spiritual experiences, even those such as sleep paralysis and out-of-body experiences that might be imagined in some ways as culture free, but that the more the spiritual experience is constrained by a specific physiology, the more the frequency of the event will be constrained by an individual's vulnerability to those experiences. We will call this the "cultural kindling" of spiritual experience.

One person feels a damp coldness and says that a demon is present. Another person starts shaking uncontrollably and experiences the shaking as the Holy Spirit. A third feels light, almost as if he were floating. That is what happens when he meditates. Anthropologists of religion have been sharply aware that such bodily events are not only given different meanings in different spiritual traditions but that the meaning in some sense creates the bodily event. "In modern ways of thinking about culture and psychology," the historian Robert Orsi (2012) says, "there is no 'out of' history and culture, no place antecedent or outside of social circumstances, relationships and ways of thinking about and imagining the world" (97). Neither bodies nor categories of the spiritual are ever free of their social context. As Talad Asad (2012) remarks, "Defining is a historical act and when the definition is deployed, it does different things at different times and in different circumstances and responds to different questions, needs and pressures" (39).

We nevertheless want to make the case for the impor-

ance of comparison in understanding spiritual experience because, as we will argue, direct comparison actually strengthens the case that the social gets under the skin. If we reject comparison, we leave the field to the increasingly popular argument that at least some kinds of spiritual phenomena are organic, hardwired, universal. Neuroscientists emphasize the universal biology of peak experiences in order to make the point that there are fundamental brain phenomena that may give rise to what people have called the awareness of God (Newberg, D'Aquili, and Rouse 2001). They have demonstrated that phenomena sometimes taken to be spiritual or supernatural—out-of-body experiences, for example—can be generated under laboratory conditions (Blanke et al. 2002). Anthropologists should be part of this conversation because our methods give us the kind of data we can use to demonstrate the way social context and cultural expectation shape these events.

We might use the analogy of psychiatric illness. When anthropologists refuse to consider whether madness in Ghana can be compared with madness in New York, we in effect cede the ground to the biomedical psychiatrist to define madness as driven solely by internal biological causes: what has been called the "bio bio bio" model of psychiatric illness—genetic cause, brain lesion, pharmacological treatment (Luhrmann 2012a). When anthropologists, alongside social epidemiologists, are able to demonstrate that people experience psychiatric illnesses in differently patterned ways in different

Julia L. Cassaniti is Assistant Professor of Psychological and Medical Anthropology at Washington State University (Pullman, Washington 99164, U.S.A. [julia.cassaniti@wsu.edu]). **Tanya Marie Luhrmann** is the Watkins University Professor in the Anthropology Department at Stanford University (Stanford, California 94305, U.S.A. [luhrmann@stanford.edu]) Both have contributed equally to this article and share joint first authorship. This paper was submitted 4 XII 13, accepted 19 VI 14, and electronically published 19 XI 14.

social settings, we are able to make not only the deconstructive argument that psychiatric categories have been used in racist ways but also the demonstrative argument that racism drives people mad.¹

Moreover, we are, in any event, always implicitly comparing. The project of making sense of another's experience involves altering the categories of experience from one subjectively positioned linguistic, cultural, historical tradition to another and (in American anthropology) publishing findings in English words, limited by the particular historical meanings of those words. This is not a matter of language alone; making sense of a neighbor is an imperfect exercise whether or not that neighbor speaks English, and always the sense making is laden with the dynamics of power. Sidestepping explicit comparison can leave the inequalities and ambiguities of implicit comparison unquestioned, and anthropologists of religion may use their own categories to make sense of others' experience without explicitly recognizing that they do so.

But how to compare? Anthropologists have been increasingly interested in phenomenology in recent years (Csordas 1994; Desjarlais and Throop 2011), and in fact there are many research projects that focus on (and thus implicitly or explicitly compare) specific phenomena, such as dreams (Lohmann 2003; Mittermaier 2010), visions (Obeyesekere 2012), or ghosts (Kwon 2008). Sometimes scholars work explicitly with scare quotes because they recognize that they compare psychologically dissimilar events that they still describe as similar. William Christian and Gabor Klaniczay (2008) titled their collection *The "Vision Thing"* and included work on dreams, awake sensory experiences of the immaterial, and powerful inner images because all these are taken (at times) to be direct visual evidence of the divine or supernatural and called visions. Rebecca Seligman and Laurence Kirmayer (2008) compare anthropological understandings of possession and psychiatric understandings of dissociation by committing to a definition accepted in the psychiatric literature—"functional alterations of memory, perception and identity as well as the psychophysiological processes presumed to underlie the phenomena" (32)—and then working through why anthropological and psychiatric accounts differ. The biologist Alister Hardy (1979) famously asked the British public to send him descriptions of their experience of God and organized the thousands of responses by sensory element and setting. The religious historian Ann Taves is acutely aware of the complex resonance of terms such as "experience." Nonetheless, she reads deeply in the neuroscience literature. "In my view," she writes, "it is better to construct rough and ready bridges [between the humanities and the sciences] than to wait for the construction of a perfect bridge that will stand for all time" (Taves 2009:xiii). She sees that some mental or bodily events

(particularly, anomalous events) are "deemed religious" or special in many different settings and that these events often have a neuroscientific description. She urges us to ask what patterns of events are associated with them in different settings and under what conditions they are "deemed religious." She calls this a "building blocks" approach to the study of religious experiences.

We take from this work and from our own the observations that in any local spiritual tradition, names may be associated with various phenomenological experiences (the word "vision" may include a range of actual bodily or mental events); that ordinary bodily or mental events may or may not be identified as religious (dreams are religious experiences in some settings but not others, and perhaps only some kinds of dreams); and that anomalous experiences are often deemed religious.

With these observations in mind, we set out here a first iteration of a field guide to identify spiritual experiences across traditions and cultures. We suggest that there are at least three different kinds of phenomena that might be compared:

1. *Named phenomena without fixed mental or bodily events.* These are phenomena that have specific local terms but are recognized by individuals by a broad and almost indiscriminate range of physical events: goose bumps, tingling, warmth, temperature change, emotions such as fear or joy or a sudden sense of peace. An example might be the presence of God for charismatic evangelical Christians. In such churches, people learn to recognize when God is present, but different individuals often report different specific signs—this person feels goose bumps, that person feels cold, another feels hot. Negative spiritual presences are recognized across many cultures and given varied theological interpretations, but they are rarely recognized by specific physiological constellations of indicators. Ghosts, or people who are dead but somehow are still present, are recognized many different ways. For example, English ghosts were usually identified as looking like actual people before the Victorian era, when they became transparent (McCorristine 2010).

2. *Bodily affordances.* These are events in the body that happen: shaking, adrenaline rushes, fainting, crying. We use the term "affordance" (Gibson 1986) to suggest that 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."

3. *Striking anomalous events.* These are specific patterns of events, often (but not always) identified as associated with the spiritual or supernatural, that are sometimes also called "unusual experiences": they are outside the range of everyday experience. Classic examples include hallucinations or sensory overrides, déjà vu, mystical experiences, out-of-body experiences, near death experiences, and sleep paralysis. These events are often treated as specific neurological events in the

1. This work is summarized in Luhrmann (2012a); for an anthropological account of the factors leading to an increased rate of illness for immigrant Africans, see Eliacin (2013) and Hopper (2004) for an overview.

scientific literature even if there are debates about what that neurological structure is, and many are reported both in the scientific literature and in folklore.

This is a structure that helps us to begin to develop some clarity about what we are comparing. Are we comparing events in the body that most people have but that are only deemed religious in some settings? Or are we comparing “presence of God” moments, which are unlikely to be found as such outside of Christian contexts? Or are we comparing rare events with a complex physiology, which we know to occur to some but not all people, such as sleep paralysis? With this structure, we can ask how the presence of a specific cultural name for a mental or bodily event affects that event’s salience within a specific social world. We will argue that local cultural practices shift the pattern of spiritual experiences, even those such as sleep paralysis and out-of-body experiences that might be imagined as in some ways culture free, but that the more the spiritual experience is constrained by a specific physiology, the more the frequency of the event will be constrained by an individual’s vulnerability to those experiences. We will call this the “cultural kindling” of spiritual experience.

What We Did: Our Method

The original impulse for our comparison came out of Tanya Marie Luhrmann’s ethnographic and experimental work on a charismatic evangelical church, which represents the major demographic shift in the religious practice of the United States since 1965 toward spiritualities more focused on an intimate and present experience of God (e.g., Miller 1997; Pew 2006). In these congregations, reports of the direct spiritual experience of God is welcomed though not required or presumed.² The interview for the work began with open-ended discussion (“Would you say that you hear from God? How?” “What has been your most memorable spiritual experience?”) and then turned to a series of questions about unusual sensory experiences—whether people had heard a voice when alone, or seen something others might not see; what that was like and

2. This work is discussed more fully in *When God Talks Back* (Luhrmann 2012b). For the study discussed here, Tanya included interviews with 33 members of the Vineyard church people. In this group, 25 were female and 8 male. The average age was 49. Twenty-five were white, three were African American, three were Asian, and one was “other.” Twenty-one had a BA degree or better (here data were missing on six). They were recruited through an advertisement seeking people “interested in spiritual transformation and the Christian spiritual disciplines,” primarily through notices placed in church bulletins in four charismatic evangelical congregations on the San Francisco peninsula (two were Vineyard churches and two were churches similar to the Vineyard, the denomination in which Tanya had done her ethnographic work). None had been hospitalized for psychotic illness. Before randomizing people into different experimental wings of the study (the aim was to compare the practice of imagination-rich prayer with a nonprayer condition), subjects were interviewed in depth about their prayer life and their spiritual experience. All interviews were transcribed by a commercial firm and corrected by Rachael Morgain for word-for-word accuracy.

how often it happened; would they call that experience religious or spiritual and why—and then moved on to spiritual experiences taken from the classics in Christian spirituality, above all William James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1999 [1902]), and the best recent compendium of unusual experiences, Cardeña, Lynn, and Krippner’s *The Varieties of Anomalous Experiences* (2000). Naturally, the questions used Christian categories, but when those categories were typically associated with specific phenomenological experiences, we asked about those events first. The “Holy Spirit” experience, for example, is a concept often used to describe an event in which someone feels an intense surge of power sweeping through their body like electricity, or what we would call the bodily affordance of an adrenaline rush. We used the term “Holy Spirit,” but we led the questions with the presumed phenomenological description of the event.

Here we discuss the questions that project asked of 33 members of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship about their specific spiritual experiences. We have removed questions about frequency and concomitant drug use. The whole interview typically lasted an hour or more.

Demonic presence. Have you ever been certain, from the way that you felt in your body, that there was a demonic presence near at hand?

Cataplexy. Have you ever had an experience of uncontrollable trembling or shaking or an experience in which you felt that a spiritual power pushed you down (some people call this being “slain in the Spirit”)?

Adrenaline rush. Have you ever had an experience in which you felt this intense rush of power through your body, as if some great force were running through your body? Perhaps your mouth was dry and your palms were sweaty (some people call this a “Holy Spirit” experience)?

Overwhelming emotion. Have you ever had an experience of intense, overwhelming emotion, perhaps with uncontrollable weeping or uncontrollable laughing or rapture, that felt like a spiritual experience?

Sleep paralysis. Have you ever have an experience of being awake but unable to move?

When Julia Cassaniti came to do her postdoctoral work at Stanford, we became interested in whether these categories of spiritual experiences would be recognizable in other settings. After all, although in his descriptions of religious experiences William James draws from a long history of Christianity, he writes about spiritual phenomena as if they are features of a pan-human psychology that are shaped by theology and congregational understanding, which he calls “over-belief.”³

3. “It would never do for us to place ourselves offhand at the position of a particular theology, the Christian theology, and proceed immediately to define the ‘more’ [the more than human] as Jehovah, and the ‘union’ as his imputation to us of the righteousness of Christ” (James 1999 [1902]: 555). *The Varieties of Anomalous Experience* (Cardeña, Lynn, and Krippner 2000) is written as if culture and theology are almost completely irrelevant.

Thai Buddhism offers a significant contrast to American Christianity not only in language and social setting but in the very absence of a God. In 2011 Julia returned to the small valley community in Northern Thailand where she has been doing ethnographic fieldwork since 2002 (see Cassaniti 2006, 2009, 2012). The Thai community with which she works is made up of people with spiritual lineages that slightly differ from each other but that those in the community group under the umbrella of Theravāda Thai Buddhism. People in this community are middle- and lower-class farmers and small business owners. They follow Buddhist teachings that emphasize the lessening of suffering through acts of merit making and following the *dhamma*, regularly attending *wat* (monastery) events where they practice these acts and support ordained monks. We were curious about whether these phenomenological events would be recognized in such a different religiosity.

Julia interviewed 20 people who were actively involved in Buddhist practice.⁴ She translated and back-translated the questions that Tanya asked of people in her Christian sample. While some ideas were more difficult to translate into Thai than others, for the most part Julia felt that the questions she asked were similar to the ones asked in the American project. The exceptions were these: rather than asking about demonic presence, she asked, “Do you ever feel like a bad spirit(s) comes near you?” She did not use the term “Holy Spirit” or “slain in the Spirit,” and rather than asking about “God” she asked about “spirits” or the “spiritual.”⁵ As in Tanya’s sample, each question was begun as stated but often somewhat elaborated for clarification. As Tanya did in her sample, if the person asked gave a definitive no at the beginning of a probe,

4. All lived within two miles of each other. Eleven of them were male, nine were female. Their average age was 52. Six were traditional, typical Thai Buddhists who attended weekly events at their neighborhood monasteries; eight were typical modern Thai Buddhists who went to monastery events but also learned from books and from the Internet; and six had more specialized practices: a forest monk, two “spirit doctors,” a spirit medium, a follower of the Japanese Buddhist sect *Yo Re*, and a follower of the Thai Buddhist sect *Santi Asoke*. Seven had BA degrees or more; two had attended Buddhist monastery school. Eleven worked in business or administration, three worked in farming, four worked as religious specialists, and two were retired. All of them lived (and most came from) the same small town where the research was conducted. Julia knew 10 of them well, five somewhat, and five were new to her. All but two were interviewed in Thai.

5. She used *จิต วิญญาณ* (*Jit-winyan*) to talk about spirituality. *Jit-winyan* is a compound word that means most directly “mind/heart/thoughts-soul/spirit.” It can also be translated as “psyche.” The term is understood to refer to the souls that migrate and are reborn, and as such it can be understood to incorporate Buddhist and “spirit” kinds of spirituality. She used the term *พลัง* (*Pa-lang*) to talk about the energy of spiritualness or supernaturalness. “Energy” is probably the best translation, but it can also be translated as “strength” or “power.” She used the term *ควบคุม* (*Khuap-khum*) to refer to control, and she used it in questions referring to experiences where someone feels that he or she does not have control of body or mind. It can also mean “to command or govern,” and is a compound word coming from *khuap* (to combine, merge, couple) and *khum* (to take care of, watch, oversee).

Julia skipped the follow-up questions, but if there was any sense that the person had more to say, she asked follow-up questions.

We did not do statistical analyses with our data because they are not systematic enough, and our subject numbers are not numerous enough to allow us to speak of findings quantitatively. Yet the data are rich enough and the patterns clear enough to suggest some illuminating trends and (we think) a quite interesting hypothesis.

What We Found: Our Results

The results of our interview are found in table 1. The Americans were more likely than the Thai to report cataplexy, adrenaline rushes, and overwhelming emotion as spiritual experiences, and they were more likely to report everyday encounters with demons. But the Thai were more likely to report sleep paralysis. (Both groups reported hallucination-like events, which are salient in both religious traditions, at the same rate. This suggests that they were not answering at random.)

We think that there are three broad reasons for these differences. First, if your experience has a specific name in the local religion, it is more likely to be reported. Cataplexy (“slain in the Spirit”) and adrenaline rushes (“the Holy Spirit experience”) and “demons” are specific named events for many evangelical Christians, and these Americans report them more often than the Thai Buddhists. Sleep paralysis has a specific name among the Thai, but not among the Americans, and the Thai report it more often.

Second, the different religions value different kinds of experiences. Buddhism has no divinity, no omniscient presence for which one longs. The goal for a Thai Buddhist is to detach and feel untethered from the cycle of suffering. One seeks *upādāna*, detachment. Julia found that in speaking about spiritual experiences, her Thai subjects were more likely to use an idiom of “weight” in which feelings of lightness were associated with calm, positive spirituality and heaviness with negative spirituality. They commonly reported feelings of calmness, lightness, of feeling empty, weightless, suspended in the air, or even flying, often in connection with meditation—even though we did not ask directly about lightness and calm. A mind that is concentrated (as it should be in meditation) is a mind and body that is light. An unconcentrated mind, which one feels when one is frightened or half

Table 1. Percentage of interviewed subjects who experienced phenomena

Phenomena	Thai Buddhist	US Vineyard
Demonic	20	70
Cataplexy	25	40
Adrenaline	15	52
Overwhelming emotion	10	64
Sleep paralysis	55	33

asleep or troubled, is a mind that is considered vulnerable to unwanted supernatural intrusion. Spiritual force manifests as pressure or lightness: a lightness, almost buoyancy, is reported to occur in moments of positive spiritual attainment, but slight pressure on the skin is understood to represent negative, sometimes ghostly, energy. Ghostly energy is felt inside or outside the body. This may be why sleep paralysis becomes so meaningful to these Thai. The physiological experience in sleep paralysis is one of pressure.

By contrast, charismatic evangelical spirituality is all about seeking a specific intentional being, a humanlike God that thinks and responds. God's presence is the whole point of evangelical Christianity, particularly in the more charismatic sort of evangelical Christianity in which people yearn to experience God personally, intimately, and immediately. And so the human body strains to hear and see and feel the supernatural one. Unusual sensation is interpreted as evidence of an external agent who has made itself known in and through the body and mind. Overwhelming emotions that feel uncontrolled become signs of that divine being because the controlling agency is attributed to God.

Third, there are pervasive differences in the way people value experience more generally in these two different cultures (here, distinguishing between the local culture and the religion is hard because the cultures have been so shaped by their respective religions). The American Christians value intense, robust, and memorable moments of physiological arousal as experience of God. Americans in general value aroused, excited feelings; Asians are more likely to prefer calm. The psychologist Jeanne Tsai describes this as a difference in "ideal affect" (Tsai, Knutson, and Fung 2006; Tsai, Miao, and Seppala 2007). In a study comparing Chinese and Japanese best-selling children's picture books with their American counterparts, she found that the smiles drawn in the Asian books were significantly less excited (Tsai et al. 2007). Our American Christians were much more likely to report overwhelming emotion as a spiritual experience.

Yet these differences do not explain why the pattern of responses is lopsided and not absolutely different. If pressure is salient for the Thai and irrelevant for the Americans, why do a third of our American subjects still report sleep paralysis? To explore these questions, we present in more detail our findings about phenomena in the three different categories we describe above.

In the appendix (available online as a PDF), we present some phenomena not discussed in the text of the article and give more examples of the responses to the sleep paralysis question.

Named Phenomena without Fixed Mental or Bodily Events: Demons

Christians know what demons are even if they have never encountered them. Those who approach the Bible as literally or near-literally true, as evangelicals do, must take demons

seriously: in the Gospels, Jesus spends quite a bit of time identifying them, interacting with them, and casting them out. Most evangelicals will say that demons exist. Yet people vary considerably in whether demons are salient to their lives.⁶ Many of the congregants Tanya met hesitated to talk spontaneously as if demons played a role in their lives. And yet nearly three quarters of the subjects in this sample reported experiences with demons and described the experiences in some detail. In these accounts there are no specific bodily experiences associated with the identification of demons. People are pushed, or they feel icy, or they feel odd. For the Christians, for an experience to be identified as demon caused, subjects must experience something physically different, the experience must be bad or odd, and prayer should help. The following are questions and some representative responses.

Have you ever been certain, from the way you felt in your body, that there was a demonic presence close to hand?

SUBJECT 33 [F, 47, WHITE]. I went through a period of time where I would start in worship in church and I would get these horrible pains in my back, and I was so aware that it was Satan trying to distract me and I would just like grab my friend and put her hand on my back and go "Pray for me, I'm being attacked." And she would pray for me and it would stop . . . I figure there are only two sources of stuff, and it wouldn't be God so it had to be a demon.

SUBJECT 40 [M, 59, WHITE]. The way I choose to interpret it is that the Lord was telling us to get out of there. We were . . . out in twos—out in twos going door to door, talking about the church, you know, inviting people to church and so on . . . And we had just spent some time talking to someone and we got up to this door, we knocked on the door, and it was all dark and all black and both of us felt this icy, icy wind blowing, and we both looked at each other and said "Do you feel that?" And he said "Yes." So, we walked away. So we walked away. It felt—we felt really uncomfortable. Chilled.

Thailand is a Buddhist country teeming with supernatural beings.⁷ There are ghosts (*pi*), souls (*winyan*), hungry ghosts (*prêt*), gods (*thewada*), and many other entities. The Thai see their supernatural life as abundant. As one woman remarked to Julia, "Ghosts here are not like in America, where there's 'zombies' and like that, just a few. In Thailand there are *many*." Such encounters are also an everyday part of the

6. The leadership in the Vineyard church seemed conflicted about how to think about demons. The founder, John Wimber, actually established the church because the senior pastor of the church he was originally affiliated with took affront at the eagerness with which Wimber identified and cast out demons from committed Christians. Vineyard leaders have argued that the church's identity rests on the willingness to speak of demons; and they have also argued that to talk openly about demons makes the church look foolish to non-Christians who might otherwise convert.

7. For background reading on the supernatural landscape in Thailand, see Rajadhon (1961), Tambiah (1970), and Textor (1973).

phenomenological landscape of spirituality in the community. But while they are spoken about as eerie or unusual, they are rarely described as wholly negative. Julia felt that for the most part, people were confused by a question about “bad spirits.” They floundered a bit in answering it, even though when she had once before asked about ghosts without indicating a moral valence, people had spoken comfortably and extensively about the way they had sensed the presence of ghosts (Cassaniti and Luhrmann 2011). In this case, when the ghost or entity was marked as unambiguously negative, the question elicited few responses and little elaboration (only 20% said yes). Moreover, there is no specific physiological experience that they identify independent of the name. We believe that this is why these subjects struggle to come up with something to say. Here are two typical responses when Julia asked, “Do you ever feel like a bad spirit comes near you?”

SUBJECT 11 [M, 75]. Before I meditate . . . I will forbid the *mara* (bad demon), the ghosts that will come and distract.

SUBJECT 16 [M, 70]. Yes. I feel like goose bumps, like in the night that the tree was shaking.

Bodily Affordances: Cataplexy, Adrenaline Surge, Emotional Surge

These three phenomena—cataplexy, or the loss of muscle control; adrenaline surge, as if electricity is shooting through the body; and emotional surge, when someone experiences intense, overwhelming emotion—are examples of physiological phenomena that are common to all human bodies but unusual enough so that people can remember the moment independent of a specific label. (For example, “That moment when I opened the letter and I had an intense rush of feeling I could never forget.”) At the same time, they are not rare and strikingly unusual in the way that out-of-body experiences are. Both the Vineyard congregants and the Thai Buddhists seemed to recognize what the questions were asking about. But for the most part, the Vineyard congregants welcomed these experiences as evidence of a positive good, while the Thai Buddhists did not.

Over 80% of the American congregants reported at least one of these experiences as spiritual events—only six of the 33 who answered all three questions said that they had never experienced such things. Moreover, when these experiences are reported, they are almost always pleasant. They are not universally pleasant: a few people reported experiences they interpreted as the presence of evil. But almost always, these congregants identify such moments as the presence of God in some form. New charismatic evangelical churches such as the Vineyard emphasize the humanlike dimension of God, and they emphasize the need to interact with God. Experience that feels uncontrolled, then, may be welcomed as a sign that God is truly present. Here are some representative responses.

Cataplexy: Have you ever had an experience of uncontrollable trembling or shaking, or an experience in which you felt that a spiritual power pushed you down (some people call this being “slain in the Spirit”)?

SUBJECT 60 [M, 44, WHITE]. It was as if heaven opened up and I heard a voice of the Lord as clearly as you’re hearing me, and he said, “But I love you.” And I just started crying. And I’m like, “What is that?” And he said it again, he said it: “But I love you.” So I fell down to the ground and I just started crying and crying and crying, and he said it a third time, “But I love you.” And I spoke out audibly, “Stop it. I can’t handle it anymore.” And it was quiet. But I looked up and four or five people . . . had walked over to me and were praying for me. Putting their hands on me and praying for me. And I sort of gathered myself and I’m—you know, snot ran down my nose and my eyes are teary and I look out at the pastor playing guitar, and he just looked at me and winked like, “He [God] got you, didn’t he?”

SUBJECT 64 [F, 53, WHITE]. The first time I ever got slain in the Spirit I was at some house group, and I thought, “Man, I really want to know what that is,” and I went up for prayer, and this man just prayed over me. He put his hand up like a wave. It felt like this wave of love, but it was like a tidal wave, so it felt like water but it felt like love at the same time. It was good on the inside and cool and kind of wet on the outside.

Adrenaline surge: Have you ever had an experience in which you felt this intense rush of power through your body, as if some great force were running through your body? Perhaps your mouth was dry and your palms were sweaty (some people call this a “Holy Spirit” experience)?

SUBJECT 48 [F, 49, WHITE]. I was reading something about God—and I kind of got knocked off my chair—and I was on the floor and I was tingling all over—it was the strangest feeling I’ve ever—but I knew that it was the Holy Spirit. You know, I mean, nothing—I’ve never—you know they’ll pray for me because I need to fall down to Jesus. But this—I was totally alone. You know, but I did—and it was like an electrifying kind of tingling. It was intense. For just a few minutes again. And I didn’t know what that was about. At that time.

SUBJECT 76 [F, 50, WHITE]. I’ve had adrenaline rushes in prayer or with . . . Like for example I was praying in a group setting and I was so kind of removed from these people. It was almost like I was alone and I could just feel the spirit entering me and just giving me the words when I was praying there. I was just so sure that this was the spirit of God coming through me at that moment.

Emotional surge: Have you ever had an experience of intense, overwhelming emotion, perhaps with uncontrollable weeping or uncontrollable laughing or rapture, that felt like a spiritual experience?

SUBJECT 40 [M, 59, WHITE]. I’ll share the first one with you certainly. I mean, this one brought me to my knees and

brought me to a period of—of great tears. And it was Paul’s sort of feeling of—of you know, pleading with—with God the fact that he wanted this—this affliction taken away from him. And God’s response was “My power is made perfect in—in weakness.” In weakness. I couldn’t think of the word. And then that is, you know that really sort of hit—hit home . . . It brought me to my knees and I was crying.

SUBJECT 49 [F, 42, WHITE]. I’ve had some uncontrollable laughing. Yes both [laughing and weeping]. Yeah, yeah they are definitely [spiritual moments], the laughing is, was—and I only did that one once but it was pretty funny. And he’s like, she’s just laughing because the Lord is on her. Yeah. Yeah. I cry a lot. I mean, I mean, during worship—yeah. All the time. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah [in the presence of God].

People in the Thai community understood those kinds of experiences quite differently. For a start, they were half as common. Only 40% of the Thai subjects reported this kind of experience as a spiritual event. A quarter of them said that they had experienced something like cataplexy; a fifth, something like an emotional surge; and only three out of the 20 said that they had experienced a surge of adrenaline. Only one of them gave a name to the experience, *Phi Am*, the name of a spirit who takes control. Moreover, when they described those experiences, they were mostly bad or ambivalent, in stark contrast to the Christian context. In fact, in only one case did a subject unambiguously associate the experience with something good. This may be because the object of their spiritual experience is not external to them. They have no freestanding intentional being who might be considered equivalent to the Christian God. The goal of religious practice is to cultivate calm. These bodily affordances, then, do not suggest positive spiritual experience. When the Thai respondents experienced high arousal events, most found the moment to be uncomfortable, and their responses were short and few. Here are some typical Thai responses to the questions Julia asked.

Cataplexy: *Have you ever had the experience where you cannot control your body, like your body was shaking/quivering/trembling, as if some kind of spiritual energy was shaking you?*

SUBJECT 14 [F, 45]. When I disobey the spirits it happens. Not anymore, because I do what the spirits say.

SUBJECT 19 [F, 40]. I have . . . I have . . . when I was meditating, and then my body was shaking and I felt like I was circling. It was a long time ago when I went to meditate at the [Dhammakaya] temple. They told me that it is the condition that happens when our mind concentrates so hard on something. It’s like I was trying to collect my mind or something like that. It was like circling and shaking like in a circle.

Adrenaline surge: *Have you ever had an experience where you felt an intense spiritual energy rushing through your body, maybe your mouth was dry or your palms sweaty?*

SUBJECT 2 [F, 39]. That is the power of the dark side of mind which I told you before. Or you could say it was *chao kam nai wen* (the spirits of your karma). Sometimes they will make me have a very bad headache with no causes. To solve this, I have to pray for forgiveness (Phae Metta) and make merit for them and it will get better.

SUBJECT 10 [M, 45]. I almost drowned over here [*points to the river*] once. It’s about the concentration [meditation]. At first I couldn’t really swim out around the dam. I think that I am a good person and this dam I participated in building it also, like build the water, forest, and something like that. I could swim off from the dam, it might be some kind of spirits. In that area, the water was like circling and I couldn’t really swim out. At that day I felt like some power helped me and then I got out of that area. When I think about it, um . . . it was about our mind or not? Or what? I wondered how could I get out of there. I don’t know, don’t really know, but I think it might be my courage and mind. Because I almost drowned twice or three times there. People tried to help me by throwing the rope to me. I almost died over there. After that I got out of that place. I was thinking about it but I don’t really know what it was. It’s about the heart and mind. Energy came out. Maybe it’s energy from me. I thought I would die there.

Emotional surge: *Have you ever had an experience of intense emotion such as crying or laughing in a spiritual way?*

SUBJECT 2 [F, 39]. When I make merit without expectation, at these times my mind feels happiness, very joyful. It’s like a big bubble and it gets bigger and bigger. But actually if you feel like that too much it’s not good.

SUBJECT 14 [F, 45]. When I was possessed, I don’t know. Some people told me I wasn’t myself at all.

Striking Anomalous Events: Sleep Paralysis

Sleep paralysis has been recognized in folklore for centuries, but it has only recently been clearly identified within the psychiatric literature (the clinical documentation of sleep phenomena is relatively recent).⁸ It is a state in which someone experiences themselves as awake but unable to move, accom-

8. See Adler (2011), Davies (2003), and Hufford (1982). For the relationship between sleep paralysis and posttraumatic stress disorder among Cambodian refugees, see Hinton, Hufford, and Kirmayer (2005). David Hufford’s *The Terror that Comes in the Night* (1982) made famous not only the condition but a folklore method for understanding whether a folk story had roots in a physiology. He collected a wide variety of folkloric examples, quantified them, categorized them, interviewed living people with similar experience, and consulted the scientific literature on sleep physiology. He concluded that the Old Hag syndrome and medieval and early modern European stories of incubi and succubi were ultimately rooted in a physiological phenomenon but that cultural factors heavily determined the ways in which the experience was described and interpreted (Hufford 1982:245). More recently, Shelley Adler (2011) has documented the “nocebo” effect of sleep paralysis, particularly among the Hmong, who interpret the experience as a precursor of death and sometimes indeed appear to die as a result of the experience.

panied with intense fear, pressure on the chest, and difficulty breathing. They also often report a “presence” that is sometimes seen and heard. It is reasonably well studied. About a quarter to a third of Americans typically report that they have experienced it (Adler 2011). It is easy to ask about: people who have had sleep paralysis recognize it readily and, if they recognize it, go on to describe the event in a way that fits the standard clinical account.

Our Americans reported sleep paralysis at the standard rate. In general, they did not name it, did not associate it with a supernatural presence (although one or two mentioned evil, and their accounts are longer), and did not give it much significance. In contrast, sleep paralysis is a common experience reported by people in the Thai sample (this has been found elsewhere through Southeast Asia).⁹ Almost two thirds of the Thai subjects reported it, and most named it and talked about it at some length. When they did, they called it an experience of *Phi Am*, the name of a spirit that causes it. Here is the question we posed to the Americans and two representative responses.

Did you ever have an experience of being awake but unable to move?

SUBJECT 49 [F, 42, WHITE]. Yeah. But I think I was just overtired. It was pretty recent. No, no. I think I just overdid it, and I got home from the gym one day and I was like—you know, and I was like, I cannot move [*laughs*]. So it wasn't anything spiritual. It was kind of trippy though. Cause I couldn't move.

SUBJECT 114 [F, 72, WHITE]. Yeah. Like it was really, really heavy. Well, once or twice in a lifetime. I didn't know [if it was a spiritual experience]. I just didn't know. I thought, “This is interesting,” and I prayed about it so I could move.

Okay. And then you were able to move?

Yeah.

Julia posed the question to the Thai in the same way. Here is her question and some representative responses.

Have you ever had an experience where you're awake but aren't able to move?

Subject 1 [M, 38]. I was taking a nap, . . . um . . . or maybe in the middle of the night, you know, I was like I was kind of awake but I cannot move my body . . . and I was kind of hearing the voice, the voice was laughing, she was a woman . . . like it was not like very clear laughing or anything, she was a women and she was kind of, she sat on my shoulder and she was just laughing and I was so mad at her. I was like go away and then like she just kept laughing, and then I prayed for my Buddha and God [Ganesh] and then she's gone. And just then I felt my body again. Maybe some kind of spirit like tried to tease me or something . . . maybe like some spirit came and tries to tell me that I should go to the temple and make merit or something . . . It's a

9. See n. 8.

Buddhist thing, you know when you experience some spiritual energy in some certain way . . . they might come and tell me that it's the time to make merit and go to the temple and do something for them.

SUBJECT 9 [M, 70]. I have sometimes, if we call that the dream, it's not like that though, not a dream, it was like *Phi Am*. I can't move. But I saw it but I cannot talk, I cannot call anybody. There was one time, there was one person who died at the school. And then he came to the house. He came to tell me that his things were over there, that thing is over here. When I was sleeping, sleep but not sleep. And then I was like “ah . . . that person is dead already and why did he come to see me.” I think like that. I think about why he came to me. I tried to get up and talk to him, but I cannot go. I cannot talk, cannot move, but my eyes see it . . . because I saw him come to me. I saw him stand over there and telling me what is over there, what is over here. I wanted to say something but I really could not.

The accounts of sleep paralysis among the Thai subjects are much richer and longer than almost all the other Thai responses. Clearly the event is important to them in a way that the other categories were not. But note that not all the Thai report sleep paralysis. Even though it is a highly salient category, only 55% say that they have experienced it. And even though sleep paralysis is not particularly salient for the Americans, almost a third do report it. Something about bodily vulnerability also plays a role in limiting whether these events occur. These observations are very interesting because one might assume, as sleep science has more or less assumed,¹⁰ that sleep phenomena are culturally neutral. The much higher rate of sleep paralysis in Thailand does accord with other anthropological observations (Adler 2011) and begs for explanation.

Discussion: Cultural Kindling

Our theoretical goal in this paper is to introduce the concept of “cultural kindling” as a way to understand the different patterns of spiritual experience in different social contexts. The “kindling” hypothesis was first articulated by Emil Krapelin (1921), who observed that to the extent that actually demoralizing events—a job loss, a breakup, a bad relationship—play a role in a first episode of depression, they play a less important role in later ones. Kenneth Kendler and his colleagues explain that this is due to “increased reliance on these patterns of processing [which] makes it easier for their future activation to be achieved on the basis of increasingly minimal cues” (Kendler, Thornton, and Gardner 2000:1243; Segal et al. 1996; see also Monroe and Harkness 2005). If someone has ever been clinically depressed, it takes less in

10. A search for “culture” in all available years of *Behavioral Sleep Medicine* turns up no results; a similar search in the *Journal of Sleep Research* turns up research done outside of the United States but does not indicate differences in sleep phenomena.

terms of real life knocks to lead them into depression a second time. Becoming depressed becomes a habituated response.

We suggest here that the local culture of a particular religion serves a similar function in shaping the way people pay attention to what they sense and feel in search of evidence of the spiritual and lowering the threshold of its identification through the body. The presence of a specific local term, such as “Holy Spirit experience,” which draws someone’s attention to a phenomenon such as intense emotion, whether the phenomenon has meaning for a person’s actual experience (some people are no doubt temperamentally more likely than others to be comfortable having such rushes) and whether that experience is recognized and valorized by the group (Episcopalians may know about Holy Spirit experiences, but they certainly will not be rewarded for having one during the service)—we think that all these features will interact with someone’s physiological responsiveness to influence the way they pay attention to their own minds and bodies. That attentional scrutiny may, we suggest, lower the threshold for identifying phenomena that indicate supernatural experiences.

Our presumption here is that people are constantly having a wide range of bodily experiences. We see, hear, smell, taste, and feel; we move and have feelings. We shake, feel heaviness and lightness, and experience coldness and heat. We sense stillness. These are what, following Gibson, we have called “affordances,” features of the world that can seem significant and imbued with meaning or that can be ignored. Most of these “events” we interpret and label as natural phenomena. But other times we identify a feeling, a heaviness, or a shudder as strange and unusual. It feels otherworldly. Even a sharp pain in the stomach can be the sign of a dangerous spirit making its presence known rather than just a sign of a stomach ache. And then there are more uncanny phenomenological events: a glimpse when nothing material is there, a voice carried by the wind, a sudden powerful emotion that comes out of the blue.

We already know that spiritual practices have an effect on spiritual experiences. This at any rate was what Tanya found in her Spiritual Disciplines Project (Luhrmann 2012*b*; Luhrmann and Morgain 2012). Christians who were randomized into the prayer arm of the experiment, where they were asked to spend 30 minutes a day for a month attending to inner prayer experience in search of God, were more likely to report unusual sensory experiences or hallucination-like experiences as well as more meaningful unusual sensory experiences. Compared with those in the nonprayer condition, they were also more likely to say that they felt the near-tangible sense of God’s presence, an awareness of profound spiritual knowing, an overwhelming emotional experience of God, and other unusual spiritual experiences.

We suggest that phenomenological experience is always the result of the interaction between expectation, cultural invitation, spiritual practice, and bodily responsiveness—what Ian Hacking (1995) called “looping,” Seligman and Kirmayer (2008) called “bio-looping,” Csordas (1993) called “the sen-

sory mode of attention,” Desjarlais and Throop (2011) called “modes of existence,” and the field of cognitive science more pragmatically takes as a foundational principle (Neisser 1976). We suggest that fluctuations in phenomenological experience are common and modulated below the level of awareness in most daily experience, but when people attend to their mind with more care and more interest in the supernatural, the partial perceptions and fleeting thoughts, the often unnoticed shifts in awareness that get ignored in most daily life, are allowed to flower into meaning. Of course, the way that a particular body experiences it will depend on the vulnerabilities of that particular body: its genetic inheritance and genetic expression, its personal history, its exposure to trauma, and its experience of love and care.

Our model here is what psychiatric anthropologists have taught us about the shaping of psychiatric illness. They have shown that local social context shapes the symptoms that someone who can be diagnosed with, say, depression will remember and report—and that as a result, in different social settings, those symptoms will be experienced more intensely than in other settings. To use Robert Levy’s (1984) useful terms, some symptoms (sadness, for Americans) may be “hypercognized,” while others (joint pains) may be “hypocognized.” Psychiatric anthropologists teach us that the difference in cognitive attention leads not just to a difference in reporting but to a difference in experience.

We think that spiritual experience can be understood in a similar way, as generated out of a variety of factors, among them cultural expectation and the kind of behaviors encouraged in a local social setting. We have asked here whether Christianity might “kindle” different kinds of spiritual experiences than Buddhism. Anthropologists of Christianity might ask whether different kinds of Christianity kindle different kinds of spiritual phenomena—whether Catholicism, for instance, with its emphasis on images and icons, might produce more visions than Protestantism, which places so much more emphasis on the word and on “hearing” God. Similarly, traditions that do not value spiritual experience at all, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, might produce fewer people who recognize signs of such experience in the body.

What we add to ongoing discussion about comparative phenomenology is the observation that not all kinds of mental and bodily events respond equally readily to cultural invitation. If an experience is named (such as “demons”) and has no specific physiological markers, people in a society where that experience is not named will likely not report it. On the other hand, if an experience involves a specific, complex patterns of unwilling bodily experience, such as sleep paralysis, some people will experience it in societies in which it is neither named nor salient; and even in societies where it is clearly named and highly salient, not everyone will experience it. The following, then, is our theory about the cultural kindling of spiritual experience.

1. A phenomenological experience is an interaction between cultural invitation and bodily physiology. By “cultural invi-

tation” we mean the implicit and explicit ways in which a local social world gives significance and meaning to sensation, whether mental or bodily, and the behavioral practices (such as meditation) that may affect sensation. We imagine there is a range here, from what might be more properly called cultural encouragement to cultural demand. By “bodily physiology” we mean the array of genetic and individual historical factors that shape the body’s responsiveness.

2. When a local social community gives significance to specific sensations, either fearing them or desiring them, sensitivity to having an experience of the supernatural increases, requiring a lower threshold for such experiences, than in a community in which people do not have such supernatural experiences and in which such fears and desires are hypothesized or unelaborated.¹¹ We expect that social interests here might rise and fall in intensity, for example, in moments of rapid social change.

3. The more that the experience of the supernatural is associated with a specific physiology (e.g., sleep paralysis), the more the frequency of the event will be constrained by an individual’s vulnerability to these experiences. Conversely, the less tied to specific physiology an experience is (e.g., the experience of demons), the more directly its frequency will reflect cultural interest in it.

In giving this account of the interaction between culture and spiritual experience, we believe that we are carrying out Ann Taves’s invitation to develop a “building block” approach to the study of religious experience, away from religious experience imaged as a fixed and stable thing, to the processes through which people identify and attribute meaning to mental and bodily events.

The connection between labeled, elaborated meanings and the report of particular physiological occurrences is always fraught with misunderstandings and ambiguities, and in the realm of the spiritual this is especially so. Yet if we do not compare religious experiences cross-culturally, we imply that labeled categories entirely determine experience—a solipsistic argument of incommensurability that simply does not fit our knowledge. If we do not interrogate our own categories, we may mistakenly assume that our own cultural sensibilities are simply expressed in different forms elsewhere. Comparative phenomenology does not universalize; it shows us how deeply cultural expectations shape intimate human experience. In the approach we have presented here, we offer a method that helps us to disentangle phenomena defined by name, bodily affordance, or anomalous event. Such a perspective helps to orient such a range of phenomena within a larger comparative framework of felt religious experiences around the world while at the same time taking into account and emphasizing the complex nature of attending to such phenomena in particular historically and culturally elaborated ways.

11. We are grateful to Jocelyn Marrow for suggesting the wording of this paragraph.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful for the contributions of Jocelyn Marrow (especially in relation to the conclusion on cultural kindling) and Justin Van Elsberg (especially in relation to the historicization of the categories of religious experience) along with members of Tanya’s Culture and Mind Lab at Stanford University and of Julia’s Religion and the Body graduate seminar at Washington State University. They have offered invaluable suggestions for the framing of this project, as have Joel Robbins, two anonymous reviewers, and participants in the Wenner-Gren symposium on the anthropology of Christianity.

References Cited

- Adler, Shelley. 2011. *Sleep paralysis*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Asad, Talal. 2012. Thinking about religion, belief and politics. In *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*. Robert Orsi, ed. Pp. 36–57. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Blanke, Olaf, Stéphanie Ortiq, Theodor Landis, and Margitta Seeck. 2002. Stimulating illusory own body perceptions. *Nature* 419:269–270.
- Cardeña, Etzel, Steven Lynn, and Stanley Krippner. 2000. *The varieties of anomalous experiences*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Cassaniti, Julia. 2006. Toward a cultural psychology of impermanence in Thailand. *Ethos* 34(1):58–88.
- . 2009. Control in a world of change. PhD dissertation, University of Chicago.
- . 2012. Agency and the Other: the role of agency for the importance of belief in Buddhist and Christian traditions. *Ethos* 40(3):297–316.
- Cassaniti, Julia, and Tanya Luhrmann. 2011. Encountering the supernatural. *Religion and Society* 2:37–53.
- Christian, William, and Gabor Klaniczay, eds. 2008. *The “vision thing.”* Collegium Budapest Workshop Series, no. 18. Budapest: Collegium Budapest.
- Csordas, Thomas. 1993. The somatic mode of attention. *Cultural Anthropology* 8:135–156.
- . 1994. *The sacred self*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Davies, Owen. 2003. The nightmare experience, sleep paralysis and witchcraft accusations. *Folklore* 114(2):181–203.
- Desjarlais, Robert, and C. Jason Throop. 2011. Phenomenological approaches in anthropology. *Annual Reviews in Anthropology* 40:87–102.
- Eliacin, Johanne. 2013. Social capital, narratives of fragmentation, and schizophrenia: an ethnographic exploration of factors shaping African-Caribbeans’ social capital and mental health in a North London community. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 37:465–487.
- Gibson, James. 1986. *The ecological approach to visual perception*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Hacking, Ian. 1995. The looping effects of human kinds. In *Causal cognition: an interdisciplinary approach*. D. Sperber, ed. Pp. 351–383. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hardy, Alister. 1979. *The spiritual nature of man*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Hinton, Devon, David Hufford, and Laurence Kirmayer. 2005. Culture and sleep paralysis. *Transcultural Psychiatry* 42(1):5–10.
- Hopper, Kim. 2004. Interrogating the meaning of “culture” in the WHO international studies of schizophrenia. In *Schizophrenia, culture and subjectivity*. Janis Jenkins and Robert Barrett, eds. Pp. 62–86. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hufford, David. 1982. *The terror that comes in the night*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- James, William. 1999 (1902). *The varieties of religious experience*. New York: Modern Library.
- Kendler, Kenneth, Laura Thornton, and Charles Gardner. 2000. Stressful life events and previous episodes in the etiology of major depression in women: an evaluation of the “Kindling” hypothesis. *American Journal of Psychiatry* 157:1243–1251.
- Kraepelin, Emil. 1921. *Manic-depressive insanity and paranoia*. Edinburgh: E. & S. Livingstone.

- Kwon, Henrik. 2008. *Ghosts of war in Vietnam*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Levy, Robert. 1984. Emotion, knowing and culture. In *Culture theory*. Richard Shweder and Robert Levine, eds. Pp. 214–256. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lohmann, Roger, ed. 2003. *Dream travelers*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Luhrmann, Tanya Marie. 2012a. Beyond the brain. *Wilson Quarterly* 2012(Summer):28–34.
- . 2012b. *When God talks back: understanding the American Evangelical relationship with God*. New York: Knopf.
- Luhrmann, Tanya Marie, and Rachael Morgain. 2012. Prayer as inner sense cultivation. *Ethos* 40(4):359–389.
- McCorristine, Shane. 2010. *Spectres of the self*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge.
- Miller, Donald. 1997. *Reinventing American Protestantism*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Mittermaier, Amira. 2010. *Dreams that matter: Egyptian landscapes of the imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Monroe, S. M., and K. L. Harkness. 2005. Life stress, the “kindling” hypothesis, and the recurrence of depression: considerations from a life stress perspective. *Psychological Review* 112(2):417–445.
- Neisser, Ulrich. 1976. *Cognition and reality*. New York: W. H. Freeman.
- Newberg, Andrew, Eugene D’Aquili, and Vince Rause. 2001. *Why God won’t go away*. New York: Ballantine.
- Obeyesekere, Gananath. 2012. *The awakened ones*. New York: Columbia University.
- Orsi, Robert. 2012. The problem of the holy. In *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*. Robert Orsi, ed. Pp. 84–108. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pew Research Center. 2006. *Spirit and power: a ten country survey of Pentecostals*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.
- Rajadhon, Phaya Anuman. 1961. *Life and ritual in old Siam: three studies of Thai life and custom*. W. Gedney, ed. and trans. New Haven, CT: HRAF Press.
- Segal, Z. V., J. M. Williams, J. D. Teasdale, and M. Gemor. 1966. A cognitive science perspective on Kindling and episode sensitization in recurrent affective disorder. *Psychological Medicine* 26:371–380.
- Seligman, Rebecca, and Laurence Kirmayer. 2008. Dissociative experience and cultural neuroscience. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 32(1):31–64.
- Tambiah, Stanley J. 1970. *Buddhism and the spirit cults in northeast Thailand*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taves, Ann. 2009. *Religious experience reconsidered*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Textor, Robert. 1973. *Roster of the gods: an ethnography of the supernatural in a Thai village*. New Haven, CT: Human Relations Area Files.
- Tsai, Jeanne, Brian Knutson, and Helene Fung. 2006. Cultural variations in affect valuation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90:288–307.
- Tsai, Jeanne, Jennifer Louie, Eva Chen, and Yukiko Uchida. 2007. Learning what feelings to desire: socialization of affect through children’s story books. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 33:17–30.
- Tsai, J. L., F. Miao, and E. Seppala. 2007. Good feelings in Christianity and Buddhism: religious differences in ideal affect. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 33:409–421.