

EMBODIED LIBERATION IN BUDDHISM, PARTICIPATORY THEORY,
AND FEMININE SPIRITUALITY: A METAMODERN CRITICAL
HERMENEUTICS

by

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read EMBODIED LIBERATION IN BUDDHISM, PARTICIPATORY THEORY, AND FEMININE SPIRITUALITY: A METAMODERN CRITICAL HERMENEUTICS by Sabine Grunwald, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Integral and Transpersonal Psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies.

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ABSTRACT

Unprecedented contemporary spiritual, cultural, political, and ecological dilemmas call for new discourses and practices to transform societies and individuals and prepare for an uncertain future. The participatory transpersonal philosophy that is rooted in pluralism, embodiment, and participatory enaction offers a new lens to reframe spiritual, social, and cultural discord. This dissertation explores embodiment, *bodhisattva*-ness, and emancipation of femininities through the lens of participatory theory and spirituality. To what extent embodied liberation hampers or brings forth transbody and transpersonal transformations is less well understood. The assertion of this dissertation is that disembodiment, lack in *bodhisattva*-ness, and oppression of femininities limit the emergence of novel spiritual subject–object hybridizations as participatory events or participatory cosmologies. The synthesis of the participatory and the metamodern forms the soil for the blossoming of transbody, transpersonal, and transsocial transformations expressed in forms of participatory embodied spiritual emancipation, ethics of care and compassion, and liberation of feminine spiritualities. The methodological approach of this theoretical study is shaped by a combination of philosophical hermeneutics and critical theory. First, participatory

theory and Modernist *Vajrayāna* Buddhist traditions are juxtaposed, and similarities and differences in regard to the body, disembodiment, embodiment, and transbody-transpersonal transformations uncovered. The McDonaldization of the body—McBody—reveals the perils to embodied liberation. Second, the personified, idealized, mystified, naturalized, and integral *bodhisattva* from *Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna* Buddhist, participatory, and Western neurophysicalist perspectives are examined. Third, hybridized feminine-spiritual participatory events and participatory cosmologies that mirror subject—object hybridizations are studied in context of kyriarchal power structures that have contributed to internalized oppression of femininities. A critical reflection explores the meaning of participatory freedom and emancipation of femininities. A synthesis of positive and negative freedom and participatory theory informs the presented Embodied Liberation Meta Model.

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DEDICATION

To Bodhi, Dharma, Green and White Tārā, *ḍākinīs*, and *bodhisattvas* and their
fierce compassion that liberate suffering beings, bring forth love, and
facilitate the blossoming of femininities.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The participatory transpersonal philosophy that is rooted in pluralism, embodiment, and participatory enaction offers a new lens to reframe spiritual, social, and cultural discord and dilemmas (Ferrer & Sherman, 2008a; Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013). Unprecedented contemporary ecological, social, and spiritual crises call for new discourses and practices to transform individuals and societies and prepare for an uncertain future (Mickey et al., 2017). Global climate change (Cook et al., 2013; Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change, 2019), social inequalities (P. Diamond, 2019), spiritual crisis (M. Collins et al., 2010; Egri, 1997), emotional wounding of women (Anzaldúa, 2007), and women's oppression in industrialized contemporary Western society (Ferguson, 1991) exemplify the amalgam of interconnected ecological, social, spiritual, and issues of equality. Concomitantly, there is evidence in regard to the erosion of dogmatic religions (Fernandes, 2003), the rise of religious fundamentalist movements (Doktor, 2003), a shift toward spirituality and decline of organized religions (Lipka & Gecewicz, 2017), and an increase in individualized personal spiritualities (Moore, 2014). These dramatic changes in the religious and spiritual landscape suggest that people's soteriological needs and worldviews have been shifting. Such shifts affect the level of participation in communities, and vice versa, the social and spiritual engagement in the mystery of life. A mystery is perplexing and something one cannot fully understand or explain and is experienced as an existential drive that propels spiritual seekers onto a path to find meaning, seek purpose and fullness of life, emancipate, and liberate. Such

mysterious spiritual search undergirds how people relate to life's paradoxes (e.g., perceived real, hyperreal, empty, monolithic, and pluralistic spiritual truths) that manifest in form of a diversity of social, ecological, and political dilemmas and problems.

According to Hooper (2000), disembodied, socially disembedded, individualistic, and market-oriented trends of modernity have divorced people from their own lived experience and thus perpetuated hegemonic masculinity. Gare (2013) argued for re-embodiment to counter these developments, while Freinacht (2017) proposed transpersonal development toward a larger embodied listening society through participation and co-creation of new memes (i.e., cultural patterns) toward the metamodern turn. Metamodernism blends aspects of both modernism and postmodernism and is characterized by hope, romanticism, sincerity, authenticity, affect, feeling tones, and the potential for universal truths and grand narratives (van den Akker et al., 2017). Freinacht (2017) pointed out that metamodern society transforms human relations and expands individual minds and bodies through an emerging greater collective, social intelligence, and emotional intelligence. This “transpersonal” element of metamodernism addresses interconnected political, social, psychological, and spiritual crises in a complexifying digital post-industrialized information age in novel ways (Freinacht, 2017, 2019; Mickey et al., 2017). Metamodernism offers a vision to address the perils and menaces of modernism, the latter characterized by realism-naturalism, objectivism, individualism, self-aggrandizement, and liberal capitalism (C. Butler, 2010; Hicks, 2011). Metamodern strategies also provide

avenues to address the shadow sides of postmodernism designated by anti-realism, social subjectivism, social construction, conflict, collectivism, and egalitarianism (C. Butler, 2002; Hicks, 2011). The quest for disembodiment has been prevalent in modernism and postmodernism in the name of autonomy, independence, and strive for freedom from time and place and labor and nature (Gare, 2013). In this dissertation, the disintegration of the body alienated from a larger societal, ecological, or cosmic whole is explored through the participatory lens. Ferrer and Sherman's (2008a) metamodern participatory turn undergirds the body-soteriological research space of my scholarly work.

The space to situate my research entails both *transbody* (Röhricht, 2015; Weiss, 2015) and transpersonal (Hartelius et al., 2013) dimensions to explore body-soteriological transformative pathways adopting participatory epistemology and ontology, Buddhist philosophy and ethics, and feminist spirituality.

Transbody refers to states of consciousness beyond the limits of the common physical body identity and the body image as a representational spatial image that people have of themselves (cf. Röhricht, 2015; Weiss, 2015). Assertions of this dissertation entail that embodiment¹ (Mehling et al., 2009), transpersonal development expressed through heartfulness and *bodhisattva*-ness² toward others and being in and of the world (Chi, 2016), and participatory feminine spiritualities (Fernandes, 2003; Ferrer, 2011) are pillars that condition the transformation potential of contemporary American and Western societies facing interconnected cultural, social, and spiritual dilemmas. This dissertation adopts participatory

epistemology and ontology to explore various hybridizations³ of cultural, spiritual, and feminine facets.

In Buddhism, transbody and transpersonal states of consciousness play a pivotal role on the path to liberation (Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, 2013a; Ray, 2008). The path of transformation implicates the *bodhisattva* prevalent in various Buddhist traditions (McLeod, 2014; Ray, 2000; Samuels, 1997). The Buddhist *bodhisattva*'s aim is to liberate oneself and all sentient beings by ending suffering and to act compassionately toward all sentient beings (Leighton, 2012). The *bodhisattva* ideal is paradoxical with complex relations between the *bodhisattva*'s path and goals (e.g., emptiness, Sanskrit, *śūnyatā*), morals, and prosocial engagement (Danto, 1987; Perrett, 1986). The Buddhist *bodhisattva* ideal (Pelden, 2007) stands in contrast to the naturalized Western *bodhisattva* grounded in rationalism, objectivism, and neurophysicalism (O. Flanagan, 2011), and the metamodern *integral bodhisattva* which is part of participatory spirituality (Ferrer, 2017). Contrasting ethical views of these *bodhisattva* ideals undergird the motivations and enactments of compassion as well as spiritual and social participation in ecosystems. Although *bodhisattva*-ness is central for how people relate to spiritual, moral, and social dilemmas it has been understudied. The discernment of differences and similarities between self-centered and disembodied non-Buddhist *bodhisattvas*,⁴ Buddhist *bodhisattvas* striving for universal compassion, and participatory integral *bodhisattvas* in pursuit of metamodern ideals are relevant in context of contemporary post-industrialized

information societies facing alienation, disembodiment, and amplified individualism (P. Diamond, 2019).

Contemporary Western society holds polarized spiritual/religious positions: (a) a position that is open to globalization and cosmologies, as well as invests itself in the world through human and spiritual development; and (b) a position that prefers isolation and erects boundaries to avoid intermingling with other religions and spiritual beliefs (P. Beyer, 1994). For P. Beyer (1994), religion is “performance,” meaning that religious communications create public space in order to gain social, political, and cultural influence. According to Albrow (1997), the global spiritual landscape is characterized by a prevailing sense of interconnectedness for all life and the awareness that life on earth is threatened and action needed to address this threat to humanity. Geoffroy (2004) identified four major contemporary religious/spiritual positions—the intransigent (dogmatic, perennialist), conservative, pluralistic, and relativistic (e.g., New Age spiritualities) positions. Ferrer (2017) projected four future scenarios of religion entailing (a) the emergence of a single world faith; (b) mutual transformation of religions with cross-pollination among religions; (c) interspiritual wisdom affirming the emergence of numerous spiritual teachings, principles, and values supported by all religions; and (d) spirituality without religion advocating for the cultivation of a spiritual life free from religious dogma or supernatural beliefs. Participatory spiritualities express hybridized forms of spiritualities and religions toward an infinite differentiation-in-communion, which is characterized by embodied and less self-centered forms at individual and collective levels (Ferrer,

2009). In this study, the research space entails the investigation of hybridizations of transpersonal and transbody states from postmodern, metamodern participatory, and Buddhist perspectives.

In America, Buddhist convert communities have developed hybridized forms that fuse Buddhist beliefs, metaphysics, and practices with Western memes and meta-memes resembling metamodern ideals (Gleig, 2019). These radical revalorizations of Oriental Buddhist traditions express shifts from modern to postmodern culture toward metamodern culture that enacts hybridity, harmonization, plurality, and globality of participatory epistemologies (Gleig, 2019; McMahan, 2008). Specifically, tantric esoteric Buddhist traditions (*Vajrayāna* Buddhism) that view the human body as the gateway to spiritual liberation have cultivated ancient inner and somatic practices to dissolve the individual into primordial emptiness and liberation (Baker, 2019; Kalu Rinpoche, 1995). The cultivation of embodied forms of spirituality in the context of *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna* Buddhism assume a specific spiritual ultimate, that is, the realization of Buddha nature (Powers, 2007; Ray, 2002, 2018). The Buddhist assertion of a monolithic spiritual ultimate contrasts the participatory view that assumes a plurality of spiritual ultimates refuting spiritual hierarchy (Duckworth, 2014a; Ferrer, 2009, 2017).

In the pluralistic participatory theory, the body is viewed as equal to vital, heart, mind, and consciousness as part of an integrated larger whole (Ferrer, 2017). While somatic-focused *Vajrayāna* Buddhism emerged in pre-modern and modern culture in Asia (Baker, 2019), the participatory paradigm is embedded in

emergent metamodernism in the West (Ferrer, 2017). What kind of somatic-spiritual-cultural hybridizations emerge as *Vajrayāna* and other convert Buddhist traditions enter contemporary American culture is unknown. The metamodern pluralistic perspective offers a new lens to explore dichotomies in body-spiritualities within the cultural emergent space in the Western world. According to van den Akker et al. (2017), metamodernism is considered a cultural phase in media, politics, society, philosophy, and the arts. In this sense, metamodernism is a certain kind of spirit-of-the-time (German, *Zeitgeist*). Freinacht (2017) pointed out that metamodernism is not only a cultural phase or philosophical paradigm but also a human developmental hierarchy. According to Freinacht, the highest developmental state is spiritual unity, whereas the metamodern stage is characterized by the ability to discern some positions as more real than others among multiple perspectives through deep listening. In contrast, van den Akker and Vermeulen (2017) stressed that metamodernism is a structure of feeling, a cultural sentiment viewed as an oscillation among, between, and after modern and postmodern sensibilities. The metaxy (i.e., the in-betweenness or the movement between opposite positions that oscillates fluidly like a pendulum from one to the other along a continuum) of such metamodern view is aligned with Ferrer's (2002) participatory view. In this study, metamodern participatory epistemology and ontology form the framework to explore the hybridization of body-spiritualities.

According to Freinacht (2017), the embryonic metamodernism presupposes that individuals and societies are more compassionate, less self-

centered, and more embodied than in modernity and postmodernity.

Metamodernism, a term coined by Zavarzadeh in 1975, relates to change, metamorphosis, and Metalanguage, and thus, is not just a reaction to postmodernism (Baciu et al., 2015). Metamodernists recognize the intimate interconnectedness of all things and constant emergence of the great unknown, which echoes participatory theory (Ferrer, 2017). Freinacht (2017) asserted that the metamodernists use fluently dialectic logic, subjective, and intersubjective approaches in a complexifying world full of cultural, spiritual, and social paradoxes. The resilience of metamodern people is based on the view that “people are fundamentally crazy and that our everyday consciousness is not a sane reflection of reality, but a bizarre, psychotic hallucination that is utterly contingent, made up and arbitrary” (p. 367). Such perspective nurtures deep acceptance of individual, interpersonal, and societal differences because co-creation underlies everything: “I am all that arises; you create me as I create you” (p. 323). Ceriello (2018a) stressed that metamodern spiritual identities are fluid and freely constructed and reconstructed through open engagement with mystical and spiritual phenomena. This process of cocreation blurs ontological boundaries and involves an increased sense of personal agency.

The transpersonal and transbody arcs from modern and postmodern memes toward new memes will determine whether globally metamodern meta-memes will blossom, as exemplified by the Green Social Liberal metamodern Nordic societies (Freinacht, 2019) or the Leap New Green Deal that calls for holistic transformation of interlocked ecological, economic, and social systems

(N. Klein, 2020). Other possibilities entail dark futures, such as the dystopia of an uninhabitable earth (Wallace-Wells, 2019). According to Wallace-Wells (2019), the alternatives of metamodernism are utterly devastating with people adversely affected by global climate warming (e.g., wildfires, sea level rise, flooding, heat waves) forcing environmental migration, food and water shortages, economic disruptions, collapse of social and political systems, and oppressive authoritative power structures. This dystopic view claims that the cultural collapse is associated with ethical deterioration due to the dominance of anti-*bodhisattvas* that enact careless, reckless, and impassionate memes. The postmodern spiritual, social, and ecological dilemmas are global and no longer can be narrowly defined by European and American intellectual traditions; thus, the need for a metamodern conversation that includes Buddhism.

Corsa (2018) posited that metamodernism ought to embrace global ethics to adequately address global crises. Compassion and intimacy are metamodern traits that are awakening in response to narratives of emotional cruelty in civil discourse in the Trumpian age with strong relativistic and modern undertones which have disrupted people's way of being (Mooney, 2012; Moscovitz, 2018). N. Klein's (2020) provided an alarming vision of global climate disruption: A hot planet literally on fire, hurricanes and torrential rains drowning islands and coastal cities have triggered the sixth mass extinction of species, and cataclysmic economic and human costs. The global coronavirus pandemic has escalated such eco-fascism, ecological genocide, culture and identity wars, and subsequent social inequalities. Klein argued for an indigenous inspired postcarbon future which is

grounded in deep care for the Earth and to care for one another with clear overtones of a metamodern attitude. Grunwald (2021a, 2021b) echoed such care ethics that inspire to reconnect with the Earth, humanity, and the whole cosmos because it shifts people's experiences toward metamodern and unifying perspectives that inherently involve compassionate responses to the interlocked global crises.

Compassion, care, and prosocial affects have been associated with the feminine according to Tyson (2015). Ethics of care (or relational ethics) are relatively new ethical approaches that are focused on feminine characteristics or care perspective instead of the masculine justice perspective (Burnor & Raley, 2011; Grunwald, 2021c). Care ethics, affects (e.g., compassion and empathy), and love for others and the planet undergird metamodernism (van den Akker et al., 2017). According to Gilligan (1993), women tend to focus on care and relationships exemplified by the ideal care model of mother/child relation, while men tend to focus on justice, universal rights, and moral masculine principles. Ethics of care emphasize interpersonal relationships, human interdependence, relational autonomy, impartiality, particularism, and relation-building emotions (e.g., sympathy and empathy) in support of morally healthy relationships. Noddings (2003) asserted that caring relationships between carer and cared-for require the latter to recognize oneself as recipient of care and mutuality ("good relationships"). This assertion contrasts modern and ancient cultures that have shown pronounced patriarchal social structures with more masculine than feminine expressions that have been perceived as uncaring and oppressive

(Fernandes, 2003). Such oppressive forces have manifested in forms of violence against women of color (Crenshaw, 1991; Ferguson, 1991) and sexual abuse, battering, and rape (Kemp & Anderson, 1999). Patriarchal power structures have rendered women and the feminine invisible and voiceless. To overcome patriarchy transcendent states of “Women’s Be-ing,” “New be-ing,” and ultimately “Metabe-ing” have been proposed by Schneider (2000). Such meta-narratives in the context of feminist spirituality are understudied.

The term *feminist spirituality* emerged during the feminist movement of the second wave in the United States in the 1970s. The feminist spirituality movement was motivated to reclaim the power, value, and dignity of women subjugated to male-dominated religious dogma. The study of *feminism* centers scholarship around socio-economic issues (e.g., gender justice, reproductive freedom, and gender discrimination) and experiences of women that have been perceived as constraining women’s well-being and lives (Brooks, 2010). Feminism has been and continues to be a global movement grounded in passion and protests of women to have their voices heard striving for women’s emancipation and gender equality (Delap, 2020). The frameworks of *feminist science* have focused on *feminist empiricism*, which is the study of experiences of oppression and other women’s experiences (Borgerson, 2020), and *feminist standpoint theory* as epistemology, methodology, and philosophy of science asserting that knowledge is socially situated. Specifically, the situatedness of marginalized groups that have been oppressed by power differentials accounting for sexism, racism, heterosexism, ableism, and classism are of pivotal importance

in feminist standpoint theory (Hundleby, 2020). Latin American *decolonial feminist philosophies* have brought forth activist movements and scholarship rooted in spiritual traditions of indigenous traditions (Harding & Mendoza, 2020), while *Black feminism* and *Womanism* focus on engagement with intersectionality and centers the experiences of black women of color (J. C. Nash, 2019).

Feminist objectivity refers to situated knowledge rather than transcendence or states of being (Haraway, 1988). Feminist objectivity is grounded in feminist standpoint theory, which suggests starting research from the lives of women rather than from theory. Haraway (1988) rejected relativism and instead suggested situated and critical scientific knowledge as feminist epistemology, even if this means for women to learn about “derogatory subjugated” standpoints because those bear the potential for transformation and social change. The assertion is that objectivity is passionate detachment and allows researchers to deconstruct and then passionately construct new and better-informed ways of seeing and acting. For Haraway objectivity is preferred over identity, which has caused imbalances between oppressed women and the oppressors. According to Naples and Gurr (2014), feminist scholarship has been conducted mainly by privileged white, middle-class heterosexuals, which has introduced bias into objective knowing. Lloyd (1995) critiqued feminist objectivity arguing that feminism as a political movement is irrelevant to objective truth and scientific knowledge. In contrast, *feminist subjectivity* is grounded in the lived experience of oppressed voices of women instead of being viewed through the lens of dominant culture. Subjectivity in the postmodern feminist context means to take the perspective of the individual

self, rather than an objective outsider position, such as a detached researcher (Davies, 1992).

Postmodern feminism has aimed to deconstruct patriarchal norms entrenched in society undergirding gender inequality through recognizing the plurality of women's experiences and characteristics (Hekman, 2005). In contrast, *feminist essentialism* is an ideology that argues that women are fundamentally different to men and that common "feminine" characteristics (e.g., values such as care, empathy, and nurture) are shared by all women which unifies them (Stone, 2004). Woman is a necessary starting point for any feminist endeavor, however, to define a woman solely by her biology is apparently reductionistic. Essentialism is widely rejected by feminist theorists today, but was a widely held belief among second wave feminists. Essentialism has been refuted by the argument that femininity is socially constructed instead biologically bound to specific female characteristics (Stone, 2004; Witt, 1995).

Although anti-essentialism argues that the idea of substance, of a persistent subject is illusory, gender is considered nonetheless a stable category of significance within a given culture (Witt, 1995). Bohan (1993) juxtaposed the essentialist construal of gender that has been critiqued based on empirical, political, and theoretical concerns and the constructivist position of gender that has been offered as an ameliorative explanation to address gender disparity and women's oppression. Feminist psychology has recognized that neither essentialism nor anti-essentialism can fully address polarizing views of gender, sex, and feminine engrained in cultures. This tension has brought forth

compromise approaches, such as *strategic essentialism*. This term was coined by C. G. Spivak and “provisionally accepts essentialist foundations for identity categories as a strategy for collective representation in order to pursue chosen political ends” (Pande, 2017, p. 1).

The disconnection between secular feminism and religious/spiritual feminism have been pronounced indicating a sacred/secular divide throughout feminist history (P. M. Magee, 1995). According to Llewellyn and Trzebiatowska (2013), secular and religious/spiritual discourses interact and cannot be separated. The binary ideological views in the feminist academy have focused on power, identity, agency, and oppression related to sex, gender, and femininities in the public spheres. Such secular feminism’s remissness of women’s spiritual lives is incongruous with women’s spiritual and religious practices enacting immanent and transcendent spiritualities that touch the mystery.

Spiritualized feminism is grounded in spiritualized understanding to foster non-violent social transformation and social equality, specifically for oppressed women (Fernandes, 2003). Despite the multiplicities of spiritualities and femininities, it is unclear whether spirituality informs the feminine and brings forth social transformation, or vice versa, whether the feminine enacts a multiplicity of spiritualities and social transformations. The pluralistic participatory theory offers a new lens for a participatory feminist spirituality, which explores the feminine-in-spiritual diversity. This approach provides a potent research space to identify novel transpersonal constructs that hybridize feminine-spiritual as a participatory event or as a participatory cosmology⁵. This

dissertation research breaks new ground and contributes toward a critical theory of participatory feminine spirituality.

Reframing of modern and postmodern feminist narratives (Frost & Elichaooff, 2014), radical egalitarianism and equal rights feminist activism (Kinser, 2004; Purvis, 2004), personal feminine narratives of third-wave feminisms (Jacob & Licona, 2005), spiritual and social identities (othering), and opposition (feminine versus masculine; Tyson, 2015) into a participatory frame offers potential to emancipate femininities through wholeness, embodiment, and integration of human, subtle, and spiritual dimensions (Ferrer, 2017). The plurality of subject–object hybridizations of participatory theory have not been applied to feminist spirituality, and thus, offer great potential to infuse metamodern narratives with hybridized feminine-spiritual participatory events⁶ and cosmologies.

Thesis Statement and Research Objectives

The thesis of this dissertation is that disembodiment, lack in *bodhisattva*-ness, and oppression of femininities limit the emergence of constructive, novel subject–object hybridizations as participatory events or participatory cosmologies. I posit that hybridizations of somatic, affective-spiritual, and feminine elements are critically important to move from modern and postmodern memes toward participatory metamodern memes. Emerging and contemporary metamodernists exhibit the capacity to synthesize novel meta-narratives and develop collective intelligence to co-create resilient and flourishing cultures in the face of socially constructed and spiritual dilemmas.

The thesis will be argued by undertaking a theoretical research study examining (a) the body, disembodiment, and embodiment in context of participatory theory and Western Modernist *Vajrayāna* Buddhism (Chapter 4); (b) *bodhisattva*-ness from the Buddhist, Western naturalistic neurophysical non-spiritual, and participatory spiritual perspectives (Chapter 5); and (c) feminist spirituality through the participatory lens⁷ (Chapter 6). The connecting thread that will run through each chapter will be the grounding of the investigation in participatory theory. This transpersonal theory has not been explicitly juxtaposed with Buddhist philosophy and feminist spirituality, with few exceptions (e.g., Duckworth, 2014a).

The first objective of this dissertation is to juxtapose participatory theory and Indo-Tibetan *Vajrayāna* Buddhist traditions and identify similarities and differences in regard to the body, disembodiment, embodiment, and transbody-transpersonal transformations. The second objective investigates the *bodhisattva* as personified, idealized, mystified, naturalized, and integral *bodhisattva*. A comprehensive discussion of *bodhisattva* motivations, ideals, and ethics articulated in *Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, the naturalized *bodhisattva* (neurophysicalism), and the integral *bodhisattva* (embodied participatory spirituality) are presented. The third objective is to study hybridized feminine-spiritual participatory events and participatory cosmologies that mirror subject-object hybridizations in participatory theory.

Positionality and Personal Motivation

My first passion in life was nature and the environment, which inspired me to study environmental sciences and landscape processes earning my first Ph.D. in 1996. My dissertation research focused on simulation modeling of water and soil quality rooted in empiricism and system theory. Since then, my academic career involved quantitative research—statistics, geostatistics, hybrid stochastic-deterministic modeling, artificial intelligence, and mechanistic simulation modeling—to better understand environmental phenomena and change, human-environmental interactions, and how global climate change impacts soil, water, and people. Since 2001 I worked as a faculty member at a corporate large public U.S. university earning tenure in 2006 and promotion to full professor in 2010. However, over time my research viewing people and communities solely as numbered nodes in an abstracted ecosystem model seemed more and more reductionistic, distant, and disembodied lacking deeper ways of knowing and understanding. Wilber (2000a) called such reductionistic view of the world overly focused on “objective truth” (IT/ITS) *flatland* because knowing also involves subjective (“I,” The Beautiful) and intersubjective (“We,” The Good) perspectives; the latter were in the shadows at the time.

My fascination with Wilber’s integral theory (see Wilber, 2000b; 2000c; 2007)—AQAL (all quadrants, all levels) of interior-singular, interior-plural, exterior-objective, and exterior-interobjective; integral methodological pluralism; integral transpersonal psychology—was profound. I studied integral theory at Fielding Graduate University, Santa Barbara, CA, earning a graduate certificate in

integral studies in 2013. The Wilber-Combs lattice asserts that a combination of human developmental *stages* (e.g., archaic, magic, mythic, rational, pluralistic, integral, superintegral) and *states* of consciousness (gross, subtle, causal, and nondual; Wilber, 2007) culminates in the final state-stage nondual. This integral map means that

a person can have a profound peak, religious, spiritual, or meditative experience of, say, a subtle light or causal emptiness, but they will interpret that experience with the only equipment they have, namely, the tools of the stage of development they are at. (Wilber, 2007, p. 91)

For many years Wilber's perennial integral metatheory provided me with a road map involving psycho-spiritual development and trauma-sensitive inner work. I had often wondered why I had explored many different kinds of secular and nonsecular meditation, mind-body, compassion and loving-kindness meditation, and contemplative practices over the years including qigong, tai chi, shiatsu, Zen, Vipassana, holotropic breathwork, somatic meditation, social meditation, mantra and visualization practices, chanting, and nondual practices. I spearheaded a faculty team to launch the University of Florida (UF) Mindfulness Program and have served as its director since 2015. This program aims to co-create mindful campus culture and offers secular and nonsecular mindfulness meditation and compassion workshops, teachings, and retreats. I have been fascinated by exploring, learning, and expanding my phenomenal experience of the vast spectrum of transpersonal and transbody states. Indo-Tibetan *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna* Buddhist philosophy, ethics, study, and practices provided an insurmountable foundation for my spiritual development. Although I learned much from many spiritual and Buddhist teachers (e.g., Shastri Will Ryken,

Acharya Susan Skjei, *Vajrayāna* teacher Reginald [Reggie] A. Ray, Caroline Pfohl, Skye LaChute, Steve Armstrong, and Tara Brach) and sanghas / communities (e.g., Shambhala, Dharma Ocean, Zen, Triratna Buddhism, Vipassana, Buddhist Geeks, and local dharma groups) in organic fashion about a vast amount of spiritualities it left me partially unfulfilled in the face of the abundance of spiritual paths. One path I engaged in more deeply is the *Vajrayāna*. I received formal transmission from Ray entering the path of a *Tantrika* (*Vajrayāna* practitioner), falling in love with the teachings and *Vajrayāna* mind–body practices. I do not identify myself as a Buddhist or traditional *tantric* Indo-Tibetan Buddhist practitioner or scholar of *sutras*. I hold the *Vajrayāna* more “lightly” and unfolding as part of the emerging American dharma (Western Buddhism). My positionality is more of a Buddhist-informed and inspired practitioner with interest in hybridization of Buddhist-meditation-social practices, inner feminine psychospiritual qualities, compassion and care for the environment and people, and outer metamodern sensibilities but without rigid focus on a specific spiritual goal. In a sense, my view is aligned with participatory theory. This situatedness makes me somewhat vulnerable and potentially biased to present this theoretical dissertation. I have aimed to suspend and hold in abeyance my biases, presuppositions, assumptions, spiritual and cultural beliefs, and experiences through the process of bracketing to convey the investigated phenomena of this dissertation from multiple perspectives. My scholarly approach to address potential biases involved the identification of similarities, dissimilarities, and synthesis of topical themes to present the breadth and depth of

what is knowable involving somatic, emotional, linguistic, and mind-based ways of knowing.

My positionality regarding feminism is fluid, oscillating between postmodern feminism and strategic essentialism. I sense my attunement with emerging metamodern feminism and the envisioned participatory feminine spirituality (Brooks et al., 2013). My sensibilities as a cis-gender woman toward pluralism and the metamodern are born out of a career in academia in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. These disciplines are male-dominated and lag behind in terms of diversity, inclusivity, and equity. In the STEM work environment I experienced various barriers (such as power differentials, gender discrimination, glass ceiling, being silenced, mansplaining, and leading through the double and triple bind that many other woman leaders have also faced, cf. Rennison & Bonomi, 2020) that inspired me to develop my inner spiritual-feminist voice. To undertake this research and reduce biases my aim was to be mindful and sensitive in regard to my personal attunement toward specific feminist orientations. From my personal situatedness the following questions emerged that motivated my dissertation research:

- May the body serve as a subjective–objective unifier to pacify participatory and *Vajrayāna* Buddhist views? (Chapter 4)
- Metamodernism holds the potential to transform contemporary spiritual, ecological, and socio-political polarities. What qualities, way of being, and goals shall a contemporary *bodhisattva* ideally embody

to co-create a metamodern future and participate to the fullest in the mystery of life? (Chapter 5)

- Does the emancipation of femininities from oppressive, non-participatory spiritualities enact unity-in-diversity (i.e., feminine-in-spiritual diversity) or does it lead to new forms of spiritual oppression? (Chapter 6)

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

First, I present a brief literature review of participatory theory and spirituality, embodiment, disembodiment, and body constructs viewed through the Western and Buddhist lenses, *bodhisattva* models, and feminist spirituality. This literature review is intended to provide the basic foundation for the research topics presented in this dissertation, while specific topical literature is embedded within the research chapters and reflections (Chapters 4 to 7).

Participatory Theory and Participatory Spirituality

Participatory theory of human spirituality emerged in 2002 with Ferrer's work *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory*, which was a response to neo-perennialism and perennialism⁸ that had dominated the field of transpersonal psychology since its inception. Epistemological and ontological foundations of participatory thinking that embrace multiple ways of knowing were provided earlier by Tarnas (2001) and Heron (1996). Heron stressed that the epistemology of the subjective–objective is revealed in relation to others. According to Heron (2003), the participatory nature of human knowing is inherently an experience with someone or something, implying that the experience is always shared intersubjectively; it is participatory. This subjectivity is always contextually engaged based on intersubjective culture, beliefs of spiritual schools or traditions, gendered, sexualized, politicized, and flavored through a socially constructed field. Heron emphasized that the spiritual and the subtle as transpersonal experience are also subjective–objective through *knowing by acquaintance*, by personal participation. This participatory view rejects both a purely subjective

account of transpersonal experiences and the monopolar perennial philosophy with the “objectivist” notion of “One all-inclusive Absolute.” The radical shift in view from perennial and Eastern theologies is that notions of one reality and one transcendent consciousness with the absolute identity of subject and object are untenable. Instead, the subjective–objective transpersonal experience is considered fluid meaning that what is subjective in one type of experience may appear objective in another, and vice versa. This notion implies a plurality of different realms and many ways of being-in-the-world (“*Many-in-One*”), called *diunity*⁹ (i.e., not a duality and not a nonduality; Heron, 2003).

According to Ferrer (2002), the participatory vision turns away from intrasubjective experiences to participatory events of transpersonal and spiritual phenomena. These epistemic events are not reduced to individual inner subjective experiences, but can emerge multilocally, for example, in the locus of a relationship (e.g., women’s circle), a collective identity (e.g., women of color identity), a place (e.g., a sacred mountain), or an individual. This view frees participation in the undetermined spirituality from the inner subjective space and expands to include two other worlds (i.e., the objective and intersubjective worlds). A non-participatory view considers a person “having” a specific experience (e.g., feminine divine) with a specific state of consciousness (e.g., feminine consciousness), which reifies the Cartesian subject–object split and objectifies the experienced phenomena (i.e., makes something other). In contrast, the participatory view asserts ontological (not merely phenomenological) subject–

object identification with the participation of the individual's consciousness in a spiritual event.

Participatory knowing occurs through knowing by presence, identity by the virtue of being, enaction, and transformation of self, social communities, and the world (Ferrer, 2002). *Enaction* refers to bring forth or cocreate rather than encounter something pregiven that is ontologically fixed (Varela et al., 2016). An enactive understanding of the sacred conceives spiritual phenomena, experiences, and insights as cocreated events (Lahood, 2007). Participatory enaction is epistemologically constructivist and metaphysically realist, which means that the participatory model boldly affirms spiritual realities without naïve essentialisms of dogmatic certainty nor reified metaphysics of presence (Ferrer, 2002; Ferrer & Sherman, 2008b). However, it contrasts with prominent epistemological and metaphysical philosophies that make explicit truth claims denying the possibility of cocreation (e.g., substance monism¹⁰; Nadler, 2020)

In participatory theory, pluralism is embraced to explain the multiverse of spiritualities (Ferrer, 2008a, 2009). Pluralism involves tolerating different views or beliefs (e.g., different views of feminist spirituality; Baghramian & Ingram, 2013). Participatory knowing of reality is considered multidimensional, fusing the intellectual knowing of the mind and thoughts (Look, 2020), the emotional and empathic knowing of the heart (Hart, 1999; Jordan, 1997), the sensual and somatic knowing of the body (Caldwell, 2014; Kaparo, 2012; Yasuo, 1987), the visionary and intuitive knowing of the inner world or soul (Hollenback, 1996;

Puhakka, 2000), as well as any other way of knowing available to human beings (Ferrer, 2002, 2017).

These multiple ways of knowing are supported in participatory theory through the *integration* of all human dimensions (body, vital energy, heart, mind, and consciousness) to embody wholeness (e.g., embodied spirituality) and fullness of being (e.g., bodyfulness; Ferrer, 2006). Embodiment embraces the equiprimacy principle, which gives equal weight to all human dimensions without allocating supremacy to one or the other. The fully embodied spirituality entails transcendent (e.g., cosmic bodies) as well as immanent spiritual sources (e.g., chakras and subtle energy flow in the body; Ferrer, 2017). According to Ferrer (2017), a firm grounding in the body leads to an embodied state where the object becomes subject: the “It” (body) becomes an intimate partner, a “Thou.” This lived experience of the genuine coming together of subject and object involves an ontological shift. Rather than the subject viewing the object (i.e., a distancing, third-person analytical knowing by an observer or witness), the subject is now “being” the object and a transformation of the subject takes place (Puhakka, 2000). Being bodies was emphasized by Budgeon (2003) who argued for the body to be conceptualized as a participatory event instead of an object to enact embodied identities from a feminist perspective. This ontology rests on the dynamics of “bodies becoming” through a variety of connections with other bodies, practices, and activities.

The participatory view of reality embraces plurality of liberative spiritual paths and goals grounded in subjective–objective participatory events going

beyond Cartesian duality, which separates object and subject, and assumes that a pregiven world exists out there independently of human cognition. Such a dualistic view was pronounced in modernity (Ferrer, 2002; Heron, 2003), though it is still lived reality for many individuals in contemporary culture (Freinacht, 2017). Importantly, participatory theory moves even beyond subject–object fluidity based on a mere phenomenological perspective; instead, it argues for ontological *subject–object hybridity*. Versions of subtle Cartesianism in which a subject having experiences of transpersonal objects (e.g., a visualized deity in Buddhism) or someone (i.e., a “who”) having an experience of something (i.e., a “what”) assumes an experiencing subject in relation to objects of experience. Such a view only creates further divisions, and thus, is rejected from a participatory perspective (Ferrer, 2002).

According to Ferrer (2002), participatory theory voices reservations against the varieties of perennialism including basic perennialism (with one path and one ultimate spiritual Truth, e.g., God or Goddess) and ambiguous “hidden” forms of perennialism, such as esotericist, structuralist, perspectivist, and typological universalism. Lahood (2008) pointed out that Ferrer’s view connotes “a subtle form of boundary fetishism and potentially a tacit appeal to religious purity, an appeal that hybridity theorists would claim as untenable” (p. 179). In response, Ferrer (2017) clarified that the participatory approach not only embraces interreligious interactions and novel spiritual expressions, but can also be viewed as a cosmological hybridization among Western, Eastern, and Indigenous traditions. Abramson (2014, 2015) argued that participatory theory is

inherently perennial because it involves intimate participation in the mystery/spirit and every tradition must assume some spiritual reality. Abramson asserted that the participatory theory is perspectivist perennialist, which allows ultimate realities, and thus, inherently makes an absolute truth claim. These arguments were refuted based on Abramson's misinterpretation of perennialism (Hartelius, 2015a, 2015b).

Ferrer (2011, 2017) proposed three dimensions of spiritual cocreation: *Intrapersonal cocreation* consists of the collaborative participation of all human attributes—body, vital energy, heart, mind, and consciousness—in the enactment of spiritual consciousness. This *intrapersonal* cocreation affirms the embodied, immanent dimension of the mystery, that is the “spirit within” (principle of equiprimacy). *Transpersonal cocreation* refers to dynamic interaction between embodied human beings and the mystery in the enactment of spiritual insights, states, practices, and worlds. It affirms the enactive, inquiry-driven participatory spirituality as “spirit beyond,” emphasizing transcendence (principle of equiplurality). *Interpersonal cocreation* emerges from cooperative relationships among human beings through peer-to-peer relationships and in communion with “spirit in-between,” including nonhuman intelligences such as subtle entities and natural powers (principle of equipotentiality). These three dimensions of spirituality make participatory theory one of the most comprehensive spiritual and mind–body theories because it includes all three spiritual pathways—the descendent path, ascending path, and extending path for spiritual transformation (Daniels, 2005).

The Body, Embodiment, and Disembodiment

The quest for *disembodiment* has been prevalent in modernism and postmodernism in the name of autonomy, independence, and strive for individual and social freedom. From a postmodern perspective, these goals to be free of the humdrum of everyday life are supposedly attained through overcoming the limits of the human body by fusing with technology or a virtual digital world (Gare, 2013; Suler, 2016). The modern and postmodern quests have both denied and ignored embodiment of multiple human faculties (Gare, 2013; Muri, 2003).

Embodiment has been defined as the felt sense of being localized within one's physical body and references the lived immediate experience of one's own body (Mehling et al., 2009). To embody the lived experience of a particular moment means to viscerally feel sensory, motor, emotional, and imaginal experiences rather than to funnel arousal into mental concepts, ideas, and categories (Fogel, 2013). Embodiment is a crucial element in participatory theory, which addresses disembodied spirituality prominently found in Western culture (Ferrer, 2017).

Disembodiment, bodylessness, somatophobia, and the oppression of bodily selves have been prevalent in the West (Caldwell, 2014). These narratives of bodies that are dead, numb, unseen, distant, or objects of beauty to be romanticized point to disidentification and fragmentation in which the body is estranged and separated from a larger whole. This marginalization of the body in contemporary Western culture stands in contrast to the potential of a lived body, a lived mind, and lived environment (Varela et al., 2016). Feeling the body (body awareness; Prendergast, 2015), being within a body (embodiment; D. H. Johnson,

2018), being in relationship with the body (participation; Stanley, 2016), experiencing a larger body (cosmic body; Cardeña & Winkelman, 2011), and being body (nonduality; Blackstone, 2008; Loy, 1986) are perspectives that nurture more subjective and intersubjective body constructs. Such positive views of the body have been asserted in the domains of somaesthetics, body consciousness, embodied spirituality, phenomenology, and psychosomatics (Ferrer, 2017; Marlock & Weiss, 2015; Shusterman, 2008).

However, the body has been desacralized and shunned as impure in several major religions (e.g., S. Coakley, 1997; Kripal, 2014); ignored, devalued, and objectified in Anglo-American philosophy (e.g., G. Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Shusterman, 2008); and commodified and sexualized in Anglo-American culture (e.g., Barratt, 2013; Traister, 2018). In various degrees, the rise of individualism, disembodiment, and the relinquishment of a sense of the sacred have contributed to the incipient mind–body divide in Anglo-American thought (A. C. Klein, 2004). History is overburdened by disembodied spirituality, suggesting that the body and vital/primary energies have been often ignored or sublimated in religious practice (Ferrer, 2008b) with few exceptions (e.g., tantric esoteric forms of bodily practices in Hinduism and Buddhism). In disembodied spirituality, the body is viewed as a hindrance to spiritual flourishing, sinful, a defilement, an unreliable source of spiritual insight, illusory, impure, defective, or simply unequal with heart, mind, and consciousness. In contrast, participatory theory embraces embodied spirituality and views all human dimensions, including the body, as equal partners harmonizing self, community, and social, political, and

ecological worlds with the mystery out of which everything arises (Ferrer, 2015).

The body and vital primary energy are viewed as crucial for spiritual transformation and for the exploration of expanded forms of spiritual freedom (Ferrer, 2002, 2008b), though Ferrer did not explicitly discuss transbody states. Transbody states are characterized by going beyond the physical body or *being bodies* experienced as deep, unified, open, and intimate aliveness in one's body (Blackstone, 2008).

Metamodern, postmodern, and modern views of the body in the West differ from body constructs in Eastern view, specifically in Buddhism. According to Powers (2007), metaphysical body conceptions that go beyond human body boundaries are prominent in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. Embodied liberation from a Buddhist perspective touches on primordial spaciousness and timelessness experienced within and through the physical body, beyond the body (e.g., rainbow body), and beyond death. The human body is viewed as valuable and radiant in *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna* Buddhism meditation practice, while it has been also conceived as impure in the *Theravāda* school (Williams, 1997). According to *Vajrayāna* Buddhism, liberation is found within and through the human body that serves as a gateway of naked and spontaneous experience (Baker, 2019; Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, 2010a; Kalu Rinpoche, 1995). The human body is viewed as a microcosm of the macrocosm providing direct connection to Buddha nature (Ray, 2016a). In somatic meditation the meditator immerses completely in the body to subjectively experience the totality of the macrocosm as an immediate, spontaneous, nonconceptual apprehension of *what is* (Ray, 2002). According to

Duckworth (2010a), embodied resting in objectless awareness in meditation that is devoid of representational thought is practiced in *Vipāśyanā* meditation in which the meditator intends to suspend metaphysical presumptions of dualism. This embodied approach has been recognized in the phenomenological model of Mipam’s “two models of the two truths” of the *Nyingma* tradition, *Madhyamaka* school of Buddhism. In Mipam’s phenomenological model, ultimate truth is perceived as authentic experience without subject–object distinctions pointing to the experiential unity of appearance and emptiness.

The Multi-Perspectival Bodhisattva

Although there are many types of *bodhisattvas* that were shaped by Buddhist and non-Buddhist views, they all adopt universal characteristics: avoidance of harmful actions, performance of virtuous deeds, and work for the benefit of all sentient beings (The Dalai Lama, 2018). The “awakened being” (Sanskrit: *bodhi* [awake] and *sattva* [sentient being]) is one who is to become a Buddha according to the *nikāyas* of the *Pāli* Canon in early Buddhism (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2005; Samuels, 1997). In the *Theravāda* Buddhist tradition, the *bodhisattva* ideal is embodied in the *arhat* (Sanskrit), the purified saintly one who has transcended all desires, attachment, conditioning, and defilements in personal enlightenment and realized emptiness of self (no-self [Sanskrit: *anātman*; Leighton, 2012). The *Mahāyāna* (“Great Vehicle”) Buddhist *bodhisattva* motivation is rooted in the arising of *bodhicitta* (Sanskrit: *bodhi*, “enlightenment” and *citta*, “mind” or “heart”), which refers to the aspiration to enlightenment; the intention to achieve complete, perfect enlightenment of the buddhas, in order to

liberate all sentient beings in the universe from suffering (Buswell & Lopez, 2014). According to Buswell and Lopez (2014), *bodhicitta* is regarded as a universal principle, an innate quality in all sentient beings in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, with few exceptions; for example, some strands of *Yogācāra* hold that not all beings are destined for Buddhahood and stress that *bodhicitta* must be developed through practice.

Emptiness (Sanskrit, *śūnyatā*) has a number of denotations that changed through time in Buddhism. Earlier meaning of emptiness referred to “empty of cleanliness” as “absence of attractiveness or attachment in the body” as one of the aggregates (Sanskrit, *skandha*; Buswell & Lopez, 2014, p. 872). Later the meaning of emptiness was appropriated as the classical doctrine of no-self (Sanskrit, *anātman*) by Nāgārjuna in the *Madhyamaka* school of Buddhism. According to Nāgārjuna, “emptiness is the lack or absence of intrinsic nature (Sanskrit, *svabhāva*) in any and all phenomena, the final nature of all things (Sanskrit, *dharmatā*), and the ultimate truth” (Sanskrit, *paramārthasatya*; Buswell & Lopez, 2014, p. 872). In essence, emptiness in the *Mahāyāna* is twofold—emptiness of self and phenomena (Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, 2010a). Importantly, despite the various interpretations of emptiness in the *Madhyamaka* school of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, emptiness is not nothingness nor the absence of existence (e.g., the absence of a chair or tree), but rather the absence of a falsely imagined type of existence, identified as *svabhāva*. Because all phenomena are dependently arisen, they lack, or are empty of, an intrinsic nature characterized by

independence and autonomy. Nāgārjuna thus equates emptiness and the notion of conditionality (Buswell & Lopez, 2014).

In prominent Tibetan Buddhist traditions emptiness as spiritual ultimate has been conceived as (a) substrate of phenomena, that is, emptiness as other-emptiness referring to an ultimate metaphysical ground separate from relative phenomena that are perceived as self-empty (*Jonang* tradition); (b) a quality of reality, that is, emptiness as phenomena's lack of inherent existence (*Geluk* tradition); and (c) emptiness as the unity of relative appearance and ultimate emptiness (*Nyingma* tradition; Duckworth, 2010a). Śāntideva, one of the most prominent *Mahāyāna* Buddhists, expressed emptiness by quoting from the *Mysteries of the Tathāgata Sūtra*: “For example, Śāntamati, if the root of a tree is cut, all the branches, leaves, and flowers dry up. In just the same way, Śāntamati, if you pacify the false view of a real self, all reactive emotions are pacified” (Goodman, 2016a, p. 5). Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is one of the most prominent guides to *bodhisattva* practice in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism with extensive commentaries by Chödrön (2018) and Pelden (2007). In the recent book *Readings of Śāntideva's Guide to Bodhisattva Practice* by Gold and Duckworth (2019) various perspectives of Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra* were presented including bodies and embodiment in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (Ohnuma, 2019), Śāntideva's moral phenomenology (Garfield, 2019), Śāntideva's ethics of impartial compassion (Goodman, 2019), and innate human connectivity and Śāntideva's cultivation of compassion (Dunne, 2019), among others.

The nonduality of the three bodies (Sanskrit, *kāyas*) dissolves the paradoxical situation of the empty nature of the *bodhisattva* in *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna* Buddhism (Perrett, 1986). In the realization of Buddha nature, the *bodhisattva* experiences simultaneously the emptiness of the *dharmakāya* (truth body, which is the body of Ultimate reality), the *sambhogakāya* (complete enjoyment body, which is the energetic body produced from subtle energies), and the body form of the *nirmanakāya* (a physical manifestation of the Buddha in form of a gross body; Buswell & Lopez, 2014). In such states of nonduality there is no distinction between subject and object, between form (body) and formlessness (emptiness; Loy, 2015). The *dharmakāya* refers to the corpus of a buddha's qualities (i.e., "the *dharma*-body of the buddhas," Buswell & Lopez, 2014, p. 429). *Bodhisattvas* have been personified (e.g., in human flesh and blood), idealized, and mystified, such as Mañjuśrī or Maitreya (Leighton, 2012; Vessantara, 2003).

The naturalized *bodhisattva* is situated within Western philosophy and refers to a "reductionist" version of Buddhism without transcendent and mystical states of mind, without deities, without cultural imprints, with minimalist metaphysics grounded in neurophysicalism (O. Flanagan, 2011). According to MacKenzie (2014), a naturalized *bodhisattva* model is antithetical to the theoretical, practical, and ethical framework of Buddhism underlying the *bodhisattva* path.

The integral *bodhisattva* vow and its foundation of embodied spirituality are situated in participatory theory, promoting the collaborative participation of

various human attributes in the enactment of spiritual phenomena (Ferrer, 2017).

According to this vow,

in which the conscious mind renounces its own full liberation until the body, the heart, and the primary world can be free as well from alienating tendencies that prevent them from sharing freely in the unfolding life of the mystery here on Earth. (p. 20)

The claim that the integral *bodhisattva* renounces its own full liberation is contentious. Similar claims in regard to Buddhist *bodhisattvas* limited liberation conceptions have been disputed (cf. Chödrön, 2018; Pelden, 2007; Williams, 2010). Western and Buddhist *bodhisattva* perspectives are contrasting and have far reaching implications for ethics, morals, and prosocial engagement (Clayton, 2018; Davis, 2013; Goodman, 2016b, 2017; Vasen, 2018). Although Buddhist *bodhisattvas* have been studied from a scholarly perspective, they have not been juxtaposed to recently emerging Western appropriations of the *bodhisattva*. Buddhist *bodhisattvas* emerged in the East and achieved their peak popularity in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism when Śāntideva composed the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* about 700 CE; however, the enculturation of *bodhisattva* philosophy, ethics, and practices into contemporary Western culture is an ongoing process of unknown outcome that is understudied.

Feminist Spirituality

The first wave of feminism emphasized women's suffrage and feminist social reform that explicitly invoked religious values (specifically Christian values and goddess worship), while the second wave of feminism focused on women's empowerment through the deconstruction of hierarchical structures of social inequality and women's oppression (Zwissler, 2012) and feminist voices in

Judaism (Antonelli, 1995), Islam (Afshari, 1994), and Buddhism (Byrne, 2013). This latter period evoked feminist spirituality focused on the Goddess/goddesses as the sacred feminine divine in contrast to a masculine God (Christ & Plaskow, 1979; Mihaltses, 2012; Plaskow & Christ, 1989). This phase also brought forth Latina spiritual orientations drawing on indigenous knowledge, such as Chicana Mestiza consciousness (Anzaldúa, 2007). Deep care about femininities has inspired feminist activists to deconstruct patriarchy and fight for gender, social, racial, and other equalities (Kinser, 2004; Mackay, 2015; Purvis, 2004), reconnect with ancient matrifocal and matrilineal cultures to evoke the feminine (Gimbutas, 1982), and reconstruct non-patriarchal embodied utopias (Bingaman et al., 2002; Markus, 2002). Sex, socially constructed gender, and spiritual expressions of the masculine/feminine touch on the interconnection between biological and gendered identities in patriarchal societies and monotheistic, masculine, phallocentric religions and spiritualities (Kripal, 2014; Tyson, 2015).

Third-wave feminists have shown to be less religious and more spiritual due to feminists' alignment with secularism, diversity, and individualism as well as feminists' association with alternative personal spiritualities (Aune, 2011). The third-wave included intersectionality and black women activism (Crenshaw, 1991); for example Alice Walker's womanism (Holiday, 2010; Zwissler, 2012), which mirrored in form the spirituality of the Black Madonna (Comas-Díaz, 2008a). Feminists redirected focus from outer activism toward inner development, which manifested in the form of feminine archetypes¹¹ as psychological expressions of the collective unconscious associated with various feminine deities

(Bolen, 2001; Neumann, 2015; Zwissler, 2012). Fourth-wave feminism combines psychology, spirituality, and politics with broader visions for transformation of society as a whole and all people irrespective of sex and gender (D. Diamond, 2009). Recently, metamodern mysticism and spirituality have expressed personal pluralistic spiritualities (Ceriello, 2018b; Parsons, 2018), yet the intersection of metamodernism and feminist spirituality has yet to emerge.

Feminist spirituality entails three major approaches: (a) reform of present traditions that are considered oppressive of women; (b) search for historical prepatriarchal practices, cultures, and religions; and (c) creation of new spiritualities based on personal experience (Pukkila, 1999). Christ (1997) presented pluralistic spiritualities to characterize the Goddess/goddesses based on various theological conceptions, such as transcendence, immanence, theism, and pantheism. The participatory theory rejects monolithic spiritual conceptions based on the ontological perennialist assertion of a singular spiritual ultimate and the Cartesian subject–object split (Ferrer, 2002, 2017). Komjathy (2015) posited that theistic conceptions of the sacred, such as God or Goddess, are commonly based on subject–object dichotomies, although the spectrum of theological views on a transcendence-immanence spectrum is broad and differs among religious and spiritual traditions. Process theology, developed from Alfred North Whitehead’s process philosophy, holds the notion of panentheism (“all is in God”), which was embraced in Christ’s (1997) Goddess construct, a more recent version of feminist spirituality (Epperly, 2011).

Are god(s)/goddess(es) transcendent, immanent, or both? Divine(s) may be viewed from monistic (one impersonal reality), monotheistic (one personal God/Goddess), pantheistic (sacred immanent in the world), panentheistic (sacred in and beyond the world), or polytheistic (multiple gods/goddesses) perspectives (Komjathy, 2015). However, the feminist's God-Goddess view is problematic because it perpetuates the dualism of divinity, which mirrors the dualism of gender and sex (Nicholson, 2012). Participatory theory opposes dualistic notions of divine versus non-divine or God versus Goddess because they reify distinctions between subject and object (Ferrer, 2002). Metamodern spiritualities in the postsecular age are characterized by openness to hybridity, antiauthoritarianism, holism, and anti-perennialism (Ferrer & Vickery, 2018).

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL TOOLS

The study adopts a theoretical approach to (a) assess body constructs viewed through the lens of participatory theory as well as *Vajrayāna* Buddhism traditions (Chapter 4), (b) critically discuss various kinds of *bodhisattvas* (Chapter 5), and (c) assess novel transpersonal constructs that hybridize feminine-spiritual as a participatory event or participatory cosmology (Chapter 6). In this dissertation critical philosophical hermeneutics is adopted in Chapters 4 and 5, while critical theory is used for Chapters 6 and 7 (critical reflections).

Philosophical Hermeneutics

According to Zimmermann (2015), *hermeneutics* means interpretation, but hermeneutics is more than interpretive principles or methods. Hermeneutics is the art of understanding and of making oneself understood. Interpretation involves drawing on personal life experience and cultural understanding by which texts and facts are integrated into a meaningful whole. Importantly, critical hermeneutics as methodology of interpretation is concerned with meaningful human actions, communications of life situations, and how language and cultural traditions make understanding possible (Mantzavinos, 2016). Detel (2011) described the typology of sets of questions for interpretative praxis: (a) Who is the author?, (b) What is the subject matter of the text?, (c) Why was the text written?, (d) How was the text composed?, (e) When was the text written or published?, (f) Where was the text written or published?, and (g) By which means was the text written or published?

The word *hermeneutics* originates from Greek *hermeneuein*, meaning to utter, to explain, or to translate (Zimmermann, 2015). Initial usage of hermeneutics focused on self-understanding by Greek philosophers, such as Plato and Socrates, and biblical interpretation and exegesis (Jaspers, 2009).

Philosophical hermeneutics aims to understand the nature and communication of truth (Zimmermann, 2015), which is the approach most relevant for my study to discern ontological and epistemological assertions in participatory theory and Buddhist philosophy. The philosophical hermeneutic method assumes that in truth a specific standpoint always includes a universally valid context of meaning, which is called a *horizon* and alludes to one's way of seeing the world as culturally dependent (Zimmermann, 2015). The situatedness of participatory theory in metamodernism (Ferrer, 2017; Freinacht, 2017) and *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna* Buddhist philosophy documented in form of ancient *sūtras* within the Indian and Tibetan cultural frame (Baker, 2019; Komarovski, 2015) provides the horizons for my study. In hermeneutics truth is considered an event because "objective truth is something we take part in rather than something we merely observe from a distance" (Zimmermann, 2015, p. 13). In essence, one is part of history and shaped by it.

Schleiermacher's *general hermeneutics* aimed to reconcile conflicts between science and religion advocating general understanding, even across time and language (Mantzavinos, 2016). This kind of understanding depends on a circular movement between part and whole meaning that a particular statement depends on the larger context, that is, a whole within which the part has meaning

(hermeneutic circle; Zimmermann, 2015). For example, Buddhist assertions such as “the *Prajñāpāramitā* (*Heart Sūtra*) expresses the highest wisdom of the Buddha, who realizes emptiness as identical with the causality (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and illusory (*mayopama*) nature of things” (Pettit, 1999, p. 46) make assertions in regard to reality. General hermeneutics serves as method to investigate such absolutistic Buddhist claims that circle back to the relative world and impermanent phenomena. General hermeneutics asserts that knowing depends on some great unifying ground of reality and that the microcosm of human communication mirrors the cosmic whole (Zimmermann, 2015).

The *philosophical hermeneutics* of Hans-Georg Gadamer is rooted in understanding as the basic movement of human existence that encompasses the whole of life experience (Zimmermann, 2015). This hermeneutical approach is poised to provide the investigative ground for my study, which juxtaposes participatory and Buddhist standpoints. This method asserts that objective understanding occurs when an object discloses itself through the meaningful relations within which it appears. Knowledge is not something that is acquired as a possession, instead it is something in which one already participates (Gadamer, 1975). Gadamer (1975) stressed that history is like a stream in which one participates in every act of understanding. This kind of hermeneutics serves to study metamodern participatory theory as well as *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna Buddhist* views. For example, hermeneutics reveals the change in historical effected consciousness and its formative effect on how *bodhisattva* constructs are perceived over time from *Therāvāda*¹² to contemporary forms of *Mahāyāna*

Buddhism).

According to Gadamer (1975), the historical being-in-the-world is like a dialogue that expresses the hermeneutic nature of being through hearing considered superior to the metaphor of seeing. Gadamer's *fusion of horizons* transforms the reader through the fusion of cultural past and present horizons. This process of fusion of old and new combine into something of living value stressing the phenomenological aspect of fusion (Vessey, 2009). Such a fusion is implicated in spiritual hybridizations that are examined in my dissertation. Gadamer stressed the dialectic of belonging between reader and text, while Ricoeur emphasized distancing between reader and text to explain rather than understand through fusion (Westphal, 2012). A limitation of the traditional hermeneutics is the possibility of erroneous interpretation due to the scholars' biases. I am aware that my Buddhist beliefs may introduce bias in my interpretations, which can be countered by balanced interpretation of multiple contrasting sources.

Hirsch's (1967) search for validity in interpretation grounded in logical positivism and objectivity contrasts Gadamer's (1975) view of hermeneutic phenomenology that deliberately opposes truth to method and stresses the subjectivity of the speaker/author (see Madison, 1988). Both views raise questions about the legitimacy of interpretations, which aims to identify a *good (true)* interpretation or to discern between contradictory interpretations. Packer and Addison (1989) suggested that there is no possible interpretation-free stringent

validation of a text or tradition. Instead, a *good* interpretation is one that answers the concern that motivated an inquiry in the first place.

To uncover the truth through interpretation unconceals what is to be known. The attempt to uncover the *ordo of essendi* (i.e., the order of being as things are in themselves acknowledging ontological primacy) is relaxed in the *ordo cognoscendi* (i.e., the order of knowledge as it is known to people; Madison, 1988). The former seeks to identify the truth and validate interpretation through a normative approach *à la* Hirschian objectivity that is problematic, while the latter acknowledges that valid knowledge is a matter of relationship that changes with time and perspectives grounded in inquiries to find practical answers to life and the world (Packer & Addison, 1989). Phenomenological hermeneutics acknowledges that an interpretive account is not focused on finding timeless truth, because such truth cannot be discerned or corroborated (Heidegger, 1927/2006).

Numerous approaches have been suggested to evaluate interpretations, among them the following: (a) coherence or plausibility (i.e., the requirement that the interpretive account has a particular internal coherent character); (b) examination of the interpretive account and its relationship to external evidence; (c) participants' interpretation; (d) identification of consensus among researchers, scholars, or various groups; (e) assessment of the interpretive account's relationship to future events; and (f) practical implications (Packer & Addison, 1989). The caveat of evaluation in hermeneutics is that all of them have downsides. For example, Hirsch (1967) rejected coherence as an evaluation criterion because it supposedly biases toward self-confirmability to interpretive

inquiry. However, Packer and Addison (1989) argued that a “good” interpretation provides coherence through the provision of countering arguments and disconfirming evidence. Hirsch (1967) asserted that interpretation must be tested against external evidence viewed as interpretation-free standard through identification of the author’s intention. However, Packer and Addison (1989) questioned how such an external uninterpreted norm could be identified. Similarly, participants’ interpretation fails to provide an objective norm. Consensus building is prone to collective delusion and interpretation may differ widely due to novelty or familiarity with a text. The agreement with a specific interpretation does not guarantee correctness, specifically when interpretations are opposed (e.g., perennial view vs. participatory view). Packer and Addison elaborated that the pragmatic criterion of equating the validity of one’s finding through interpretation with predictive validity would inherently preempt transformation and change. The pragmatic concern of interpretation focuses on the everyday world that brings forth meaning, as well as potential for emancipation and social transformation (Lather, 1986).

According to Madison (1988), the methodological principles for phenomenological hermeneutics entail: (a) coherence (i.e., interpretation without contradictions in itself), (b) comprehensiveness (a unified whole or a unity in meaning), (c) penetration (i.e., a guiding intention in the work), (d) thoroughness, (e) appropriateness, (f) contextuality, (g) agreement with what the author says, (h) agreement with the accredited interpretations of an author, (i) suggestiveness to stimulate further interpretations, and (j) potential (i.e., the ultimate validation of

an interpretation lies in the future). The latter principle suggests that textual meaning arises in the process of becoming. Following Gadamer (1975), Warnke (1987) pointed out that interpretation is like understanding of a work of art that involves participation in its meaning. Despite the inability of phenomenological hermeneutics to provide concise logical validation procedures, this approach allows for persuasive argumentation that aims to legitimize some interpretations as better than others (Madison, 1988). A persuasive critical feminist hermeneutics of liberation that adopts feminist interpretive inquiry as a response to malestream hermeneutics was presented by Schüssler Fiorenza (2002). Schüssler Fiorenza argued for hermeneutics that is closer to critical theory and extends patriarchy to encompass and connect to structures of privilege and oppression, such as racism, ableism, and capitalism. Such *kyriarchal* approach is rooted in feminist conscientization, transformation of malestream discourses, and emancipation (Schüssler Fiorenza, 2016).

Critical Theory

Critical theory was used to study novel transpersonal constructs that hybridize feminine-spiritual as a participatory event or participatory cosmology. Critical theory has many sources, including Plato, Socrates, Immanuel Kant, Hegel, Karl Marx, and the Frankfurt School members, for example, Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, and Jürgen Habermas (Bronner, 2017). This theory is deeply skeptical of tradition, ideologies, and all absolute claims. Critical theory addresses the subjects of inquiry as equally reflective participants that have knowledge and agency (Bohman, 2016). Habermas (1971)

pointed out that critical inquiry is not focused to control social processes and their outcomes, but instead to initiate public processes of self-reflection, perspective taking, and practical verification. Whether critical theory is limited to critical inquiry (e.g., Max Horkheimer) or aims at social transformation (e.g., Karl Marx) differs among critical theorists (Bronner, 2017).

According to Bronner (2017), critical theory is a philosophical approach to culture aiming to confront historical, social, and ideological structures that constrain it. Critical theory aims to emancipate from slavery, acts as liberating influence, and creates a world which meets the needs and powers of human beings (Bohman, 2016; Ingram & Simon-Ingram, 1992). This theory treats facts less as isolated depictions of reality but understands that facts are value-laden and embedded in society, religion, art, culture, and philosophy that need to be incorporated to address social conditions and political ideologies that limit freedom (Horkheimer, 1982). Besides values and beliefs, language that expresses the ideological, aesthetical, and rhetorical structure of the text, and multiple perspectives are critical elements in critical theory; therefore, it requires reading “with the grain” and “against the grain” (Tyson, 2015, p. 6). A practical and pluralistic approach undergirds critical theory in the social sciences because it juxtaposes and reconciles epistemic (explanatory) and nonepistemic (interpretive) approaches to normative claims; and thus, critical theory contributes to democratizing scientific authority (Bohman, 2016).

Human emancipation in circumstances of domination and oppression are of special interest for critical theorists and feminists. For example, Fraser (1992)

argued that the status of women in capitalist society as caretaker, nurturer, and childbearer is reduced to symbolic reproduction of societies (i.e., cultural transmission and socialization), but it is undervalued in terms of material and economic reproduction of society. This patriarchal gendering has marginalized and oppressed women. Similarly, critical theorist Benhabib (1992) asserted that gender bias has created a chasm between personal happiness and public rights (freedom) and suggested to redefine freedom in terms of a common life in which one's needs are rationally chosen in light of the needs of others (e.g., happiness of others). Schüssler Fiorenza (2016) argued for a critical feminist political theory and the *the*ology* of liberation. The asterisk * is used to interrupt and make explicit the grammatically masculine and feminine determination of the Divine. Schüssler Fiorenza's radical approach opposes neoliberal kyriarchy and calls for women's freedom from androcentrism and cultural normative masculinity. Feminists have demonstrated how supposedly neutral or impartial social norms have built-in biases that limit their putatively universal character with respect to gender and social equity (Minnow, 1990; Tyson, 2015). Critical theory allows one to expose supposedly scientific objectivity and moral neutrality in order to denounce biases and cognitive dissonance through first-person experiences, second-person perspectives of those who cannot effectively participate because they are marginalized or oppressed, or critical inquiry using third-person perspectives (Bohman, 2016; Tyson, 2015). Tyson (2015) provided a superb critical theoretical analysis of feminism with critical deconstruction and reconstruction of traditional gender roles, patriarchal binary thought,

psychoanalytic feminism, materialist feminism, and multicultural feminism, which is shaped by gender, race, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, religion, and spirituality. Frost and Elichaooff (2014), stressed that critical theory provides the tool to critically examine culture, history, and society and interactions between axes such as spirituality, gender, sexuality, and ableism that shape identity. This critical approach is poised to challenge assumptions and practices that discriminate, marginalize, commodify, and pathologize and the social and historical context that have shaped power relations. For example, a critical theoretical approach was employed by Pukkila (1999) to study feminist spiritualities. Lunn (2009) presented a study of the role of religion and spirituality in development adopting three core concepts of critical theory—grounding of knowledge in historical context, critique through dialectical process, and identification of future potentialities for emancipation and self-determination. Similarly, I adopted three pillars of critical theory—traditional feminist spiritualities exemplified by feminine archetypes and Goddess/goddesses, critique of these feminist spiritualities, and participatory feminist spirituality as potentialities for the emancipation of femininities through hybridized feminine-spiritual participatory events and cosmologies. The research methods described above (Chapter 3) are used in the following research chapters to investigate the thesis of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 4: EMBODIED LIBERATION IN PARTICIPATORY THEORY AND *VAJRAYĀNA* BUDDHISM

This chapter explores body constructs along the descending, ascending, and extending body-soteriological pathways (BoSoP), as well as it lays the foundation to identify their potential for transbody and transpersonal transformation. The motivation undergirding this research was to discover similarities and differences in regard to body constructs in Buddhist Modernist *Vajrayāna* and Western participatory theory. Whether body constructs and embodiment facilitate or hamper liberation from these two different perspectives is unclear and will be explored in this Chapter 4.

Insights are provided on the nexus of pluralistic body constructs using Jorge Ferrer's participatory theory juxtaposed with *Vajrayāna* Indo-Tibetan Buddhism viewed through the Buddhist Modernist lens. An exuberant richness of physical and metaphysical bodies has been recognized in both *Vajrayāna* Buddhism and participatory theory. In *Vajrayāna*, the body is viewed as the gateway to liberation—the culmination of immanence, transcendence, and expansion. In participatory theory, the body is viewed as equal to vital, heart, mind, and consciousness as part of an integrated larger whole. Embodiment, disembodiment, and body awareness are critically discussed, and special attention is given to the implications of these two contrasting views and the potential of practices from both approaches to ameliorate disembodiment and foster transbody and transpersonal transformation.

Introduction: The Body-Soteriological Pathway (BoSoP) Model

In transpersonal psychology, three major soteriological pathways were identified by Daniels (2005, 2009, 2013): (a) the *descending path*, stressing immanence through greater connection to the world of nature (phenomena), other people, femininities, or the dynamic ground of the unconscious; (b) the *ascending path* toward enlightenment, transcending a lower self (ego) toward a higher self (Self); and (c) the *extending path*, expanding the individual self outward to a larger self that encompasses other people and the larger political, economic, and ecological systems. Daniels asserted that all three pathways need to be recognized and incorporated in an integral model of transpersonal transformation, which places the ego in the center from which descending, ascending, and extending pathways emanate in different directions. This chapter extends Daniel's soteriological model by also placing the physical body in the center of the model in order to explore pathways within, beyond, and in relation to the body, which potentially fosters transbody and transpersonal transformation. This approach to the BoSoP model views the physical (gross) body as the fundamental vessel that contains and transformatively channels an inherent spiritual life-force. In this way, the model provides ontological domain space and epistemic vectors resembling the directions of bodily- and self-transformations.

The Descending Path of Transbody and Transpersonal Development

The descending current constitutes the manifestation of spirit in the world (Daniels, 2009). This soteriological view of immanence has been posited in various types of theology, for example, panenhenic (i.e., experience of oneness of

sacred nature), pantheistic (i.e., God or the sacred are immanent in the world), and monistic (i.e., one impersonal absolute reality; Komjathy, 2015). Daniels (2005, 2013) argued that the soteriological descending current for transpersonal development is exemplified by depth psychology (e.g., C. G. Jung's psychoanalysis and R. Assagioli's psychosynthesis), involving the exploration of the unconscious. Van der Kolk (2014) argued that the unconscious is the body, which holds traumatic memories, impairs somatic awareness, and contributes to disembodiment and dissociation. The connection between the unconscious and the body has been supported by others (e.g., Marlock & Weiss, 2015; Stanley, 2016).

Gendlin and Hendricks-Gendlin (2015) asserted that the *bodily felt sense* is the ground for body psychotherapies and self-transformation. The notion of body in the phrase "bodily felt sense" takes a radical stance of bodies knowing of situations directly that precedes human or conscious activity. Gendlin (1962/1997) pointed out that such visceral sensing is a human capacity to sense a whole situation in its totality in contrast to sense separation. In this way, "the living body knows (feels, lives, is) its situation from the body," which was referred to as an *implicit intricacy* (Gendlin & Hendricks-Gendlin, 2015, p. 251). A whole complex mesh of implicit intricacy of bodily felt sense entails past history of experiences, what a situation arouses in oneself, trauma and unresolved emotions, pain or particular sensations, and much more what arises implicitly in the body equated by Gendlin with the unconscious. Various empirical studies have demonstrated the association between trauma and the body; and specifically the impaired somatic regulation as a response to trauma that may hinder

immanent spiritual experiences (van der Kolk & Fisler, 1995; Walters et al., 2011; Warner et al., 2014).

The descending path of transbody and transpersonal development entails intimacy with the body through mindful attention and awareness focused on body states (e.g., skin as boundary of the body or sensations), body schema, and kinesthesia. This descent into the physical body emphasizes inquiry into the soma as becoming aware of the subtle energies that flow through the body and contribute to lived experience (Varela et al., 2016). *Somatic awareness* involves witnessing “from within” in an ongoing communication between the body and mind, between the inner world and outer world (Stanley, 2016). According to Mehling et al. (2009), *body awareness* is a complex construct with a variety of facets, such as somatic memory, introspection, attentional focus, awareness of internal body sensations, and perceptions. The distinction between body awareness and *interoceptive awareness* has been a matter of dispute. Narrow conceptions limit interoceptive awareness to afferent body sensations (A. D. Craig, 2009; Critchley et al., 2004), while broader conceptions point to the sense of signals originating within the body critical for one’s sense of embodiment and well-being (Cameron, 2001; Farb et al., 2015; Mehling et al., 2012). To embody the lived experience of a particular moment means to viscerally feel sensory, motor, emotional, and imaginal experiences rather than to funnel arousal into mental concepts, ideas, and categories (Fogel, 2013). *Embodiment* has been defined as the felt sense of being localized within one’s physical body and

references the lived immediate experience of one's own body (Mehling et al., 2009).

When one-pointed, deliberate attention on body parts shifts to whole-body awareness, the depth of the physical body opens to transbody states experienced as going beyond the boundary of the skin of the body (Weiss, 2015). These transbody states, associated with nonordinary states of consciousness, have been described as awakening somatic intelligence (Kaparo, 2012), embodied spiritual awakening (Blackstone, 2008), embodied mind (Varela et al., 2016), somatic earth descent (Ray, 2016b), and whole-body *vipassana* mindfulness (Glickman, 2002). According to Ferrer (2017), deep centering in the body allows one to embody lived experience as an intimate "Thou." The melting of subject-object as visceral phenomenological states of being touches timelessness and spaciousness (Puhakka, 2000). Ferrer's (2006) "bodyfulness" expresses this remarkable transpersonal shift referring to the awakening of the body as part of embodied spirituality: "In bodyfulness the whole psychosomatic organism becomes calmly alert without the intentionality of the conscious mind" (p. 45; see also Caldwell, 2014). Transbody states are characterized by *being bodies* experienced as deep, unified, open, and intimate aliveness in one's body (Blackstone, 2008).

Mind-body research has shown associations between body/somatic and mind/cognitive variables. For example, Kerr et al.'s (2013) empirical study found that mindful somatic attention optimizes attentional modulation of 7-14 Hz alpha rhythms, which play a key role in filtering inputs to the primary sensory neocortex and also in organizing the flow of sensory information in the brain. According to

Kerr et al., these findings confirm Buddhist conceptions that mindfulness is closely associated with the body. Specifically, the Buddhist antecedents to the body scan meditation undergird mind–body connectivity (Bhikkhu Anālayo, 2020a). Empirical research demonstrated that body-scan meditation practice improves somatosensory perceptual decision making (Mirams et al., 2013), reduces the salience of perceived body boundaries and increases optimal emotional experience (i.e., measured happiness; Dambrun, 2016), and enhances introspective accuracy and tactile sensitivity as measured by the mean size of body representation area in the primary somatosensory cortex (Fox et al., 2012). Cebolla et al. (2016) used the rubber hand illusion experiment to investigate long-term meditators and nonmeditators highlighting the role of body awareness and mindfulness in embodiment mechanisms. This study found that the meditators experienced less sense of agency (loss of sense of self) and higher body awareness and mindfulness. Findings that mindfulness meditation improves body awareness was corroborated by Szucs et al. (2020). Based on phenomenological inquiry, enhanced body awareness through mind–body approaches, such as somatic-oriented mindfulness meditation, tai chi, yoga, or body awareness therapy, resulted in the realization of embodied self-awareness and perception of unity between body and self (Mehling et al., 2011).

Phenomenology is a method to explore the descending, ascending, and extending pathways. Exploration of the first-person perspective as an inner way of knowing has been pivotal in Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, which uses the *epoché* or bracketing (see Beyer, 2015; Husserl, 1931/2017). Husserl claimed

that bracketing allows one to study the intentional content of the mind purely internally (Varela et al., 2016). These assertions exemplify naïve realism by separating mind-world and object-subject. However, transcendental phenomenology asserts that ideally there is no separation between the knower and the known in the state of *shimmering*, a metaphorical image for the living-present paradoxically as a standing-streaming of nontemporal temporalizing (Husserl, 1991).

This view has been countered by empirical research of perceived self-consciousness, which demonstrated an individual's proneness to self-delusions and biased perceptions through illusory visual experiences (Aspell et al., 2013; Blanke, 2012), autoscopia, and manipulated out-of-body experiences (Blanke & Mohr, 2005). The break-down of spatial unity of the conscious experiencing self localized within the bodily borders was demonstrated empirically using multisensory conflict experiments (Lenggenhager et al., 2007).

In contrast, in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, perceptual experience is the gestalt, the meaningful whole of figure against ground. Unlike Husserl's theoretical assertions focused on mental experiences, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology focused on bodily experiences (M. R. Kelly, 2018). Merleau-Ponty eloquently argued for a phenomenology of lived experience, an immersion into the "very flesh of the world—the lived human body as homology of the cosmos" (as cited in Morley, 2008, p. 144). For Merleau-Ponty, the body is not just an object, but also an embodied "lived body" with thoughts, sensations, and perceptions (Varela et al., 2016). Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012) rejected a dualistic

view and asserted that the mind and body are not separate entities, positing that experience consists of both mental and bodily experience. When presence in the body is the reference point for one's understanding of the world, "one *is* one's body" (Virtbauer, 2016, p. 70). The lived-body is sentience itself, in liminal space between the self and the world, and stresses bodily Being-in-the-World (Morley, 2008).

The Ascending Path of Transbody and Transpersonal Development

The ascending body-soteriological pathway advocates transcendence of the relative, manifest world in the achievement of "higher" (Absolute) spiritual consciousness (Daniels, 2005, 2013). According to Daniels (2009), the ascending characteristics are transcendence, other-worldliness, liberation, wisdom, attainment of spiritual consciousness, and One Spirit. This pathway aims to disidentify with ordinary, sensory experience of the phenomenal world, and thus is antithetical to the descending path, which aims at intimacy with the body and sense perceptions. According to Daniels (2005, 2013), the ascending path is about Spirit, away from the physical body, and is aimed at consciousness and wisdom. Such ontogenetic, liberative, transpersonal, and spiritual models of adult development that stress self-reflection and self-awareness to transcend self (or ego) were described in detail by Ardel and Grunwald (2018). The ascending path can be exemplified by Wilber's (2000a) integral model, which places matter at the lowest level of consciousness, ascending toward body (gross); mind, soul (subtle); spirit (causal); and Spirit (nondual). According to Wilber (2007), the "body" has multiple meanings in the integral model, with the *biological body* in the

individual-exterior quadrant (third-person perspective) and the *felt body* with subjective feelings, emotions, and sensations in the individual-interior quadrant (first-person perspective). These ascending stages are thought to develop through the process of “transcend and include” (p. 126), and are intertwined with states of consciousness as indicated in the Wilber-Combs lattice. In this way, Wilber assigned a low value to the body in the neo-perennialist, hierarchical integral model.

Transcendence as a mystical state of “pure consciousness” has been associated with the dissolution of the ego, merging of the bodily self with external space, and a sense of sacredness that is perceived without spatial and temporal constraints (Dieguez & Blanke, 2011). The *transcendental ego* suggests an extension beyond the limits of ordinary consciousness (Grosso, 2015). Komjathy (2015) suggested to discern different theological views along the transcendence-immanence spectrum, with humans containing the sacred (expressing more immanence), the world considered as sacred (most immanent), and the most transcendent state expressed as the sacred outside of space and time and completely different from the world. This latter view was referred to as the *transcendental world* by William James (1912/2003). Inherently, transcendence undergirds a dualistic distinction between the natural and supernatural world (Grosso, 2015).

The sublimation of the body in the ascending pathway refers to using the energy of one human dimension to amplify, expand, or transform the faculties of another dimension (Ferrer, 2017). The ascending path is prominently found in

most major religions, among them Buddhism (Trammel, 2017). To transcend the self and realize Buddhahood (enlightenment) has been notable in Ch'an Buddhism (Watts, 1985), Zen Buddhism (Suzuki, 1970), and in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism including the *Vajrayāna* (esoteric *Tantra*) Buddhism (Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, 2010a; Geshe Tashi Tsering, 2012; Ngakpa Chögyam & Khandro Déchen, 2003), *Māhamudrā* (Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche, 2004), and *Dzogchen* traditions (Anyen Rinpoche, 2006; Dowman, 2014). The ascending trajectory is unidirectional for both body and self. This pathway aims to go beyond the physical body to attain nonordinary transbody states and transcend a narrow, lower self toward transpersonal states that ultimately manifest as liberated ways of being, particularly in the sphere of consciousness.

According to Loy (2018), the ascending-transcending Buddhist view aims to go beyond a mortal human body bound to pain and suffering through adoption of the noble eightfold path aiming to break the cycle of birth and death (immortality). This nondual liberative path directs practice efforts to resolve the dualisms of *life-versus-death* bound to the body and *being-versus-nothingness* bound to the anxious ego/self-intuiting and dreading its own lack of being (or *no-thing-ness*). Here “the sense of self is shadowed by a sense of lack that it perpetually yet vainly tries to resolve” evoking feelings of “something is wrong with me” (p. 5). Buddhist practices involve dying now to face death which was well expressed by Dōgen suggesting to “forget yourself” (p. 6).

A systematic review of transcendental states identified through electroencephalogram (EEG) monitoring during meditation across contemplative

and religious traditions (including Zen, Chinese Buddhism, Vipassana; Vedic; yoga; transcendental meditation) was provided by Wahbeh et al. (2018). According to this review, Buddhist meditation practice was associated with selflessness, perception of true self (Buddhahood), timelessness and spacelessness, absence of boundaries of time and space, the latter suggesting loss of (human, physical) body sense. In a quantitative research study the effects of mindfulness meditation decreased perceived body boundaries, extended the spatial frame of reference beyond the physical body, and transcended the self boundaries (Hanley et al., 2020). Self-transcending was associated with EEG alpha1 activity in meditations from Vedic and Chinese Buddhist traditions and in Transcendental meditation, beta/gamma activity in focused attention meditation (e.g., Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese traditions), and theta activity in open monitoring meditation (e.g., variety of Buddhist and Vedic traditions; Travis & Shear, 2010).

According to Vago and Silbersweig (2012), focused attention meditation on an object (e.g., breath) stabilizes self-perceptions and discerns between object and observer, while open-monitoring meditation enhances disengagement from self, response inhibition (viscero-somatic, visual, and auditory/linguistic), emotion regulation (equanimity), and decentering from the bodily self. Evidence-based empirical research found that mindfulness meditation was associated with an increase in monitoring of body states, slower body movements, perceptual-motor integration processes, and disruption of the sense of self-agency (Naranjo & Schmidt, 2012). Neurobiological mechanisms of mindfulness meditation

through an integrative fronto-parietal control network in the brain was associated with self-awareness, self-regulation, and a positive relationship between self and other that transcended self-focused needs and increased pro-social characteristics (self-transcendence; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). According to Knauff's (2019) empirical research, Tibetan Buddhist tantric practitioners of mindfulness meditation, visualizations, and mantra meditation dissolve normal selfhood, but through Buddhist ethics of compassion do not escape the self (transcendental non-self) and the conventional world; instead practitioners attain transcendent spiritual absorption (i.e., full absorption within self or being self).

The Extending Path of Transbody and Transpersonal Development

The extending body-soteriological pathway implies the expansion of boundaries. Friedman (1983) touched on the levels of self-expansion that bring forth transpersonal development. The expansion of consciousness from reactive through naïve, egocentric, conformist, achievement, affiliate, authentic, and transcendent, moving toward unity consciousness was elaborated by Wade (1996). Similar models of expansion have been articulated with the center of the earth or the body. For example, S. Kelly (2017) asserted that when the body of earth is realized as Gaia, it is seen as an alive whole. In this view, the sacred earth is perceived and felt as the wider cosmos or the body of a Deity.

Gloria Anzaldúa's cosmic becoming across human/nonhuman borderlands espoused agency, justice, and decolonizing of the human, through deep embodiment tied to the cosmic scale queering notions of time and space beyond a purely individual human-centered view (Schaeffer, 2018). The *new mestiza*

embodies an expanded consciousness that breaks through self identities, dualistic notions of gender, cultures, oppression, and race in cultural borderlands

(Anzaldúa, 2007). Anzaldúa (2002) asserted,

Indeed, this shared identity factor is wider than anything in human nature; each person has roots you share with all people and other beings—spirit, feeling, and body make up a greater identity category. The body is rooted in the earth, la tierra itself. You meet ensoulment in trees, in woods, in streams. (p. 560)

“spirit infuses all that exists—organic and inorganic.” (p. 558)

Schaeffer (2018) pointed out that Anzaldúa’s indigenous spiritual conceptions of cosmic travel beyond affective sensing, words, and physical bodies across space and time touches on the extending pathway. The erotic relational practice of being-within, for example digging with one’s hands in the brown earth, becomes diving into the soul awakening a cosmic vibrancy that quivers.

Kripal (2014) provided several examples for cosmotheism in religion, asserting a divine, expansive meaning to the purpose of life (e.g., God is the universe, the body is the cosmos). Supersexualities play an important role in paradoxical and metaphysical descriptions of the subtle body, spiritual body, rainbow body, diamond body, pure conscious light, and other bodies that are conceptualized or experienced as an expansion of the physical body. For example, Daoist cosmology posits combining the apparent opposites of yin and yang into a greater whole, the Dao (Kripal, 2014). There is no yin without the yang, and no yang without the yin in the constant flux and relationship with each other. It is the dynamic interaction between the two that create the relationship. It is like a foundational positionality that is found in all things.

Spaciousness has been espoused in somatic meditation practices cultivating expansive states of consciousness that have been associated with out-of-body experiences (Maitland, 1995). Buddhist cosmology asserts long periods of contraction of the cosmos as well as periods of expansion (Gethin, 1997). Various expansive social, cultural, nation, and ecological bodies were exemplified by S. Coakley (1997). In transpersonal psychology, Ferrer's (2002, 2017) participatory theory and participatory spirituality exemplify the expansive body-soteriological pathway.

The extending pathway was studied by McFarland et al. (2012) and McFarland et al. (2013) using the Identification with all Humanity (IWAH) scale, which uses an escalating spectrum from (a) people in my community, (b) Americans (or other cultures), and (c) all humans everywhere. The IWAH was conceptualized as being more than an absence of ethnocentrism and its correlates, and more than the presence of dispositional empathy, moral reasoning, moral identity, and the value of universalism. In McFarland et al.'s (2012) empirical study, the IWAH predicted concern for humanitarian needs and global human rights, predicted valuing of the lives of ingroup and outgroup members equally, knowledge of global humanitarian concerns, and was correlated with how close others see one as being. Reed and Aquino (2003) assessed empirically that participants with high moral identity had an “expanding circle of moral regard” espoused by traits such as care, honesty, and kindness for all (p. 1270). Participants expressed greater moral obligations toward those of different nationality, religion, and ethnicity suggesting an expanded sense of self caring

beyond their own individual self. Schwartz's (1992) empirical study in 20 different countries analyzed extended conceptions of self that involve the welfare of all people and for nature, and appreciation of universal social values such as equality, inner harmony, freedom, meaning in life, world at peace, and social justice.

In summary, the descending, ascending, and extending pathways have not only been conceptualized in transpersonal psychology and recognized in various Eastern religious traditions, but more recently these pathways have been empirically studied. Quantitative and qualitative research underpin the close association between mind and body along the three transpersonal-transbody pathways.

Embodied Liberation in Participatory Theory and *Vajrayāna* Buddhism

This section situates both Ferrer's (2002, 2017) participatory theory and *Vajrayāna* Buddhists traditions (Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c; Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, 2016a, 2016b; Kalu Rinpoche, 1995; Ngakpa Chögyam and Khandro Déchen, 2003; Ray, 2002) within the BoSoP model. Through this juxtaposition, insights into the nature of transbody states and embodied spiritual transformation are drawn that will be comparatively discussed in the conclusions of this chapter.

Ferrer's Participatory Theory

According to Daniels (2005), Ferrer's theory advocates a pluralistic and participatory vision of human spirituality. The participatory approach holds that human spirituality essentially emerges from human cocreative participation in an

undetermined mystery (understood as the generative power of life, the cosmos, or reality) in complex interaction with culture, interrelationships, and possible subtle worlds of energy and consciousness (Ferrer, 2002, 2017). Participatory pluralism is nonperennialist as it entails a multiplicity of not only spiritual paths, but also spiritual liberations and spiritual ultimates (Ferrer, 2011). This metamodern theory integrates insights from premodernity (e.g., ontological value of spiritual referents), modernity (e.g., scientific standards of open inquiry), and postmodernity (e.g., pluralism and rejection of pregiven and absolute truths). For metamodern approaches seeking to mediate aspects of the modern and postmodern ethos, see van den Akker et al. (2017), Freinacht (2017), Turner (2015), and Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010). Ferrer (2011, 2017) framed participatory spirituality in terms of three dimensions of spiritual cocreation, which largely correspond to the three pathways of the body-soteriological model: *Intrapersonal cocreation* consists of the collaborative participation of all human attributes—body, vital energy, heart, mind, and consciousness—in the enactment of spiritual consciousness. This intrapersonal cocreation affirms the embodied, immanent dimension of the mystery, that is, the “spirit within” (descendent path). *Transpersonal cocreation* refers to dynamic interaction between embodied human beings and the mystery in the enactment of spiritual insights, states, practices, and worlds. It affirms the enactive, inquiry-driven dimension of participatory spirituality as “spirit beyond” (ascending path). *Interpersonal cocreation* emerges from cooperative relationships among human beings through peer-to-peer relationships and in communion with “spirit in-between,” including nonhuman

intelligences such as subtle entities and natural powers (extending path). The latter dimension touches on interconnected bodies suggesting that bio-physical bodies are in relationship with each other forming a larger social body. The interpersonal cocreation has similarity with the term *interbeing* coined by Thich Nhat Hanh (1987), which expresses the collective aspects and interdependence of all phenomena and beings.

According to Ferrer (2017), the “spirit-beyond” of the most recent version of participatory spirituality is not to be confused with transcendence. The transcendence of the bodily bound ego or the transcendence of the world are based on dualistic notions of ego/no-ego and natural/supernatural world. Transcendence is bound to someone transcending (subject) and something that is transcended (object; Grosso, 2015). However, participatory pluralism inherently allows for a multiplicity of enacted spiritual worlds that are not necessarily bound to dualistic notions or specific ontologies, such as panentheistic (i.e., the sacred is in and beyond the world; Komjathy, 2015). Ferrer (2017) opted to use the term *subtle* instead of *transcendent* to avoid fixation onto any specific pre-given ontologies. Rather, a multiverse of subtle worlds and physical (natural) worlds is assumed that can be enacted in a variety of ways. According to Ferrer,

subtle refers to any possible coexisting or enacted worlds of energy and consciousness, as well as phenomena or entities associated with these worlds. ... the term immanent describes spiritual/creative sources located within—or emerging from—physical matter, body, sexuality, life, and nature. (p. 247)

Ferrer (2017) argued that these notions avoid dualism between the subtle and the immanent. In participatory spirituality, subtle worlds and the world of nature are ultimately united because the subtle states of consciousness and energy and the

physical world of matter (e.g., the body) are only expressions of different degrees, frequencies, concentrations, or density states of consciousness and energy.

Embodiment is a crucial element in participatory theory, which denounces many problems inherent in the disembodied spirituality prominently found in Western culture. However, Ferrer (2006, 2017) also sees world spiritual history to be overburdened by disembodied spirituality, suggesting that the body and vital/primary energies have been ignored or sublimated in religious practice. For example, a celibate monk or ascetic meditator may suppress sexual desires to amplify transpersonal states of consciousness. In disembodied spirituality, the body is viewed as a hindrance to spiritual flourishing, sinful, a defilement, an unreliable source of spiritual insight, illusory, impure, defective, or simply unequal with heart, mind, and consciousness. In contrast, participatory theory embraces embodied spirituality and views all human dimensions, including the body, as equal partners harmonizing self, community, and world with the mystery out of which everything arises (Ferrer, 2015). Participatory theory's claim is that, ontologically and epistemologically, this mystery is undetermined and dynamically enacted through engagement of the body (e.g., sensations, movement, sensuality, and sexuality), the heart (e.g., feelings of joy or fear and associated responses/behaviors), and the mind (e.g., cognitive appraisal and contemplation). The body and vital primary energy are viewed as crucial for spiritual transformation and for the exploration of expanded forms of spiritual freedom (Ferrer, 2002, 2008b), though Ferrer did not explicitly discuss transbody states. Ferrer stressed the importance of the body as spiritual manifestation in

itself, because the body (matter) and consciousness come together in sentient beings incarnating embodied love. In alignment with Anderson's (2006) views, Ferrer's participatory model ascribes the human body an intelligence that is accessible through body awareness, is inner directed, and has an energetic dimension.

Participatory theory recognizes an exuberant diversity of physical and metaphysical bodies. In embodied participatory spirituality, the body can be viewed as subject (living body), as the physical home or locus of spirit manifested in fleshly form, or as a divine revelation that offers spiritual insight and wisdom. The latter account reveals deeper meaning of incarnated life through the physical form of the body (Ferrer, 2017). The idea of the body as mirror or reflection of the universe is found in multiple spiritual traditions, among them Taoism, Platonism, Islam, Kabbalah, and Tantra (e.g., Chittick, 1994). The belief of the body as the microcosm of the entire complexity and vastness of the universe implies the notion that the divine physically manifests within the human body. According to this micro-macrocosm notion, the human body serves as a culminating pinnacle of creative spiritual forces (Ferrer, 2017).

Daniels (2009) argued that Ferrer's participatory theory embraces the three vectors of transpersonal development. Likewise, the pluralistic bodies in participatory spirituality represent all three pathways in the BoSoP model. These pathways in participatory theory entail the (a) descending soteriological path of immanence through deeper connection to nature, the sacred feminine, the Earth or the unconscious (e.g., bodyfulness, somatic awakenings, embodied spiritual

practices, sexual and sensual spiritual enactments); (b) ascending path toward the transcendence of a narrow, ordinary self bound to the physical body through engagement with subtle worlds, bodies, or fields of consciousness overcoming ordinary human structures (e.g., self-transcendence beyond the physical body in Christianity or *Vajrayāna* Buddhism); and (c) extending path toward embodiment of cosmic bodies that are expansive beyond the human form (e.g., Gaia consciousness, cosmic bodies in Taoism or Hinduism). Participatory theory's openness to hybridization of bodies as conceptualized and perceived in different religious/spiritual traditions (e.g., Buddhism, Christianity, Shamanism, Judaism, Hinduism, or other) provides a tantalizing richness of possibilities for spiritual embodiment. Multidimensional contemplative integral practices (e.g., practices that foster the differentiation and integration of masculine and feminine capabilities, strength/gentleness, healing and transformation of wounds and conflicts) were suggested to realize the depth and breadth of embodiment accounting for individual and cultural differences (Ferrer, 2017).

Bidwell (2015) described spiritual embodiment as unity-in-diversity of the *spiritual self* that is a cocreated participatory event, in which the unified-but-distinct spiritual/religious identities (e.g., Buddhist-Christian) are experienced as a whole (i.e., as two natures in one being). Bidwell suggested that from a participatory perspective there are no distinct religious/spiritual identities (e.g., Buddhist, Christian, or other), because one embodies both simultaneously. This simultaneous embodiment is the participatory event. Bidwell provided a phenomenological nature account in Evey Canyon of a participatory event that

brought forth an upwelling of gratitude and compassion through nondual knowing while sitting in Buddhist meditation practice and simultaneously knowing through the heart evoked by Christian reflection. The spiritual experience, including the spiritual identity, was enacted through participation with transcendent reality/realities as it manifests in the conditioned world according to Bidwell. This enactment suggests that transcendent body and human body exemplify a unified metaphysical body or a *hybridization of bodies*. Cocreation means that the participatory event is neither objectively real from an ontological point of view nor simply subjectively constructed, but rather a subjective–objective phenomenon transcending Cartesian dualistic categories (Ferrer, 2002).

According to Ferrer, the participatory nature of spiritual knowing involves (a) multiple modes of perception (e.g., through the heart, sensing of vital energies, moral insights, and somatic awareness) involved in the process of spiritual knowing, (b) ontologically human beings and spiritual energies participate dynamically in life (without choice), and (c) epistemic knowing through communion and cocreative participation. Participatory theory recognizes the importance of somatic, imaginal, energetic, subtle, and archetypal variables in shaping religious experiences and meanings (Ferrer, 2002, 2015). In addition, Ferrer's (2006, 2017) embodied spirituality aligns with Merleau-Ponty's (1945/2012) living body as a source of spiritual insight. Ferrer (2008b) advocated the body as subject, as home of the complete human being, and as a microcosm of the universe and the mystery. Ferrer pointed out that in a genuine embodied spiritual practice, it is essential to contact the body, discern its current state and

needs, and then create spaces for the body to engender its own practices and capabilities.

Embodied spirituality seeks to cocreate novel spiritual understandings, practices, and expanded states of consciousness departing from the compulsion to recreate traditional transcendent liberations (e.g., replicate the awakening of the Buddha; Ferrer, 2017). According to Ferrer (2003, 2011) and Ferrer and Sherman (2008b), attention to the body and its vital energies may give greater access to the immanent power of life or the spirit. In this view, the greater the participation of embodied dimensions in religious inquiry, the more creative one's spiritual life may become. This assertion, however, has not been corroborated by empirical evidence and may not even be possible to assess using the scientific method. In any event, participatory cocreation seeks to foster freedom to expand spirituality in the form of novel, bodily immanent enactments of spirituality. An example of these possible innovations is Ferrer's (2017) integral *bodhisattva* vow, in which "the conscious mind renounces its full liberation until the body, the heart, and the primary world can be free as well from the alienating tendencies that prevent them from sharing in the unfolding life of the mystery here on Earth" (p. 20).

The ego/self may be expressed in different ways in BoSoP. Ferrer (2011, 2017) made an important distinction between the modern hyperindividualistic mental ego and participatory selfhood. The former is often plagued by disembodiment, narcissism, and alienation from self, others, and the world due to its hyperindividualism. In contrast, participatory selfhood embraces an embodied, integrated, connected, open, and permeable identity. Spiritual individuation, thus,

is characterized by integration, radical openness, and radical relatedness, through which individuals gradually embody their unique spiritual identity striving for wholeness. Such an embodied spirituality coherently integrates transbody and transpersonal development, ideally bringing forth social, ecological, and political engagement motivated by ethical concern for others, communities, and the world as a whole.

In summary, participatory theory posits that the integration of all human dimensions, among them the body, contributes to a fully embodied spiritual life. It also views the body as a natural doorway to the deepest human energetic potentials operative in the enaction of creative embodied spiritual insights, transformations, and liberations. In doing so, participatory theory recognizes a plurality of possible subtle or metaphysical bodies, which are open, possibly unlimited, and cocreatively unfolding. All three paths of BoSoP—descending, ascending, and extending paths—are given equal voice in participatory theory through intrapersonal, transpersonal, and interpersonal spiritual cocreations.

***Vajrayāna* Buddhism**

Vajrayāna is not monolithic and consists of a complex set of tantric traditions and practices. I will touch upon and summarize some elements in these traditions in broad strokes, and highlight in particular some of the claims made by and about these esoteric traditions and practices as they relate to the place of the body and embodiment. I focus on those claims that have been popularized and emphasized about *Vajrayāna* in the West and use this as way to show how this tradition might relate to participatory theory.

Literally translated as “the diamond vehicle,” *Vajrayāna* Buddhism consists of an amalgam of tantric forms of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism (Kalu Rinpoche, 1995). Tibetan Buddhism formed as a combination of 8th-century Indian Buddhism and Bön, the indigenous-shamanistic religious tradition of Tibet that holds all reality is pervaded by a transcendent principle, called “All Good” (Powers, 2007, p. 506). This view of Basic Goodness, that is considered absolute and indestructible, has prevailed in contemporary *Vajrayāna* Buddhism (Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, 2010a). In this dissertation Indo-Tibetan Tantra and *Vajrayāna* are used interchangeably with slightly different flavors in practices, though distinctly different from Hindu Tantra (Geshe Tashi Tsering, 2012). Vajra (Sanskrit) means “indestructible,” “adamantine” or “inseparable” pointing to the realization of emptiness. Some of the *Vajrayāna* Buddhist traditions have been historically practiced in secrecy, in monastic or lay practitioner settings with a variety of different meditation, visualization, and somatic practices (Geshe Tashi Tsering, 2012; Ray, 2002). Due to its secrecy *Vajrayāna* has been somewhat misconceived and understudied. Only recently some *Vajrayāna* teachings have been made public in the West (e.g., *Pointing Out The Great Way: The Stages of Meditation in the Mahamudra Tradition* by Brown, 2006), in part to more East–West dialogue fostered by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, spiritual leader of the *Vajrayāna* Buddhist Geluk school (The Dalai Lama & Cutler, 1998). There are four major Indo-Tibetan *Vajrayāna* schools, including the *Geluk*, *Nyingma*, *Kagyü*, and *Sakya*. Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1939–1987), Tulku in the *Kagyü* school and also trained in the *Nyingma*, was

instrumental in bringing *Vajrayāna* Buddhism to the West as founder of Shambhala International (Powers, 2007; Ray, 2002). Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche's *Vajrayāna* teachings have been enculturated in the West, specifically North America, in lineages such as Shambhala (Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, 2013) and Dharma Ocean (Ray, 2000). This section draws predominantly from the Buddhist Modernist *Vajrayāna* perspective enriched by material from the *Kagyü* and *Nyingma* schools with insights from other Indo-Tibetan schools of *Vajrayāna* Buddhism. *Vajrayāna* was selected out of the large field of Buddhist traditions and schools due to its centrality of integrated mind–body practices undergirding the tantric liberative view compared to earlier Buddhist schools.

In *Vajrayāna*, ultimate *Bodhicitta* connects the individual with the fundamental state of existence (Sanskrit, *alaya*), which is believed to be consciousness before it is divided into subject and object (Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, 2010b). *Bodhicitta* refers to spirit of awakening (Duckworth, 2019a). Relative (conditioned) *bodhicitta* resembles the tender heart, compassion, and viscerally and somatically deep love that is fully embodied in relationships with others, life, and the universe (Ray, 2017). Ultimate *Bodhicitta* and Buddha nature (Sanskrit, *tathāgatagarbha*) are metaphysical concepts of the Mind of Enlightenment (Williams, 2010). According to the *Vajrayāna* view asserted by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche (2013b), Buddha nature is considered unstained, indestructible, primordial (i.e., timeless, nowhere, and everywhere), unconditional, and referred to as the groundless ground pointing to emptiness. However, there are contrasting interpretations of emptiness—as ground and as

groundless abyss—found in Tibetan Buddhism (Duckworth, 2014b). According to Duckworth, self-emptiness refers to a phenomenon’s lack of its own essence, while other-emptiness refers to the ultimate reality’s lack of all that it is not. The latter other-emptiness was portrayed by Dölpopa (*Jonang* tradition, Tibetan Buddhism) as “the ultimate ground as the omnipresent reality that is only “empty” in the sense that it is empty of all the distorted, relative phenomena extrinsic to it” (Duckworth, 2014b, p. 920). According to Duckworth (2014b), Mipam’s (*Nyingma* tradition, Tibetan Buddhism) interpretation of “ground is groundless” or “emptiness is empty” relaxes rigid ontological positionality in regard to ground or emptiness and allow multiple interpretations of reality.

The physical body at the center of the BoSoP model can be found in *Vajrayāna* as one of the five discrete aggregates (Sanskrit, *skandhas*), which are (a) the physical body or corporeality, (b) feelings, (c) perceptions, (d) habitual mental dispositions that connect karma-producing will to mental action, and (e) consciousness (Esposito et al., 2015). In *Vajrayāna* teachings, the human body is considered a microcosm of the macrocosm (Morley, 2008; Lama Tsultrim Allione, 2018; Ray, 2016b). The micro-macro cosmic mirror implies that the *soma* (or body) provides access to Ultimate *Bodhicitta*, and vice versa (Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, 2013c; Ray, 2017). A Modernist *Vajrayāna* interpretation was provided by Ray (2018) claiming that awareness of the soma in its natural state is open, spacious, and completely limitless. According to this phenomenological view, the soma just receives and knows *what is*; and through such direct, unmediated realization of the soma one touches enlightenment.

Conceptualization, rationalization, judgement, and other egoic strategies aimed to seek pleasure, security, comfort, and satiety, while avoiding pain, discomfort, suffering, and threats bring forth disembodiment of awareness that prevent one's liberation. The liberative goal is to contact one's *empty body* through interoception without conceptual thought (Ray, 2018).

According to Ray's (2016a) view of the *Vajrayāna*, the unknowable, infinite extent of ultimate reality is embodied and experientially available in human form through interoceptive experience and somatic meditation. Relative experience of conditioned reality and phenomena manifest within the field of emptiness (Geshe Tashi Tsering, 2012). In *Vajrayāna*, the ultimate arises in the human body as an immediate, spontaneous, nonconceptual apprehension of the whole (Pure Awareness) that is independent and free of one's conscious control (Ray, 2018). Energetic being arises from this nonconceptual apprehension (emptiness) as the play of energy, and material (physical) being arises from this energy as the play of form (Ngakpa Chögyam & Khandro Déchen, 2003). The emphasis on the phenomenological meditative approach to inconceivable reality and inexpressibility in the lived world is characteristic of the Tibetan *Yogācāra* (Mind-Only) school, while the Tibetan Buddhist *Madhyamaka* school uses post-meditative contemplation and deconstructive ontology to infer that ultimate truth is an absence to be known only *via negativa* of what is not (Duckworth, 2019b). Duckworth (2019b) emphasized that the body is both perceiver and perceived, the organ of the universe and the flesh of the world as viewed from a radical contemplative tantric perspective as exemplified in *Mahāmudrā* and the Great

Perfection. The irreducibility or the relationality that constitutes the whole is the uni-verse (one and many). This nonduality is dynamic unity that comprises everything, including the body.

Ray (2016a, 2016b) stressed that to know ultimate reality directly can only happen within and through the body, which serves as a gateway of naked and spontaneous experience. The significance of the physical human body as vital access to ultimate reality has been recognized in various *Vajrayāna* traditions. For example, body posture and body awareness was highlighted as foundational in *Mahamudra* (Brown, 2006), full awareness of bodily actions of the ordinary human body as well as the exalted body of a buddha rooted in the *trikāya* (Buswell & Lopez, 2014), mindfulness of the body to maintain constant body awareness of sensations, feeling tones, and movements in Tibetan Buddhism (Powers, 2007), full body prostrations as physical movement that purify and tame the ego in Tibetan Yoga (Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, 2011), gross (physical) body and meditation and mandala practice at the generation stage in *Tantras of Heruka* (Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, 2016a), somatic meditation practices in *Kagyü Vajrayāna* (Ray, 2016a, 2016b, 2017), outer (body, phenomena) and inner mandala (of the five Buddha families) as well as tantric body mandala in *Vajrayāna Buddhism* (Geshe Tashi Tsering, 2012). In addition, *Tumo*—a body-based inner-heat and visualization practice in Tibetan Yoga (Baker, 2019; Geshe Tashi Tsering, 2012)—and embodiment of the female Buddha Tārā (or other deities) in the body of a woman are considered possibilities to attain

enlightenment stress the centrality of the body in *Vajrayāna* (Lama Tsultrim Allione, 2018).

The ascending BoSoP aligns with *Vajrayāna*'s transcendence of the ego (self), which is associated with emptiness (Sanskrit, *sūnyatā*) of self and phenomena (i.e., material objects, physical body, mental states, and everything knowable; Khensur Rinpoche Jampa Tegchok, 2012). Khensur Rinpoche Jampa Tegchok (2012) asserted that emptiness is expressed through nonattachment to self and phenomena, which are both considered to be concepts rather than truths. Attachment solidifies self and an antidote is to transcend the habitual tendencies of reifying aspects of the ever-changing phenomenal experience.

Paradoxical views are beheld in *Vajrayāna*. Although transcendence through the personal, interpersonal, and cosmic body toward the realization of ultimate reality is viewed as one truth, another truth is to realize a fully embodied human life (Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, 2016a; Ray, 2008). Embodied freedom comes when one accepts that “life is just life” (p. 8), rather than “freedom to” or “freedom from” life (p. 7) as pinpointed in a translation of Tokmé Zongpo's *Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva* root text of the *Mahāyāna* that is also embraced in the *Vajrayāna* view (McLeod, 2014). Kalu Rinpoche (1995) asserted that *Vajrayāna* discerns between absolute Buddha nature, which is all-encompassing, unchanging, luminous, and groundless (nonduality), while sentient-beings (buddhas) arise in the world with separate bodies (duality), which endlessly experience sensations, feelings, and perceptions due to the law of dependent origination. These immanent and nonpermanent experiences in sentient

beings are emerging from the inner world of the body and the heart (Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, 2010a). The view in *Vajrayāna* is that apparent reality, which is the way things appear to be, is a mental projection onto objects in one's experience, but is not the essence of what things inherently are (the ultimate truth; Ray, 2013). According to Geshe Kelsang Gyatso (2016a), the practice of *Heruka* body mandala (*He*, Sanskrit, emptiness of phenomena; *ru*, the emptiness of self; “*ka*,” the union of Heruka's mind of great bliss and the emptiness of all phenomena) in *Vajrayāna* is the highest yoga *Tantra* practice. Heruka is focused on both the gross and subtle body in which the practitioner dissolves from an imagined Heruka body into clear light in the completion stage (nonduality) and becomes a Buddha, “an actual divine being with a divine body, the pure illusory body” (p. 124).

In contrast to the *Heruka* body, feelings of ignorance and desire may arise through sensations and perceptions formed in the human body that is situated in the center of the BoSoP model. These bodily-attachments are rooted in the 12 *nidānas* (links of dependent origination), which describe the karma of the past, present, and future associated with suffering (Sanskrit, *duḥkha*; Ray, 2008). Buddhist traditions, including *Vajrayāna*, share the intention to end karmic cycles of repeated rebirth (Sanskrit, *samsāra*) and suffering (Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, 2016b). Specifically, in early Buddhism pre-dating the *Vajrayāna*, the human body was considered to be a source of suffering evoking cravings to annihilate or sublimate the body. Buddhist asceticism strived to sublimate the existence of the human body as a repulsive source of suffering and disembodiment (S. Collins,

1998; Williams, 1997). The sublimation of the physical body stands in contrast to the dharmic “four foundations of mindfulness,” one of which is “the mindfulness of body,” emphasizing the importance of the psychosomatic body and sensations in which experiences arise (Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, 2010a; Virtbauer, 2016).

It is believed in *Vajrayāna* Buddhism that the Buddha presents three bodies (Sanskrit, *kāyas*): (a) the *dharmakāya* or truth body, which is the body of Ultimate reality; (b) the *sambhogakāya* or complete enjoyment body, which is the energetic body produced from subtle energies; and (c) the *nirmanakāya* or emanation body, which is a physical manifestation of the Buddha in form of a body of flesh and blood (Powers, 2007; Ray, 2004). The three *kāyas* are ultimately indivisible, meaning that when one rests all at once in pure Buddha nature one experiences the emptiness of the *dharmakāya*, the impermanence of the *sambhogakāya*, and the body form of the *nirmanakāya* (Brown, 2006; Ray, 2004). In such states of nonduality there is no distinction between subject and object, between form (body) and formlessness (emptiness; Loy, 2015). The assertion is that within this nondual realm of complete openness and nonconceptual experience there arises a continual stream of spontaneous responses as somatically sacred imperatives. This fully awakened state is not empty in the sense of being void or nothing; rather, it is empty of attachment, thought, and any conceptualization. Nondual Pure Awareness is considered immaculately pure and manifests in form of experience that is illuminated with exuberant joy and a felt sense of warmth and aliveness in the body. The liberated

body and *kāya* are equivalents, but distinctly different from the mundane conceptualized, and constructed (nonempty) human body, which is called *sharira* in Sanskrit (Ray, 2018). The *sharira* resembles the third-person, distancing perspective of the body, which can be observed in form of physiological measurements from a medical perspective.

In the *Vajrayāna*, the ascending path transcends dualistic notions realizing effortless nonduality (Ray, 2002). In the *Atiyoga* (nondual Tantra) and *Dzogchen* traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, *rig pa* (Tibetan) refers to an eternally pure state free from the dualism of subject and object and has been translated into English as “pure awareness” with qualities such as luminosity, effortlessness, presence, original purity, and expanse. *Rig pa* is regarded as the ground of both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, and all objects of knowledge are assumed to arise from *rig pa* and dissolve into *rig pa*, which is already self-liberated (Buswell & Lopez, 2014). According to *Vajrayāna* Buddhism, greater immanence through mindfulness of the body also opens the extending path toward an expanding self experienced as completely timeless, open, vast, and spacious with no boundaries. The extending realization of bodylessness gives way to out-of-body experiences that touch on cosmic bodies, such as the *dharmakāya*. The extending view from a conditioned perspective stresses that the personal (human) body is interconnected with the interpersonal body of all of humanity and the Earth. This interconnectedness is bound to dependent origination (Sanskrit, *pratītyasamutpāda*) meaning that all phenomena are interconnected (The Karmapa, 2017). The extending path from an

unconditioned perspective recognizes that the human form body is one and the same with the indestructible Buddha nature (Brown, 2006).

Even within Tibetan Buddhist traditions there are notable epistemological differences in regard to the emptiness of body (form) pointing to pluralistic conceptualizations of nondualities. For example, in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism there are two major schools that assert nonduality: *Madhyamaka* (“Middle Way” by Nāgārjuna) and *Yogācāra* (by Asanga and Vasubandhu). The *Madhyamaka* school takes an extreme epistemological stance because it refutes all philosophical positions, including nonduality between body (matter) and mind that is rejected as another illusion. Nāgārjuna neither asserted nor denied the experience of nonduality (Loy, 1998). *Madhyamaka* posits that the Absolute truth is emptiness and even emptiness does not in itself constitute an absolute reality (R. L. M. Lee, 2014). In comparison, the *Yogācāra* school asserts the identity of subject and object. It claims mind-only (Sanskrit, *cittamātra*), implying that only mind or consciousness exists. *Yogācāra* views the apparently objective world not as a projection of ego-consciousness; rather, the delusive bifurcation between subject and object arises within nondual mind (Loy, 1998).

Emptiness has distinctly different meanings in prominent Tibetan Buddhist traditions: (a) *Jonang* tradition—Dölpopa’s self-emptiness of relative phenomena, and other-emptiness as absolute ineffable reality of ultimate truth interpreted as empty ground; (b) *Geluk* tradition—Tsonkhapa’s emptiness of emptiness in which emptiness is perceived as a mere absence; and (c) *Nyingma* tradition—Mipam’s ultimate emptiness is perceived as a unity of emptiness and appearance, that is a

single unified truth. The *Jonang* assumes a *substrate of reality*, that is, emptiness as an ultimate metaphysical ground that is separate from worldly phenomena. While the *Geluk* asserts a *quality of reality*, that is, emptiness as phenomena's lack of inherent existence. The Nyingma ("Middle Way") synthesizes emptiness as unity of relative appearance and ultimate emptiness (Duckworth, 2010b).

Emptiness in tantric practice is explored through the body, which is recognized as the gateway to enact rituals and visualizations (R. L. M. Lee, 2014). Tantric initiation (Sanskrit, *abhisheka*) in *Vajrayāna* involves full-body prostrations considered as a gesture of surrender and purification of the body and mind (Powers, 2007; Ray, 2013). Tantric visualizations embody a symbolic reconstruction of one's self in which one essentially becomes Totality that is embodied in a *yidam*'s character (Varela & Depraz, 2003). A *yidam* is a male or female Buddha representing enlightened aspects and qualities of deities. The *yidam* practice aims to help one disidentify from desire, unconditionally accept oneself, and identify with the wisdom mind of the deity for the purpose of transformation. It is believed that the deity is nothing other than one's own enlightened nature, depicted in apparently external form. The deity is considered a manifestation of all three *kāyas* of the Buddha. In *yidam* practice, one realizes the paradox of form (body) that is formlessness (emptiness), and formlessness that is form (nonduality; Ray, 2013). *Guru yoga* is a technique of visualizing and dissolving bodies via the *trikāya* system. The practitioner visualizes the dissolution of one's own body into emptiness (*dharmakāya* as emptiness), meditates to transform light (energy) into the form of a specific tantric deity

(*sambhogakāya*), and then activates the final transformation to the level of the *nirmanakāya* where one becomes physically relevant to fulfill the *bodhisattva* vow of helping other beings (The Dalai Lama, 1988). These tantric practices bring forth self-transformation in order to transcend all bodily forms for realizing emptiness (R. L. M. Lee, 2014).

The mystical physiology of *Vajrayāna* describes the human body in terms of subtle energies (or winds) travelling through thousands of channels (Sanskrit, *nadis*) and centers (Sanskrit, *chakras*) within the body (Powers, 2007). According to Geshe Tashi Tsering (2012), there are three types of body—coarse body (i.e., the flesh and bone body), subtle body (i.e., the subtle psychic energies and subtle drops), and the very subtle body (i.e., the permanent body that carries the clear light). In *Vajrayāna*, it is believed that the permanent very subtle body passes from life to life and will remain even after one has attained Buddhahood. Tantric sexual practices, the flow of subtle energy (Sanskrit, *prāna*), and *bodhicitta* are interwoven with the subtle body (Morley, 2008; Samuel, 1989). Esoteric tantric practices simulate the death process, taking the three *kāyas* as the path, with the purpose of actualizing the state of Buddhahood and perceiving the clear light of death as the truth body (*dharmakāya*; Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, 2016a). In Tibetan Buddhism, the *bardo*, a state between death and rebirth, points to the ephemeral, cyclic nature of life and bodies (impermanence). It is believed that *tulkus* (who are reincarnate custodians of a specific lineage) reincarnate intentionally in human form to transmit the dharma in lineages. *Bodhisattvas* choose intentional rebirth in *samsāra* to benefit sentient beings (Karma Lekshe Tsomo, 2001), while *buddhas*

(awakened or enlightened beings) have a body adorned with the 32 major marks of a Buddha according to the *Lakṣaṇa* and *Mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇa Sūtras* as a result of countless eons of effort to either spiritual or worldly perfection (Buswell & Lopez, 2014). The bodies of buddhas are twofold: “a physical body (Sanskrit, *rūpakāya*) and a body of qualities (Sanskrit, *buddhakāya*)” (Buswell & Lopez, 2014, p. 149). According to Buswell and Lopez (2014), the exact nature of the *buddhakāya* has been a great deal of debate involving either a corruptible or foul body born from the womb of one’s mother (Sanskrit, *pūtikāya*), a mind-made (formless) body or subtle body (Sanskrit, *manomayakāya*), *dharmakāya*, or the three bodies (Sanskrit, *trikāya*). Those who attain awakening are believed to transform themselves into light in the form of the rainbow body, after which their physical form dissolves, leaving nothing behind (Powers, 2007). In Tibetan *Tantra* the five colored lights of the rainbow body are the essence of earth, water, fire, air, and space (Kalu Rinpoche, 1995). These metaphysical body conceptions refer to the formless body in Tibetan *tantra*.

In summary, in *Vajrayāna* Indo-Tibetan tantric forms of Buddhism the descending path of BoSoP involves somatic descent into the physical karmically conditioned body (embodiment, immanence) and cultivating subtle and very subtle energies to attain complete openness and spaciousness (pure awareness). The ascending path of BoSoP is through transcendence of the illusory body-bound self (nonattachment, emptiness, and nonduality) and transcendence of body boundaries, while the extending path of BoSoP is recognition of interconnectedness of phenomena in the cosmos (karma and dependent

origination), and realization of indestructible Buddha nature and the *buddhakāya*. In *Vajrayāna* Buddhism, mindfulness meditation, deity visualization, mind–body and somatic practices form a symbiotic amalgam to foster both transpersonal and transbody development aiming at enlightenment and realization of liberation of body and mind. A key tenet in *Vajrayāna* highest *tantra* is that the microcosm (human body) mirrors the macrocosm because they are one and the same (nondual view), and thus, the body is viewed as the gateway to liberation. Becoming and *being body* is to realize *rig pa* from the *trikāya* point of view. Although multiple bodies are recognized in the *Vajrayāna* tradition, they cannot be generalized. Notable distinctions in regard to the body, embodiment, and spiritual ultimates within tantric sects exist as viewed from a Buddhist Modernist Western perspective.

Juxtaposition of Participatory Theory and *Vajrayāna* Buddhism

There is an exuberant richness of bodies recognized in *Vajrayāna* Buddhist traditions and participatory theory. Both acknowledge embodiment as saliently important to the integration of all human dimensions. Juxtaposing participatory theory and *Vajrayāna* within the BoSoP framework allows an exploration of potential transbody and transpersonal transformation pathways. Participatory theory adopts spiritual diversity in terms of a plurality of spiritual paths and a plurality of spiritual ultimate(s) or goals. Liberation and aliveness are realized through spontaneous or intentional participation in an indeterminately mysterious creative power. Therefore, Ferrer's (2002, 2017) participatory theory elegantly avoids privileging a specific spirituality or truth claim over another

based on ontological grounds (e.g., claiming that the *Vajrayāna* Buddhist view is better than the Christian theistic view). Both ontological doctrinal criteria for arranging cross-cultural spiritual truths and perennialist (i.e., universalist) truth claims to reality are rejected by participatory theory. Instead, particular spiritualities are assessed based on the desired outcomes in a given context, location, and time. In this account, cross-cultural hierarchies of spiritualities are tied to their transformational potency and emancipatory effects, such as overcoming of egocentricity and dissociation or promoting ecological balance, human rights, and social justice.

In contrast, *Vajrayāna* traditions assert the path toward the pure and immaculate Absolute and a specific view of emptiness suggesting a univocal liberation and a constructivist relative karmic plane of being in the world. Few exceptions in Tibetan Buddhism, such as the radical phenomenology of *Mahāmudrā* and Great Perfection, embrace an enactive participatory view and a dynamic living reality (Duckworth, 2019b). Ferrer's participatory theory heavily draws on Buddhist tenets, such as overcoming egocentrism, the *bodhisattva* ideal, emptiness (undetermined ultimates), and embodiment. Although this theory arguably offers a contemporary secular global version of Buddhism, it emphasizes participatory emancipatory enactments over a monolithic liberative goal (Duckworth, 2014a). In contrast, the goal of liberation holds prominence in *Vajrayāna* Buddhism. Liberation in *Vajrayāna* traditions is the realization of ground as fruition. This liberation in ordinary *Madhyamaka* is to realize two separate truths (relative truth and ultimate truth; Duckworth, 2010a). In the

Yogācāra (Mind-Only) school phenomenological appearance is interpreted as mere distortion, while in the tantric turn (Mind-Only in *Mahāmudrā*) liberation is phenomenal appearance interpreted as the creative dynamics of gnosis. In the latter tradition the notions of a path along a temporal trajectory and a specific liberative goal are assumed to be delusional; instead present reality is hailed as liberative because it provides unity of emptiness and appearance in a dynamic field of experience (Duckworth, 2019b). According to Ray (2000), in *Vajrayāna* liberation is considered a liberation *for* (i.e., to realize fully one's human potential) rather than liberation *from* suffering, pain, trauma, and life's crises.

The liberative goals in many of the *Vajrayāna* Buddhist traditions and participatory theory differ profoundly with the former in adherence to a univocal, superior spiritual goal/ultimate and the latter affirming a multiplicity of spiritual goals, liberations, and ultimates. In my view, these contrasting liberative goals are problematic only if spiritual identities are held firmly and without openness, which creates spiritual otherness. Such a reified spiritual identity is similar to any other identity, such as identity-based claims for women's rights or racial, gender or social identities that create oppositional identity politics limiting deep and lasting individual and social transformations (Fernandes, 2003). A reified Buddhist identity claims a monolithic liberative view, and thus rejects plurality of liberations, while participatory identity rejects absolutes (e.g., the indestructible, primordial groundless ground hold in *Vajrayāna*) as universally valid. Even different views on emptiness as ground (Great Perfection), groundless ground (*Nyingma*), or emptiness of emptiness (*Geluk*) posited as reified spiritual ultimate

in different *Vajrayāna* schools create spiritual hierarchies from more to less enlightened which is antithetical to participatory thought.

However, participatory theory and *Vajrayāna* Buddhism share in common similar liberative outcomes, respectively: (a) egocentrism—less egocentricity / no-self and emptiness, (b) embodiment—less dissociation / less disembodiment, and (c) relationality—integral *bodhisattva* vow and ecological, social, and political interconnectivity / *bodhisattva* vow and dependent origination.

Irrespective of participatory practices or *Vajrayāna* practices, liberated human beings are more selfless, more compassionate and loving, and more engaged in the social, ecological, and spiritual transformation of the world (Ferrer, 2017). As the Buddhist self-identity becomes emptier, less egoic, and more embodied through mindfulness meditation, visualization, and somatic practices, concepts such as spiritual ultimates versus the Absolute lose importance because states of being (e.g., being body, nondual consciousness, and subtle states) become more prominent, realizing eventually Buddhahood (Ray, 2008). Similarly, as novel spiritual understanding emerges through cocreative enactment in an undetermined mystery, it opens more fully the “spirit-beyond” (enlightenment), “spirit within” (enlivenment), and “spirit in-between” (eco-social-political engagement) ultimately leading toward religious hybridization and greater spiritual diversity (Ferrer, 2017). Ferrer and Sherman (2008b) considered participatory theory not a spiritual tradition, but rather a *spiritual sensitivity* expressing the acknowledgement and softness toward other religious and spiritual traditions and identities, while conserving grounds for critical discernment. Both participatory

and Buddhist practitioners benefit from the inquiry-driven dimensions of one's own tradition that may gradually increase the hybridization of bodies (Ferrer, 2017) and be able to hold the paradox of being both a Buddhist and participatory practitioner, Buddhist-Christian, or fill in any other religious or spiritual tradition (Bidwell, 2015). This infinite differentiation-in-communion can express a greater-than-ever spiritual plurality with a deeply felt sense of spiritual unity (Ferrer, 2017).

The similarities between participatory spirituality and the radical phenomenological tantric traditions of *Mahāmudrā* are striking. Both embrace an enactive participatory view that stress present reality as a dynamic matrix of experience avoiding reifying emptiness as static and ineffable as it is asserted in the *Jonang* or objectifying emptiness as it is claimed in the *Madhyamaka*. The subject-object hybridization of participatory theory is expressed in *Mahāmudrā* as dynamic unfolding unity between appearance and emptiness. As Duckworth (2019b) pointed out *Mahāmudrā*, drawing from *Yogācāra*, assumes that

all appearances have three natures: (a) the imposition of true reality on appearances (the imagined nature), (b) the conditioned and relational process of their arising (the dependent nature), and (c) the absence of any essences of an appearance beyond being a conceptual designation (the consummate nature). (p. 134)

These three natures are explicated through the metaphor of a crystal that appears in its dependent nature reflecting its background (i.e., the crystal appears blue when placed on blue background; the crystal appears green when placed on green background; etc.). But the color of the crystal's background (the imagined nature) does not exist essentially or permanently in the crystal and colors do not inhere in the crystal (the consummate nature; Duckworth, 2019b). Likewise, participatory

spirituality asserts subject–object hybridization and the enactive participatory nature of events and cosmologies that is dynamic and spontaneously creative with novel expressions.

According to participatory spirituality, any kind of perennial view to attain a specific pre-determined liberative spiritual ultimate through transpersonal and transbody practices is refuted (Ferrer, 2002). According to Buswell and Lopez (2014), *Mahāmudrā* asserts that the crowning experience of Buddhist practice is a state of enlightened awareness in which emptiness and phenomenal appearance are unified; thus, an imprint or seal is placed on all phenomena of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. As Duckworth (2019b) pointed out this “unity of appearance and emptiness can be interpreted (monistically) as a unified field or (pluralistically) as a matrix of interrelations” pointing to the enactive participatory nature of the radical phenomenology of *Mahāmudrā* (p. 136). *Mahāmudrā* exalts that the ordinary state of mind as being both the natural and the ultimate state that is characterized by lucidity and simplicity. In essence, *Mahāmudrā* posits that natural purity pervades all existence including deluded minds (Buswell & Lopez, 2014). This ontological truth claim of a specific spiritual ultimate is not consistent with the view of participatory theory which asserts that the spiritual ultimate is mysterious and undetermined. Jackson (2011) stressed that in *Mahāmudrā* non-dual gnosis of great bliss and awareness of emptiness is inseparably conjoined as ultimate luminosity realizing Buddha nature. Though personal gnosis of one practitioner in the gradual stage-specific *Mahāmudrā* path and gnosis in the sudden *Mahāmudrā* path (see Brown, 2006) may not result in exactly the same

experience of unity of emptiness and appearance, pointing to perspectivist perennialism. Based on phenomenological bracketing of personal *Mahāmudrā* meditations the nondual bliss may be similar though not exactly identical to evoke visceral and feeling states compared to previous nondual experiences. The subjectivity of nondual unity remains a contentious matter.

The Nondual Awareness Dimensional Assessment (NADA) was used to study nondual traits and states, self-transcendence, and bliss in a study by Hanley et al. (2018). The prevalence reports of 13 different nondual trait items ranged from 9-37% of participants who never or rarely experienced them to 21-83% of participants who very often to always experienced one of the nondual trait items (p. 25; $N = 528$ participants). Other methods to measure nondual awareness were based on electroencephalography (Berman & Stevens, 2015) and qualitative research that stressed the degree to which nonduality is subject to cultural biases and certain practices (Wade, 2018). Dunne (2011) studied the differences in understanding of nondual awareness in the *Abhidharma*, *Mahāmudrā*, and other Buddhist schools. The contentious debate about nondual awareness from Buddhist and Western perspectives is ongoing.

Dzogchen's (Great Perfection, *rdzogs chen*) *Atiyoga* has been hailed a pinnacle in the *Vajrayāna* that is radically phenomenological in its approach asserting direct intuition of gnosis (Sanskrit, *jñāna*; Duckworth, 2019b; Pettit, 1999). However, *Dzogchen* does make some specific claims about mind, space, and esoteric instruction which run counter to non-perennialist assertions in participatory theory arguing that the spiritual mystery is undetermined (Ferrer,

2017). According to Pettit (1999), the view, path, and result (fruition) of the Great Perfection are essentially identical with gnosis. This view implies that there is no difference between the goer, the going, and the gone to; no difference between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. The ground is Buddha nature or womb of the *tathāgatas*, the Absolute (Sanskrit, *tathāgatagarbha*) that is assumed to be empty in essence, pure and luminous by nature, unobstructed, universal, and spontaneous in its compassionate manifestation. *Dzogchen* claims that nonduality is revealed in the here and now (Dowman, 2014), enlightenment is already present (Germano, 1994; van Schaik, 2016), *rig pa* (Tibetan) is the most profound form of consciousness that transcends dualities and conceptions and is already present in all living beings (Buswell & Lopez, 2014; van Schaik, 2016), and the unfabricated nature of mind (*dharmakāya*) is one and the same with the mode of appearance of enlightened mind (Pettit, 1999). The ground (Buddha nature) is attributed with three aspects: essence that is pure, nature that is spontaneous and luminous, and compassion as dynamic energy that is the manifestation of the ground. *Rig pa* is contrasted by the ordinary state of consciousness defined by subject–object distinctions and conceptual constructions (van Schaik, 2016). According to *Dzogchen*, reality is the matrix of the spaciousness in which all appearances arise but never become anything else other than the sameness that is their source. Space is encompassing and immense and cannot be apprehended; it is without border (Dowman, 2014). Awareness that pervades the nature of all things is emptiness; and indivisibly emptiness is awareness alluding a nondual view. Longchenpa’s view of the Great Perfection is that the abode of the mind is

basic consciousness; and the abode of gnosis is the primordial Truth Body (Sanskrit, *dharmakāya*). The ultimate ground is perceived as unconditioned primordial purity (Duckworth, 2019b). Such a view indicates perennialism which is not aligned with participatory theories assumptions. Duckworth (2019b) emphasized that *Dzogchen* as a radical phenomenological Buddhist tradition attends to the horizon of experience in a participatory way. According to Ferrer (2017), participatory metaphysical pluralism acknowledges human beings as vessels for the creative self-unfolding of reality and the enaction of directly knowable spiritual worlds. Ferrer emphasized that “an individual is her actions (whether perceptual, cognitive, emotional, or subtle), the mystery is its enaction” (p. 244). In the participatory model, emptiness, unity, nonduality, etc. are interpreted as creative gestures of the mystery enacted through participating humans and collectives. In contrast to *Dzogchen*, the participatory epistemology refutes pre-given attributes of the spiritual mystery (e.g., personal phenomenology, dual, or nondual consciousness), it opens to an undetermined mystery, and it affirms radically manifold spiritual ultimates (Ferrer, 2017).

Another distinction between *Vajrayāna* Buddhism and participatory theory is the position of the physical body relative to everything else. From the perspective of the *Vajrayāna*, the body is viewed as *the* gateway to the spiritual ultimate and is given the utmost importance based on the notion that the body is Buddha nature, whereas in participatory theory the body is viewed as equal to vital, heart, mind, and consciousness as part of an integrated larger whole (Ferrer, 2017). On the one side, this equality principle may be interpreted to foster integral

development in the sense of a harmonious balance among all human faculties, while on the other side *the Body* may be considered to include all other human dimensions because they inherently arise within the physical body. In this view, the Body has attained bodyfulness, which is not a trait or end-state but rather considered a dynamic cocreated striving toward wholeness. Ferrer's (2002) theory is positive in emphasizing creative cocreation of the undetermined mystery, though it gives less voice to negative feelings and perceptions, such as fear of the unknown, while the *Vajrayāna* connotes negativity by emphasizing suffering and positivity through awakening.

In participatory theory, the *integral bodhisattva* renounces its own liberation until the body, the heart, and the primary world can be free (Ferrer, 2017). The *bodhisattva* vow is central in both *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna* Buddhism to liberate all sentient beings which is enacted through the body (Leighton, 2012; Ray, 2000). Importantly, the *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna* view is that full realization of the *bodhisattva* is attained by wholehearted, embodied, and completely lived intentionality of relieving suffering of all sentient beings. This ideal is based on Shantideva's dharma teachings of *The Way of the Bodhisattva* (Sanskrit, *Bodhicharyavatara*; Pelden, 2007; Chödrön, 2018; Tuffley & Śāntideva, 2011). The *integral bodhisattva* vow stresses the integration of all human faculties without subjugating, disembodiment, or detaching from any of them (e.g., dysfunctional sexualities or traumatic-induced tensions in the body). The *integral bodhisattva* engages creatively immanent and subtle energies in an open and boundless process to explore spiritual worlds, while Buddhist

bodhisattvas aim to replicate the awakening of the Buddha along various predetermined stages of liberation (Ferrer, 2017).

Some of the *Vajrayāna* traditions historically have been nonmonastic, individualistic, secretive, and eccentric as exemplified by the *siddhas* (Sanskrit, embodied beings accomplished in *tantric* practice) who roamed forests and mountains in the past in ancient India and Tibet (Buswell & Lopez, 2014; Ray, 2000). In contemporary Western culture, *siddhas* may be considered “enlightened madmen/madwomen” who are accomplished on the path to liberation to enact equanimity and bliss, while helping other people to do the same. However, both *Vajrayāna* monastics and *siddhas* accomplishments in the completion stage (nonattachment, emptiness, nonduality, Buddha nature) stand in opposition to mainstream materialistic-individualistic oriented contemporary societies in the West. In that sense, fully embodied beings have realized the three *kāyas* through a concerted and disciplined effort focused on liberation as end goal (transbody and transpersonal realization). Although participatory theory stresses three spiritual cocreations—intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal cocreation—these concurrent enacted cocreations endlessly unfold with no defined single liberative ultimate or absolute (Ferrer, 2017). Such a lack in unique soteriological goal may evoke existential meaninglessness and anxiety due to absence of an unequivocal direction. For some, the perceived potential subjective relativism associated with such an open-ended participatory path may turn into cynical and nihilistic forms of being due to the lack of a single Absolute truth providing ontological certainty. Participatory pluralism implies a multiplicity of participatory beings and bodies in

constant enacted cocreation that bear the potential to bring forth transpersonal and transbody states. Cocreated events involve a plurality of interactions of human cognition, bodies, subtle world and entities, culture, and other. Cocreation differs from cultural constructivism because it concurrently involves the possible impact of linguistic, nonlinguistic (e.g., somatic, energetic, archetypal), cultural, and transcultural (e.g., subtle worlds) variables in the shaping of phenomenological experiences. From a participatory perspective, subjective spiritual Truth claims rooted in constructivism assert that spiritual realities and bodily realities are social constructions (Katz, 1978) and objective spiritual Truth claims (e.g., a specific absolute transcendental reality, such as the *dharmakaya*; Ray, 2002) are replaced by a plurality of subjective–objective Truths. This metamodern view of participatory theory does not reject subjective and objective truths, but seeks to liberate the very notion of truth from premodern/modern views contingent on Cartesian dualistic thinking (Ferrer, 2017). The body as one of the human dimensions is part of the celebration of this pluralistic liberation.

Vajrayāna has radically indulged the body as sacred and adopted somatic and *kāya*-visualization practices, while other Buddhist traditions and Western psychotherapies have stressed more cognitive-oriented mindfulness meditation. There is potential to combine cognitive and somatic meditation practices, which may benefit disembodied individuals. The spontaneity of enaction expressed in participatory theory offers potential to soften the rigid postures of meditation practice, bringing more freedom of creative expression and playfulness to the present moment. The time-tested, embodied practices of *tantric Vajrayāna*

lineages offer a nexus of pluralistic body constructs to disembodied cultures, but in a radically naked way, assigning superiority to the body as the microcosm of the macrocosm. Tantric practices aim to completely embody one's way of being. *Vajrayāna* gives prominence to the body, which is viewed as the culmination of immanence, transcendence, and expansion.

The transbody-transpersonal pathways (BoSoP) in *Vajrayāna* Buddhism are in a sense linear and hierarchical starting with the cultivation of somatic and meditation practices fostering deep connection to the physical human body and nonattachment of self, other beings, bodies, and all kinds of worldly phenomena. This descending path resembles the immanent way of being in the world in the form of a human body. Here, the human body becomes fully body realizing bodyfulness. *Vajrayāna* contends that through greater immanence (i.e., embodiment) the ascending path toward liberation of self (i.e., egolessness) and liberation of the body (i.e., nonattachment to karmic bodily conditions, thoughts, experiences, feelings, etc.) is realized. From the *Vajrayāna* perspective, realization refers to the full integration of human faculties and worldly phenomena through realization of *dharmakāya*, *saṃbhogakāya*, *nirmanakāya* as indivisible one according to the tri-*kāya* view (Buswell & Lopez, 2014).

A more balanced integration of the body as an equal partner among other human dimensions forms the impetus for embodiment and bodyfulness in participatory theory. The participatory view does not privilege any of the body-soteriological pathways (i.e., the descending, ascending, and extending paths). The pluralistic lens of participatory theory in regard to body-soteriological

pathways allows theoretically an organic unfolding in all three directions of the BoSoP model unrestricted by a dogmatic view or specific liberative outcomes.

The practical impetus to cocreatively explore the mysterious human existence is driven by primary instinctual processes, secondary processes that are conditioned by past experiences, and tertiary affects that include the free will (intention to act) according to Panksepp (2010). Among Panksepp's empirically informed seven primary-process emotional systems, the seeking/desire and play/social-engagement functions touch on the creative, inner-driven, and open participation in life experiences, while fear/anxiety, lust/sex, care/nurture, grief/separation distress, and rage/anger are tied to specific environmental stimuli. Although the equiprimacy principle of participatory theory states that no human attribute is intrinsically superior or more evolved than any other (Ferrer, 2017), Panksepp's (2010) research pointed to seeking/desire and play/social-engagement implicated in creativity, novelty, and curiosity. These empirical research findings suggest that seeking/desire and play/social engagement arising in the human body are poised to co-create novel spiritualities.

Another criterion (or test) that assesses intrapersonal spiritual cocreation could involve creative potential, specifically focused on curiosity (seeking), desire, and playfulness. Interestingly, in Buddhism, desires (e.g., bodily, sensual, sexual, imagined, or other desires) have been identified as one of the major defilements underlying attachment and *samsāra* hindering liberation, while playfulness is restrained in meditation practice (Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, 2013a). According to Schore (2016) and Schroder (2017), the caveat is that there

are two distinct operating *attachment systems*—the hard-wired biological, maternal regulatory attachment system in the human body (i.e., attachment bonding between mother and child) and the spiritual/Buddhist attachment system (i.e., attachment/nonattachment tied to the emotions desire and ignorance). An impaired maternal attachment system often leads to insecure (anxious and avoidant attachment) in adulthood and impaired intra- and interpersonal relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012; Melen et al., 2016), which may hamper spiritual development and enactment (Zimberoff & Hartman, 2002). The body-based maternal bonding attachment system (relational behavior) has been shown to associate with secondary neurological processes in the basal ganglia (Panksepp, 2012). This secondary emotional system arises from simple emotional learning based on classical conditioning (Panksepp, 2010), which can be reconditioned with mindfulness meditation practice (Khoury et al., 2017).

These findings underpin that within the human body lies potential to unlock novel spiritualities and impaired attachment systems that limit spiritual participatory enactment. The human body at the center of BoSoP holds the key to heal and liberate the descending, ascending, and extending paths to attain enlightenment (*Vajrayāna* Buddhist perspective) or enact a plurality of spiritual participatory events (participatory theory perspective). Future research may focus to investigate the body-soteriological validity and/or effectivity of embodying physical and metaphysical bodies in alignment with the egocentrism/narcissism, dissociation/disembodiment, and eco-socio-political orientations (Ferrer, 2017).

Conclusions

The BoSoP framework was introduced to explore the rich plurality of body constructs found in *Vajrayāna* Buddhism and participatory theory and juxtapose descending, ascending, and extending body-soteriological pathways that unlock or limit transbody and transpersonal transformation. As such, the BoSoP model has potential to explore differences and similarities of other religious, spiritual, and mystical traditions. In *Vajrayāna*, the body is viewed as the gateway to liberation, which entails immanent experiences of timelessness, groundlessness, and spaciousness (being body), transcendence of self (nondual states of consciousness), and cosmic expansion in service to all sentient beings. In participatory theory, the body is viewed as equal partner to vital, heart, mind, and consciousness as part of an integrated larger whole. Although the philosophical views between the investigated tradition/theory are contrasting—plurality of spiritual ultimates (participatory theory) and realization of Buddha nature as the absolute Totality (*Vajrayāna* Buddhism)—many similarities were identified. The similarities include a multiplicity of integral practices, intra- and interpersonal outcomes (e.g., increased embodiment, selflessness, shared humanity, and prosocial outcomes such as compassion). In conclusion, both *Vajrayāna* and participatory theory offer rich spiritual pathways for transbody and transpersonal transformation.

CHAPTER 5: BODHISATTVAS—PERSONIFIED, IDEALIZED, MYSTIFIED, NATURALIZED, AND INTEGRAL

The multiverse *bodhisattvas* inhabit is said to be populated by humans who became *bodhisattvas*, cosmic *bodhisattvas*, gruesome and friendly *bodhisattvas*, past and future buddhas, and servants on the path to liberation (Sanskrit, *nirvāṇa*) to end suffering for all (Jennings, 1996). Although there are many types of *bodhisattvas* shaped by Buddhist and non-Buddhist views, they all adopt universal characteristics: avoidance of harmful actions, compassion, performance of virtuous deeds, and work for the benefit of all sentient beings (The Dalai Lama, 2018).

This chapter juxtaposes the *bodhisattva* in its roles as a personified symbol, idealistic vision, mystical manifestation, naturalized sentient being, and integral vision. First, the typology of Buddhist *bodhisattvas* (*Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna* Buddhism) and personified, mystified, and idealized forms of the *bodhisattva* are given voice. Second, non-Buddhist *bodhisattvas* rooted in neurophysicalism (naturalized *bodhisattva*) and participatory theory (integral *bodhisattva*) are placed in juxtaposition to Buddhist *bodhisattvas*. Finally, the interrelated and paradoxical moral, ethical, and prosocial underpinnings of traditional Buddhist *bodhisattvas* of the East and emerging contemporary non-Buddhist *bodhisattvas* of the West are discussed.

Buddhist Bodhisattvas

The origin of *bodhisattvas* is found in Buddhism and its meaning changed over time as different Buddhist traditions emerged—*Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, specifically the *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra Mahāyāna* traditions.

The Bodhisattva in *Theravāda* Buddhism

The “awakened being” (Sanskrit: *bodhi* [awake] and *sattva* [sentient being]; Pāli, *bodhisatta*) is one who is to become a Buddha according to the *nikāyas* of the *Pāli* Canon in *Theravāda* early Buddhism (“elder traditionalists”). The term *bodhisattva* itself, however, has two connotations (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2005). One refers to the general aspiration to attain future Buddhahood through sustained great compassion for living beings over many eons of cosmic time, which eventually culminates in boundless freedom. The other defines a *bodhisattva* as a human-incarnate Buddha who had to struggle and suffer to attain enlightenment, much like other human beings. An example illustrating the incorporation of these perspectives is Siddhartha Gautama, who is simultaneously seen as predestined from birth to attain Buddhahood based on countless previous lives and as having fulfilled the mission of being a world teacher (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2005). The *bodhisattva* ideal in *Theravāda* is primarily restricted to the historical Buddha and few exceptional awakened beings (Samuels, 1997).

Although *Theravāda* soteriological theory includes a path for the *bodhisattva*, the *bodhisattva* is a much rarer sanctified figure than in the *Mahāyāna*; “the more common ideal in the *Theravāda* is the arhat” (Buswell & Lopez, 2014, p. 904). An *arhat* is an enlightened being who has attained

liberation and realized emptiness of self (non-self [Sanskrit: *anātman*]; Buswell & Lopez, 2014). Shiah (2016) discerned the Buddhist non-self theory and self-conceptions in Western psychology based on multiple criteria, among them the *bodhisattva* ideal of an ideal person involving giving up desires, displaying compassion, and seeking wisdom. In contrast, the Western ego (self) engages in strengthening of the self and hedonic motivation of desire-driven pleasure. The *Theravāda* teachings emphasize the lack of an inherent existence of the self and promote a belief in the mutual dependent co-arising of all phenomena, which is denoted as the first turning of the wheel of dharma. This view stands in contrast to the second turning of the wheel (i.e., emptiness of self and phenomena) based on the *Mahāyāna bodhisattva* ideal. The third turning of the wheel of dharma points to the realization of Buddha nature (Ray, 2000). *Tathāgatagarbha* refers to the embryo or the essence of the *tathāgatas*, the one who has come/gone, and either means Buddha nature or the potential to achieve Buddha nature in *Mahāyāna* (Buswell & Lopez, 2014).

The ability of the *bodhisattva* to attain emptiness of self is tied to the composition of sentient beings based on five aggregates (Sanskrit, *skandhas*)—form (body), feelings, perceptions, karmic formations, and consciousness—in the *Abhidharma* of the *Pāli* Canon, one of the oldest *Theravāda* teachings (Khensur Rinpoche Jampa Tegchok, 2012). These aggregates are phenomena; they are delusive illusions that obscure the attributeless and primordial Mind, which is considered to be without beginning and without end. The *Abhidharma* asserts that conventional existents have no

intrinsic nature (Sanskrit, *svabhāva*), whereas *dharma*s, ultimate existents, have intrinsic nature (Williams, 2010). The traditional view of non-self articulated in the *Theravāda* tradition is arguably problematic because it creates a dichotomy between duality (phenomena) and nonduality (no-self). This view has been ontologically critiqued as flawed, since subject and object are interdependent, and the subject cannot be eliminated without transforming the nature of the object (Loy, 1998).

The oversimplified view that the inferior liberation goal in *Theravāda* is to become *arhats* following the path of disciples (Sanskrit, *śrāvakas*) and lone or private buddhas (Sanskrit, *pratyekabuddha*), while the superior liberation goal of *bodhisattvas* practicing in the *Mahāyāna* is to become buddhas is fallacious according to the Dalai Lama (2009). *Theravāda* asserts that *arhats* attain personal enlightenment without extending the same opportunity to other beings suggesting selfish interest to nirvanize. Therefore, the *arhat*'s realization of emptiness of self as *samyaksambuddha* (Sanskrit) has been considered imperfect because they have yet to enter the *Mahāyāna* to progress toward the supreme ultimate goal of perfect omniscient Buddhahood (Sanskrit, *sammāsambuddha*; The Dalai Lama, 2009; Williams, 2010). These diverse notions of enlightenment point to the different levels of liberation—the ultimate nature (Sanskrit, *dharmatā*; Pelden, 2007)—the nonconceptual wisdom considered the superior wisdom (Sanskrit, *prajñā*; Brunnhölzl, 2018).

The *Mahāyāna* school pejoratively claims that the *arhat* ideal is selfish and inferior (Pelden, 2007). Therefore, non-*Mahāyāna* forms of Buddhism come

under critique because they are supposedly uncompassionate toward other beings trapped in the prison of cyclic existence (Sanskrit, *saṃsāra*). However, this criticism is somewhat unfair because *Theravāda*, like most Buddhist traditions, acknowledge the Four Immeasurables with the intention of bringing happiness to all. Although Clayton (2018) and Nattier (2003) pointed out that the more limited focus of an *arhat* to achieve enlightenment through the vehicle of the solitary buddhas (Sanskrit, *pratyekayāna*) without the benefit of a buddha's teaching, is only great compassion (Sanskrit, *mahākaruṇa*); however, the *arhat*'s universal compassion is not directed toward all beings as in the *Mahāyāna* tradition (see C. H. Hamilton, 1950). The discerning factor between the somewhat tainted *arahant* ideal in the *Theravāda* and the *Mahāyāna bodhisattva* ideal is the amplification of all-encompassing compassion in the latter (Gethin, 1998).

The *Pāli* Canon of the *Theravāda* is ambiguous about the ability of the *arhat* in regard to partial and perfect enlightenment. In the *Buddhavaṃsa* scripture, the *arhat*'s *bodhisattva* vow is to become a completely enlightened buddha, but only after *arhatship* is within reach (Samuels, 1997). The *Theravāda bodhisattva* ideal is developed to the greatest extent in the *Buddhavaṃsa* based on both compassion (Sanskrit, *karuṇā*) for all sentient beings and meritorious acts that go beyond personal ambitions to liberate (Samuels, 1997). The *bodhisattva* ideal, as described in the *Buddhavaṃsa* and *Cariyāpiṭaka*, requires the cultivation of 10 perfections (Pāli, *pāramī*; Sanskrit, *pāramitā*)¹³ (Goodman, 2017; Samuels, 1997). According to Buddhaghoṣa's *Path of Purification*, the cultivation of the Four Immeasurables¹⁴ allows *bodhisattvas* to develop the *pāramitās* to the fullest

(Goodman, 2017). These assertions suggest that *arhats*, like *bodhisattvas* in the *Mahāyāna*, cultivate prosocial emotions extending self beyond egocentric liberation goals. For example, the most recited scripture in *Theravāda*-dominant Southeast Asia is the *Metta Sūtra* (Discourse of Lovingkindness; Goodman, 2017).

Bodhisattvas in the *Pāli* Canon may also refer to past buddhas remembered by the historical Buddha, such as Vipassī, and future buddhas, such as Maitreya, a fully awakened *arhat* (Samuels, 1997). This expanded view of the *Theravāda bodhisattva* is expressed in the *Khuddakapāṭha* scripture through its assertion of the *bodhisattva-yāna* (Sanskrit: *yāna*, denoting “vehicle”). The *Theravāda bodhisattva* ideal was prevalent among all schools of sectarian Buddhism in the period preceding *Mahāyāna* Buddhism’s emergence in the first and second century CE—an emergence that was formed out of opposition with *Theravāda* doctrines (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2005).

The Bodhisattva in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism

In *Mahāyāna* (“Great Vehicle”) Buddhism, the *bodhisattva* ideal becomes applicable to all beings including lay practitioners. *Mahāyāna* asserts that the *bodhisattva* is a person who is able to attain full *nirvāṇa*. The *bodhisattva* aims for the attainment of Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings, the number of which is infinite as the vastness of space. This striving of the *bodhisattva* is denoted as *mahāsattva* (Great Being or Great *Bodhisattva*, Pelden, 2007; Williams, 2010). According to the *Mahāyāna* view, the Buddhas have extirpated the self, and never again return to *saṃsāra* (Pelden, 2007). Though

Buddhas are requested not to pass into *nirvāṇa* but to remain for many countless kalpas in verse 6, Taking Hold of *Bodhicitta* of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, one of the most well-known *Mahāyānatexts* (Chödrön, 2018; Shāntideva, 2011). Such view is consistent with the *upasaka Chunda* claiming that some Buddhas may not pass into *nirvāṇa* for months, while other Buddhas may pass fully into *nirvāṇa* residing in the pure field of the 10 directions (Pelden, 2007). Though such interpretations are ambiguous and lack clarity about the *bodhisattva*'s fate and realization of liberative goals. According to Williams (2010), *bodhisattvas* have choices; for example, they can make themselves be reborn in the Buddha Field of a Buddha or deliberately travel there in absorbed *samadhi* meditation.

The *Mahāyāna bodhisattva* motivation is rooted in the arising of *bodhicitta* (Sanskrit: *bodhi*, “enlightenment” + *citta*, “mind” or “heart”), which refers to “the Mind of Enlightenment or Awakening Mind” (Williams, 2010, p. 195) or spirit of awakening (Duckworth, 2019a). *Bodhicitta* is most crucial in *Mahāyāna Buddhism* as an innate universal principle meaning the intention or the thought of enlightenment though it still needs to be cultivated (Buswell & Lopez, 2014). *Bodhicitta* refers to the altruistic aspiration to perfect enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings (Williams, 2010). To abandon *bodhicitta* is the gravest and most negative of all the possible downfalls of a *bodhisattva* (Pelden, 2007). In Patrül Rinpoche’s teachings of the *Way of the Bodhisattva* the cultivation of *bodhicitta* was emphasized: “May the precious spirit of awakening; arise where it has not arisen; where it has arisen, may it not dissipate; but further and further increase” (Duckworth, 2019a, p. 2).

Initially, the *bodhisattva* cultivates intentionally *bodhicitta* (relative or conventional *bodhicitta*) and actively engages in the *bodhisattva* path and activities, while ultimate (“subtle”) *bodhicitta* is attained through recognition of ultimate reality (Pelden, 2007). *Relative bodhicitta* refers to the aspiration to attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings together with the practices to achieve this goal (Buswell & Lopez, 2014; Shāntideva, 2011). This kind of *bodhicitta* is associated with the aspiring *bodhisattva* who shows increased awareness of the suffering of others with feelings of sympathy, empathy, compassion, and kindness (Ray, 2000). Ultimate *bodhicitta* is the wisdom of emptiness (Sanskrit, *śūnyatā*), the direct realization of the true nature of phenomena, which is an immediate nondual insight beyond conceptualization (Shāntideva, 2011). The fully realized *bodhisattva* embodies *ultimate bodhicitta*, which is the recognition of the illusory or empty nature of both self and phenomena that points to two veils of emptiness (Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, 2013b; Ray, 2000). In *Mahāmudrā* Tibetan Buddhism, basic enlightenment (i.e., *samādhi*, uninterrupted mindfulness, beyond all notions, beyond representation) is followed by path enlightenment (i.e., a single instant or flash of clear light with return of cognitions and perceptions, completely unobstructed), and fruition enlightenment (i.e., in a flash the entire mental continuum of cognition and perception becomes effortless nondual awakened wisdom). While *samādhi* and *postsamādhi* (nonmeditation practice) are related with *bodhisattvahood*, going beyond is Buddhahood based on Tashi Namgyel’s root text the *Natural Condition of Thatness and Clarity* (Brown, 2006).

Importantly, relative and ultimate *bodhicitta* are viewed as interdependent aspects of the same thing—the realization of the wisdom of emptiness and perfect compassion, as form is emptiness and emptiness is form (Shāntideva, 2011), while the two truths of the relative and ultimate are also paradoxically distinct and identical at the same time. As Pelden (2007) stated, “It is incorrect to say that the two truths are distinct on the ultimate level or that they are one and the same at the relative level” (p. 315). Shāntideva’s (2011) *Way of the Bodhisattva* (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*) is an expose of the *Madhyamaka* (Middle Way school) of Buddhism that explores the profound benefits of *bodhicitta*, how to generate *bodhicitta* and reduce suffering of *samsāra*, while carefulness, vigilant introspection, and patience prevent *bodhicitta* from weakening. To intensify *bodhicitta* through diligence and meditative concentration and committing to the *bodhisattva* vow results in merit for the benefit of all suffering beings (Pelden, 2007). The fruition of the *bodhisattva* path is wisdom (i.e., the direct realization of emptiness). The *tāthagata* (Sanskrit: *tātha*, “one who has thus” + *gata*, “gone”; or *agata*, “arrived”) proclaims truth from the middle position refuting all views (of “is” and that of “is not”) as being ultimately real. *Prajñā* (wisdom) refers to the immediate, intuitive insight into Suchness, the wisdom of emptiness beyond subject and object (Shāntideva, 2011).

All *Madhyamikas* deny ultimate existence through logic and negation asserting that all dharmas are empty of intrinsic existence (Sanskrit, *svabhāva*). However, the *Svātantrika* (“Autonomous”) tradition, *Madhyamaka* represented by Bhāviveka, maintains intrinsic nature conventionally, while the *Prāsāṅgika*

(“Consequentialist”) tradition, *Madhyamaka* represented by Shāntideva, Candrakīrti, and Tsongkhapa claim that all dharmas—conventional and ultimate—are empty of inherent intrinsic existence (“emptiness of emptiness”). These ontological views stand in contrast to the earlier doctrine of the *Abhidharma* (e.g., *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* or *Lokānuvartanā Sūtra*) which had posited that conventional existents (Sanskrit, *rūpa-dharma*, such as tables, chairs, and persons) are mental constructs constantly changing (impermanence) in a continuous stream as a result of causes and conditions (dependent origination). According to the *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, intrinsic nature is only held to be in ultimate existents (Ronkin, 2018; Williams, 2010).

The *Ugraparipṛcchā Sūtra* (The Inquiry of Ugra), which comprises a dialogue about the *bodhisattva* path, represents one of the earliest *Mahāyāna sūtras* (Nattier, 2003). According to the *Ugra Sūtra*, the goal is supreme perfect enlightenment (Buddhahood) viewed as a heroic path that avoids the *śrāvaka* path of the *arhat* that preempts Buddhahood. The *Ugra* is reserved for monastic *bodhisattvas* devoted to renunciate worldly life and dedicated to meditation and devotional practices in the wilderness detached from other people in solitary isolation. The supramundane goals of the *Ugra bodhisattva* path resemble the superhero of Buddhahood, according to Clayton (2018). A more mature stage of *Mahāyāna* is attributed to Śāntideva with two key texts, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (“The Entrance to the Way of Awakening”) and the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, the latter focused on the righteous conduct for the enlightenment of the aspirant *bodhisattva* (Goodman, 2016a; Clayton, 2018). Śāntideva proposed the *bodhisattva* vow,

cultivating the *bodhisattva* mindset, and the practice of the perfections to achieve full awakening and realize universal compassion for all, which is dependent on insights into emptiness (Clayton, 2018).

Emptiness of the Bodhisattva in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism

The twofold emptiness of the *Mahāyāna bodhisattva* expands the *Theravāda* concept of emptiness. The first emptiness of the twofold veil of the *Mahāyāna* is the egolessness of self, which means that the “I” or “me” has no inherent existence and is thus considered illusory (non-self; Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, 2010b; Ray, 2000). The second emptiness is the egolessness of phenomena (e.g., things, thoughts, perceptions), which are also seen as empty—without intrinsic existence (causally independent). All phenomena are posited to be nonconceptual and disjunct from the ideas that one projects upon them. In other words, they are constructed but do not represent true reality (Ray, 2000). The emptiness of self and phenomena is not mere nothingness (nihilism); instead, emptiness here means that phenomena exist in a realm beyond identification or conceptualization, and also that they have an interdependent rather than independent existence, according to the *Prajñāpāramitā* (Heart) *Sūtra* (Khensur Rinpoche Jampa Tegchok, 2012). The paradox is that despite the emptiness of self and phenomena, they nonetheless exist from a relative worldly perspective. This paradox was addressed by Nāgārjuna’s Middle Way claiming that relative and ultimate emptiness are the same thing (Garfield, 1995). Nāgārjuna refuted any intrinsic nature of reality (Sanskrit, *svabhāva*), positioning his view of emptiness

between absolutism and nihilism. In essence, the Middle Way avoids all reifying views and supports a radical openness to reality (cf. Ferrer, 2002).

Is a *bodhisattva* still a person if that person is empty? The *bodhisattva* is a person who suffers and experiences happiness like other human beings going through life and cyclic existence of rebirth. It is believed in *Mahāyāna* that the selflessness of a person (and a *bodhisattva*) means lack of a self-sufficient, substantial existent self, thereby rejecting the view of the existence of a permanent, unitary (with no parts), and independent self. The person (self) is interpreted differently among Buddhist schools. For example, in the view of the *Vaibhāshika* school, the self depends on the five aggregates, while it is considered a continuum of the aggregates and the existence of mental consciousness in the *Sautrāntika* school of Buddhism. In contrast, the *Chittamatra* school of Buddhism asserts that only the mind is real (Khensur Rinpoche Jampa Tegchok, 2012).

The nonduality of the three bodies (Sanskrit, *kāyas*) dissolves the paradoxical situation of the empty nature of the *bodhisattva* in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism (Perrett, 1986). In the realization of Buddha nature, the *bodhisattva* experiences simultaneously the emptiness of the *dharmakāya* (truth body, which is the body of Ultimate reality), the permanence of the *sambhogakāya* (complete enjoyment body, which is the energetic body produced from subtle energies), and the body form of the *nirmanakāya* (a physical manifestation of the Buddha in form of a gross body; Powers, 2007). In such states of nonduality there is no distinction between subject and object, between form (body) and formlessness (emptiness; Loy, 2015).

In *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, Buddha nature is not reserved for the *bodhisattva*. It is claimed to be available for all sentient beings in two types: (a) the naturally abiding Buddha nature, which is the empty nature of the mind (unchanging, immanent Buddha nature); and (b) the transforming Buddha nature, which comprises all the impermanent qualities of the mind that can be further developed, gradually becoming the omniscient mind of the Buddha. The emptiness of inherent existence of a person's mind is considered to be Buddha nature, which refers to the metaphysical nature of something that is inconceivable and inexpressible existing as clear light (Khensur Rinpoche Jampa Tegchok, 2012). *Mahāyāna* Buddhism makes a truth claim of Buddha nature as immanent and universal that is available as a potential for awakening, right now (Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, 2010b; Powers, 2007).

Views of Buddha nature differ among Buddhist schools. In the *Geluk* tradition, Buddha nature is defined as the emptiness of the mind, the mind's absence of essence, innate, unconditional, and all-pervasive with nothing remaining, not even as presence of the qualities of the Buddha in sentient beings, because everything is considered empty. In contrast, the *Jonang* tradition depicts Buddha nature as the unconditional ground of all being by asserting that this primordial wisdom is always present within all beings (Duckworth, 2010a, 2014a). The *Dzogchen* Buddhist school of Mipam critiqued this kind of *static emptiness* because it is derived merely through negation of essence (self and phenomena), resulting in a naïve metaphysical presence. While Mipam accepted that the qualities of a buddha are primordial, he asserted a “dynamic nature of

emptiness” that is an inconceivable unity of both appearance and emptiness (Pettit, 1999). In Mipam’s view, emptiness is interpreted as absence of cultural constructs that are deconstructed to know the truth, whereas Buddha nature carries the notion of an emptiness that is dynamically constructed as the ground of all of one’s ideas. The unity of emptiness and appearances is perceived as an alive cognitive presence and expressive activity that can be understood as a synthesis of emptiness (ontology) and Buddha nature (theology) resulting in onto-theo-logy (Duckworth, 2014a). This view implies that Buddha nature is not a transcendent truth that is the same for all *bodhisattvas*, suggesting that there is no Absolute Buddha nature; rather, the truth is discovered in the unfolding process of life, manifesting in acts of expression as the outflow of creative energy (Duckworth, 2014a; Pettit, 1999).

Personified, Idealized, and Mystified Bodhisattvas in Buddhism

The stages of the *bodhisattva* path (Sanskrit, *bhūmis*) to attain *nirvāṇa* follow a hierarchical structure of purification. Although the 10 stages to Buddhahood (described in the *Avatamsaka* [Flower Ornament] *Sūtra*; Cleary, 1993) provide a general direction toward awakening, the meaning of *nirvāṇa* differs significantly among Buddhist traditions. Such differences among the Buddhist schools and traditions fall into multiple ontological and epistemological typologies dependent whether *nirvāṇa* is interpreted as single Truth or multiple truths (i.e., existence of different kind of *nirvāṇas* or different kind of nondualities). Ferrer (2002) outlined the ontological and epistemological perennial typologies for the study of religion, spirituality, and mysticism. The

esotericist typology assumes that there is only one liberative goal (e.g., one specific *nirvāṇa*), while admitting that many different paths exist to realize the goal (e.g., different Buddhist traditions and practices). In contrast, the structuralist typology conceptualizes one path and one goal, while perspectivist typology asserts the existence of many different paths and many goals. The latter assumes that there are different perspectives or manifestations of the same ultimate reality (e.g., via Eastern Buddhism and Western contemporary forms of Buddhism).

For example, solitary personal enlightenment is strived for in *Theravāda*, while awakening of the *bodhisattva* to Buddha nature and twofold emptiness are sought for in *Mahāyāna*, esoteric *Vajrayāna*, and *Dzogchen* Buddhism (Ray, 2000). *Bodhisattvas* in Pure Land Buddhism vow to create celestial paradises on reaching Buddhahood; a popular example of a Pure Land paradise is *Sukhavatī*, created by the *bodhisattva* Amitabha, in which awakened human beings can find liberation (Leighton, 2012). The plurality of liberating nondualities in various Buddhist traditions, such as the *Madhyamaka* and the *Yogācāra* schools of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, was discussed in detail by Loy (1998). *Madhyamaka* takes an extreme epistemological stance refuting all philosophical positions, while claiming that the Absolute truth is emptiness and even emptiness does not in itself constitute an absolute reality. This tradition recognizes that everything is impermanent and devoid of self or essence and that this emptiness does not constitute an absolute reality in itself. In comparison, the *Yogācāra* Buddhist school asserts the identity of subject and object. It claims Mind-Only (Sanskrit, *cittamātra*) implying that only mind or consciousness exist. *Yogācāra* views the

apparently objective world not as a projection of ego-consciousness. Rather, the delusive bifurcation between subject and object arises within nondual Mind (Loy, 1983, 1998). According to Duckworth (2019b), the *Yogācāra* emphasizes a phenomenological approach toward the irreducible and inexpressible lived world as experienced, while the *Mādhyamaka* adopts deconstructive ontology to infer the absence of intrinsic nature. Such diversity among the traditions has spawned numerous expressions of *bodhisattvas*, including historical personified forms, idealized deities, and mystified figures as expressions of energetic and cosmic realities.

One prominent view is that *bodhisattvas* are beings, such as Siddhartha Gautama, who awakened as Śākyamuni Buddha and dedicated himself to the universal awakening of all beings (Leighton, 2012). According to Buddhist beliefs, the Buddha was not a god or an incarnation of God, he was a human being who had found the path to total freedom (Vessantara, 2003). Śākyamuni Buddha asserted in the *Mahāyāna Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (Lotus) *Sūtra* that he, the corporeal human Buddha, is in fact the embodiment of a universal *Buddha* reality that can materialize simultaneously in many forms at numerous places and times throughout the cosmos (Kubo & Yuyama, 2007). The Buddha stated that he is truly eternal and omniscient and has taught countless *bodhisattvas* in the remote past. The Lotus *Sūtra* exemplifies the dimension of cosmic Buddhahood that transcends ordinary ego consciousness, which is beyond space and time conceptions (metaphysical *bodhisattva*). The great cosmic *bodhisattva* figures intentionally descend and incarnate in human bodies for some specific temporary

purpose. On the other hand, however, the Lotus *Sūtra* points to the mortality of the historical Buddha as an ordinary person, not a superhuman being (Leighton, 2012). A variety of different *bodhisattva* types were described in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* mirroring different types of *bodhicitta*—a herder, a ferryman, and a king. As the herder type, the *bodhisattva* first delivers all others to enlightenment before entering enlightenment oneself like a herder takes care of his flock, while as the ferryman-*bodhisattva* type the ferryman and the passengers arrive together at the shore of enlightenment. As the king-*bodhisattva* type, the *bodhisattva* reaches enlightenment first and then helps others to attain it as well, just like a king first ascends to the throne and then benefits other beings (Buswell & Lopez, 2014). The nature of the world as seen by buddhas is characterized as the intercausal and interbeing *dharmadhātu* (Sanskrit), the Absolute realm, Dharma realm (or cosmos) of emptiness—an expression of Mind out of which reality arises, according to the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* (Cleary, 1993). In summary, the mortal, karmic, samsaric truth and the cosmic, primordial truth culminate simultaneously within the *bodhisattva*-Buddha, espousing both constructivist and perennialist elements. The latter points to the perennialist absolute truth claim with the culmination of the *bodhisattva* becoming Buddha and realizing *nirvāṇa*, while constructivist elements point to the relative aspects of human faculties bound to co-dependent origination, interdependence, and karmic cycles of suffering.

The archetypal, idealized *bodhisattva* figures live and evolve as dynamic embodiments of Buddhist life. *Bodhisattvas* viewed as archetypes are both germane external entities to venerate and internal psychic forces serving as

potentialities to be realized within the heart touching on the mental aspect on the path to liberation. As archetypes, *bodhisattvas* are fundamental models of dominant psychic aspects of the enlightened being, each emphasizing specific aspects of awakening. They combine internal energies and external forces assumed to provide encouragement and support to Buddhist practitioners (Leighton, 2012). East Asian Buddhist schools recognize various *bodhisattvas* who resemble wholesome qualities of compassion, loving-kindness, and gratitude. These Buddha deities are personified symbols of the *bodhisattva* ideal and, at the same time, mystical manifestations. Some of them are documented historical figures, such as Mañjuśrī, the *bodhisattva* of wisdom and insight who expounds emptiness and cuts through delusion, and *Avalokiteśvara*, the androgynous *bodhisattva* of compassion and empathy (Vessantara, 2003). Maitreya is a *bodhisattva* who the Buddha predicted would become the next incarnate buddha in a distant future (Leighton, 2012). Personified *bodhisattva* deities embody enlightened and prosocial qualities as virtues serving as symbols for awakening (Vessantara, 2003). Sky dancers (Sanskrit, *ḍākinīs*) are also recognized as *bodhisattvas* in Tibetan *Tantra*, resembling wisdom, emptiness, and spiritual goals (Simmer-Brown, 2001).

Idealized *bodhisattvas* and mystical *bodhisattvas* contrast with ordinary embodied *bodhisattvas*, who vow to live human life based on ethical principles such as abstain from harming others, collecting wholesome states, and working for the welfare of beings. The principles idealized and mystical *bodhisattvas* abide by transcend human ego narratives, because they appear unachievable for

ordinary human beings (P. Harvey, 2000). In China and East Asian traditions, a key commitment to the path of awakening is the inconceivable *bodhisattva* vow: “Living beings are infinite, I vow to free them. Delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to cut through them. Dharma gates are boundless, I vow to enter them. The Buddha Way is unsurpassable, I vow to realize it” (Leighton, 2012, p. 33).

The *bodhisattva* ideal embraces to free every single being in space and time from suffering, including loved ones, neutral people, strangers, enemies, and even mosquitos. This vow seems out of reach for ordinary human beings, who are immersed in delusions about self and other due to the attachment and grasping inherent in everyday life. The gateway to the truth of the *dharma* (teachings) opens to the *bodhisattva* through the arduous study of reality through every person and every situation—an arguably/apparently seemingly impossible task. To become a fully realized Buddha and awaken to the truth of reality seems inconceivable (Leighton, 2012). A response to the claim that the *bodhisattva* path is unattainable or pointless was provided in the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, which asserted that the *Mahāyāna* path is the path of accumulation through ardent habituation to realize emptiness. The path of the *bodhisattva* is to take refuge in the spirit of awakening according to the Praise to the Basic Field of Reality (*Dharmadhātustotra Sūtra*; Duckworth, 2019b). The *bodhisattva* discerns between taking refuge (in the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the dharma, the sangha), and *bodhicitta* with the former corresponding to the aim of freeing oneself for the benefit of oneself (*arhat* ideal) and the latter aimed at the benefit of others (*Mahāyāna* ideal). The refuge in the Three Jewels is viewed as a provisional

causal refuge whereby one pledges oneself to aspire to attain Buddhahood; however, the ultimate refuge is resultant refuge in *bodhicitta* with the resolution to act for the sake of all beings (Pelden, 2007). Taking refuge is the attempt to purify oneself from the illusion of a solid, personal self, whereas *bodhicitta* transforms the wish of the *bodhisattva* ideal into unending, spontaneous action for the sake of others (Buswell & Lopez, 2014).

Non-Buddhist Bodhisattvas

The Buddhist notion of the *bodhisattva* has inspired various contemporary Western conceptualizations of the *bodhisattva*, including the naturalized *bodhisattva* and the integral *bodhisattva*. This section is about non-Buddhist *bodhisattvas* that are not rooted in Buddhism.

Naturalized Bodhisattvas

More recently, a *naturalized bodhisattva* was proposed to provide a naturalistic, demystified, and empirical expression of the *bodhisattva* (O. Flanagan, 2011). The naturalized *bodhisattva* is situated within Western philosophy and refers to a “reductionist” version of Buddhism without transcendent and mystical states of mind, without deities, without cultural imprints, and with minimalist metaphysics. This perspective is grounded in neurophysicalism, which posits that mental events are brain events, or at least bodily events, and that the subjective character of experience is explained completely by the nervous system inside the person’s body. The rationale behind the naturalized *bodhisattva* is the scientific method, which was also suggested by Friedman (2002) to foster understanding in transpersonal psychology. O.

Flanagan (2011) argued that scientific naturalism and analytical philosophy are bound to measurable facts, allowing one to explain the truth about reality and what is knowable. Flanagan posited that the positive prosocial outcomes of the *bodhisattva* path, specifically happiness, eudaimonia, and social engagement, are inspiring for those human beings living in a disembodied and disenchanted material contemporary world.

Ferrer (2017) argued in favor of an openness of science to so-called supernatural claims in transpersonal psychology, adamantly against a reliance on a purely scientific approach that would limit the exploration of a possibly multidimensional cosmos. In Ferrer's view, a naturalistic approach is tied to neo-Kantian dualistic epistemology, which prematurely limits the exploration of alternative participatory approaches. I concur with Ferrer's assertions because the fullness, plurality, and paradoxical lived experience of *bodhisattvas* cannot be fully understood by a purely naturalistic approach. A naturalized *bodhisattva* model is antithetical to the theoretical, practical, and ethical framework of Buddhism underlying the *bodhisattva* path. Likewise, MacKenzie (2014) critiqued the naturalized *bodhisattva* concept, arguing that O. Flanagan (2011) seriously jettisoned and distorted the inner logic of the Buddhist tradition, radically reinterpreting it to fit neurophysicalism.

Integral Bodhisattvas

The *integral bodhisattva* vow and its foundation of embodied spirituality are situated in participatory theory, promoting the collaborative participation of various human attributes in the enactment of spiritual phenomena (Ferrer, 2017).

According to this vow, “an integral *bodhisattva*’s conscious mind renounces its own full liberation until the body and the primary world can be free as well” (Ferrer, 2006, p. 45). Embodied spirituality views “all human dimensions—body, vital, heart, mind, and consciousness—as equal partners in bringing self, community, and world into a fuller alignment with the mystery out of which everything arises” (Ferrer, 2017, p. 74). This whole-person spirituality is focused on the integration of all human dimensions, without subjugating, disembodiment, or detaching from any of them. Ferrer (2008) stated that embodied spirituality seeks integration of matter and consciousness, potentially resulting in a state of “conscious matter.” This view takes a pluralist stance, leaving radically open possibilities for dynamically cocreating the mystery (Ferrer, 2002, 2011). Enactments of such a mystery can take the form of metaphysical states in Buddhism, such as the *dharmakāya*, emptiness, and pure awareness. *Integration* in participatory spirituality refers to the creative interplay of consciousness and energy, while experiencing the fullness of experience in the human body. Coherence, attunement, and groundedness are essential elements of the participatory vision (Ferrer, 2008b, 2017).

A fully embodied spirituality involves engagement with both immanent and subtle spiritual energies. Ferrer (2017) asserted that an embodied liberation could potentially be attained through freedom from egocentrism, the cultivation of the *pāramitās* of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, or through many other somatic and spiritual practices including non-Buddhist ones. Embodied spirituality differs from early ascetic Buddhist approaches, which focused on individual liberation

and the sublimation and devaluation of the body toward that goal (Ferrer, 2008b). The integral *bodhisattva* differs profoundly from a *bodhisattva* on the path of liberation in Buddhist schools/traditions. The latter is expected to emulate specific states of consciousness to advance along the *bhūmis* and strive toward a specific ultimate as defined within a given tradition. In essence, Buddhist *bodhisattvas* are asked to replicate the awakening of the Buddha. The predetermined Buddhist paths and dharma teachings may limit the spontaneity of spiritual experiences of *bodhisattvas*, though many Buddhist teachers invite practitioners to openly observe meditative experiences and validate the dharma teachings for themselves. While Western science has embraced positivism, empiricism, and experiments performed in the external world, Buddhist investigations generally focus inward. Through repeated introspection and meditation practice the practitioner/meditator gains valid subjective experience (Hasenkamp & White, 2017). Duckworth (2019b) poignantly asserted that the *Yogācāra* (Mind-Only) Buddhist school emphasizes a phenomenological style of interpretation or orientation of the subjective experienced lived world to realize the inconceivable reality. In the Mind-Only view the percept-concept dichotomy collapses into perception with nondual self-awareness. Buddhist *bodhisattva* practice that is path and/or goal-focused may limit the creative and spontaneous insights that arise from “embodied presence” according to the participatory view (Ferrer, 2002).

The integral *bodhisattva* is not constricted by spiritual and religious doctrines, allowing a more spontaneous cocreation of the undetermined mystery to come to the fore—a core tenet of embodied spirituality (Ferrer, 2017). Ko

(2010) stressed that the relational self organically seeks balance between relational (interchangeable) opposites through creative moments of transformation. Creativity and openness are key elements for integration and transformation and to navigate the *bodhisattva*'s paradoxes.

Participatory theory posits that subtle worlds may exist and that no pre-given ultimate reality exists, which creates a boundless openness for the integral *bodhisattva* to explore spiritual worlds (Ferrer, 2017). The notion of ultimate reality being undetermined resonates with the Buddhist concept of emptiness and avoids the hierarchical rankings of one claim to reality being better than another (Duckworth, 2014c).

In my view, the co-created spirituality of Ferrer offers dual freedom from Buddhist doctrine and views as well as from achievement of a specific predetermined ultimate goal (liberation). Such liberative goals differ profoundly among Buddhist traditions and schools (e.g., Pure Land Buddhism, *Yogācāra* or *Theravāda* Buddhism). However, there are risks for integral *bodhisattvas*; for example, to attach to co-creation, spontaneity, and moment-to-moment consumption for the sake of new mystical experiences whereby the search for the “knowing” in the mystery can become spiritual materialism, spiritual addiction, or even spiritual madness to enact the unknown mystery. These important pitfalls are not only relevant in participatory spirituality, but are possible distortions of all spiritual paths, including Buddhist paths.

According to Ferrer (2006, 2017), the metamodern integral *bodhisattva* renounces its full liberation until the body, heart, and the primary world are set

free from alienating tendencies. This integral vow includes healing of trauma, emotional wounds, unhealthy unconscious impulses, and self-centered behavior, which all limit moral agency, positive prosocial affects, and transformation of self and communities from a perspective of wholeness. Integral liberation of all sentient beings evokes the vision of going beyond liberation of the conscious mind to emphasize a fully embodied way of freeing oneself and all sentient beings (Ferrer, 2017). Embodiment has been recognized in contemporary Western Buddhism rooted in Francisco Varela's neurophenomenology (Varela, 1996; Varela et al., 2016), which eliminates the sharp mind-body distinction between "internal versus external" (Cho, 2017). In contrast, in early Buddhism bodies have been viewed as a karmic hindrance on the path to liberation referred to as inferior, impure, and foul; specifically, the female body was devalued as a mantrap, because supposedly men were caught up in attachment to womanly charms (Suh, 2017).

Relationships Between the Bodhisattva's Emptiness, Morals, and Prosocial Engagement

Buddhist ethics, philosophy, and metaphysics provide a complex amalgam evoking numerous contradictory views. Why would a *bodhisattva* feel compassion for all sentient beings, including oneself, when ultimately there are no individual selves, only empty selves? The moral ideal of the *bodhisattva* is to actualize virtues, but there is no stable agent (self) who bears the initiative and motivation for pursuing these virtues (Coseru, 2017). From a Buddhist perspective, in order to realize emptiness of self and phenomena the *bodhisattva*

needs to let go of attachment, desires, and ignorance, and embody nonattachment (Chödrön, 2018). Jennings (1996) asserted that in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism self-attachment and ignorance are overcome through mindfulness practice calming the mind, which brings forth insight, loving-kindness, wisdom, and compassion. These Buddhist virtues are enacted through insights into dependent co-origination, interdependence among all beings, and peaceful inward resolution. Buddhist visualization techniques that exchange self and other promote insight into the interdependence of all sentient beings; those techniques were proposed by Śāntideva, an eighth-century Indian Buddhist *Mahāyāna* monk (Tuffley & Śāntideva, 2011). Such *tonglen* visualization practice of sending positive qualities to others while taking their pain upon oneself aims to deconstruct self-driven perceptions and delusions (e.g., aggression) and reveal at some deeper inner level the love and goodness for the other person (Ray, 2000). *Tonglen* humbles *bodhisattvas* and cultivates compassion (Sanskrit, *karuṇā*) because they recognize that a murderer, a mother, or a sick child could have been them in a previous or future life (P. Harvey, 2000). The *Jātaka* tales recount that the Buddha reincarnated in many different human forms as a *bodhisattva* on the path to Buddhahood (Williams, 2010).

In Jennings's (1996) interpretation, the *bodhisattva's karuṇā* is the "cool," empty, and dispassionate concern for others uniting self and other-self into a "both-and." Jennings posited that the *bodhisattva* becomes/is one with all other beings, and therefore will achieve liberation with and through the liberation of all others. According to Jennings, *karuṇā* generally evokes passive altruism without

intent to act and relieve suffering, which imbues the *bodhisattva* path with a connotation of negativity, while considering Western Christian *agape* (love) as “warm,” pure, and passionate. However, Jennings did not discern between relative and absolute *bodhicitta* of the *bodhisattva*. In various forms of Tibetan *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna* Buddhism, *bodhicitta* is considered the fire of the heart emanating pure and unconditional Love for all beings experienced as an ineffable state of consciousness, which opens space into an expansive energetic realm in which defilements lose potency and positive hedonic tones are amplified (Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, 2010b; Ray, 2002). Garfield (2010) posited that Śāntideva’s understanding of *bodhicitta* is grounded in a phenomenological account of lived experience as a psychological phenomenon with conative and affective dimensions that evokes an altruistic aspiration in the *bodhisattva* to cultivate oneself as an active moral agent for the benefit of all beings. In Garfield’s view, the *bodhisattva*’s path is grounded in a moral phenomenology, rather than virtue or consequentialist models of morality. Garfield (2019) elaborated on the importance of Śāntideva’s moral phenomenology and the power of meditation to address implicit bias and resistance to introspection. Inattention to moral phenomenology has been pervasive in contemporary Western culture exemplified by social oppression and immorality—for example, implicit bias against African Americans in the United States. Śāntideva had recognized that moral phenomenology “operates at the level of perception—before we engage in any conscious deliberation or engage our explicit beliefs, we have committed

ourselves to wrong view and the roots of wrong action in our spontaneous perceptual engagement with the world” (Garfield, 2019, p. 200).

The notion that lack of self-agency (emptiness of self) and moral-agency are compatible has been disputed by Coseru (2017). From Coseru’s view, non-self contradicts the notions of self-agency, self-awareness, and conscious awareness of affects and perceptions. Coseru argued that mental states of a *bodhisattva*, such as greed, delusion, loving-kindness, and compassion, can only be made sense of in terms of the person who possesses them; that is, they only exist from a first-person perspective. Generic suffering and pain apart from individually realized sensations are incoherent from this point of view. The paradoxical notion of selfless but agent self was addressed by Schroder (2017), who discerned between (a) the biological, evolutionary, maternal regulatory-attachment systems to sustain survival and to function in the world, and (b) the spiritual attachment-nonattachment system that Buddhists seek to transcend. The body-bound systems of the former determine the neurobiological-driven ego functions and visceral experiences governed by the polyvagal complex, the maternal attachment system (bonding between mother–child), and the hardwired emotional-reactive system in sub-cortical regions, with “seeking” as the affective driver. In contrast, the “spiritual self” is the self that Buddhists aim to transcend, dissolve, and/or deconstruct (Ardelt & Grunwald, 2018). In a Buddhist context, desire and attachment reify the “spiritual self,” and mindfulness meditation, *pāramitās*, and visualization practices aim to empty this self to attain non-self. The body-oriented *relative attachment model* articulated by Schroder (2017) links Western

neurobiology and Buddhist dharma, and suggests that a person with non-self (Buddhist emptiness) can still have agency and participate in morally sound ways in worldly affairs. Similarly, Welwood (2002) discerned between ego competence in worldly functioning and the Buddhist ego, with the latter implicated in non-self.

Coseru's (2017) critique of the *bodhisattva*'s stance of supposed selfless agency has further implications for the *bodhisattva*'s idealistic moral responsibility to liberate all beings. Coseru claimed that the ideal is intelligible only in reference to conceptions of freedom and human dignity that reflect a participation in, and sharing of, interpersonal relationships. In my view, these assertions are relativized from an agent-neutral perspective demanding an aspiring, yet unenlightened *bodhisattva* to follow normative Buddhist rules that benefit other beings. Moral agency is evoked from a consequentialist perspective because the *bodhisattva* aims to accumulate positive merit for "good" karma and rebirth, and a phenomenologist perspective grounded in *bodhicitta* that evokes unbounded Love ("Love," with capital "L") as a motivator to share with all other sentient beings. Goodman (2019) argued that the *bodhisattva*'s impartial compassion based on Śāntideva's view should be understood as a utilitarian ethics in which impartial benevolence rests in the principle of act-utility, a subclass of the ethics of act-consequentialism. According to this principle moral decisions choose among potential actions the one that would most effectively promote the good and welfare of sentient beings.

To counter Coseru's (2017) concerns about agency from a psychological perspective, equanimous states of being are perceived as freeing, rather than as impersonal, detached, dissociated, and nonloving. A state of equanimity protects one from emotional agitation and corresponds to the psychological notion of neutral valence (Desbordes et al., 2015). The *bodhisattva*'s equanimity is manifested as an intentional attitude of acceptance toward experience regardless of its hedonic tone (pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral), as well as by reduced automatic impulsivity to the hedonic tone of experience (Hadaş et al., 2016). Nonattachment, enacted through the deconstruction of the perceived illusory self, and prosocial outcomes, such as empathy and compassion, are deeply interwoven and serve to liberate the *bodhisattva* (Sahdra et al., 2016). Śāntideva in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* incited fear in *bodhisattvas* motivating them to transform selfishness into altruistic concern for the suffering of others, arising of *bodhicitta*, taking refuge in the protection of *bodhisattvas*, and attainment of equanimity (Finnigan, 2019). Equanimity in the *Mahāyāna* is understood to extend loving-kindness and compassion to all beings equally, without prejudice and preference (Goodman, 2019).

In *Mahāyāna*, the *bodhisattva* is said to achieve “threefold purity” and full awakening by practicing the six Great Perfections (Sanskrit, *pāramitā*¹⁵). *Pāramitā* practice is understood to be only genuine if the *bodhisattva* regards oneself as empty, the action being performed as empty, and the object of that action as not being a real, objectively existing thing. These markers imply nonattachment, but not detachment or attachment (Goodman, 2017).

The Bodhisattva Paradox

Bodhisattvas choose intentional rebirth in *samsāra* to benefit all sentient beings, while buddhas are viewed as perfectly enlightened beings who escape it, attaining a formless, permanent, enlightened wisdom state (Karma Lekshe Tsomo, 2001). Pelden (2007) concurred that “the *bodhisattvas* are reborn in *samsāra* through the power of their *bodhicitta*, and they remain with beings, staying close to them, in order to bring them to the underlying state of supreme bliss” (i.e., bliss of ultimate Buddhahood; p. 136). The *bodhisattva* paradox outlined by Danto (1987), however, reveals a possible tension or even contradiction: although the *bodhisattva* can enter *nirvāṇa* because one is fully enlightened, passing into *nirvāṇa* implies selfishness—suggesting that such an enlightenment is partial. This logical impasse is amplified by the expectation that the *bodhisattva* is expected to liberate all sentient beings and the assertion that the Buddha, supposedly the fully enlightened one, did reportedly enter *nirvāṇa*. Danto added another layer of complexity to the *bodhisattva* paradox by arguing that the *bodhisattva* cannot pass into *nirvāṇa* because this would be selfish, and a selfish act would disqualify a *bodhisattva* from being a *bodhisattva*. Therefore, the *bodhisattva* cannot reach *nirvāṇa*—and neither can anyone else.

Danto’s (1987) assumptions are rooted in the *Theravāda* view of *nirvāṇa*; indeed, the *bodhisattva* entering into *nirvāṇa* would be incompatible with the selfless compassion that characterizes the *Mahāyāna bodhisattva*. The underlying notion is that the act of passing into *nirvāṇa* must be a selfish act, unless all

beings simultaneously pass into *nirvāṇa* together, which seems unlikely (Perrett, 1986).

In essence, Danto and Perrett questioned how a *bodhisattva* possibly could attain final *nirvāṇa* (Sanskrit, *parinirvāṇa*), also called “*nirvāṇa* without remainder,” the *nirvāṇa* achieved at death.¹⁶ This latter *nirvāṇa* meant the cessation of suffering and was supposedly achieved by the Buddha at the time of his demise at Kusinagari when rebirth ceased. According to Buswell and Lopez (2014), the buddha vehicle (Sanskrit, *buddhayāna*) leads to the state of Buddhahood.¹⁷ Although the term Buddhahood has been disputed, “in general, the *buddhayāna* is synonymous with both the *bodhisattvayāna* and the *Mahāyāna*, although in some contexts it is considered superior to them, being equivalent to a supreme *ekayāna*” (p. 156). The latter *ekayāna* means the conveyance that carries sentient beings from *samsāra* to *nirvāṇa*.

Therefore, when a *bodhisattva* attains Buddhahood through the three-path salvation, the *bodhisattvayāna* (Sanskrit, *yana* or “vehicle”) *nirvāṇa* is attained, meaning that “a *bodhisattva* becomes not just a Buddha, but Buddha” (Perrett, 1986, p. 57). According to Perrett (1986), the three *kāyas* of Buddhahood ensure that in attaining *nirvāṇa* one realizes the impersonal *dharmakāya* (ultimate transcendental reality), the *sambhogakāya* (complete enjoyment body), and the *nirmanakāya* (body form). The *sambhogakāya* and *nirmanakāya* allow the *bodhisattva* to care for and assist other human beings, so that they too can become liberated and bring forth compassion to all sentient beings. The *Mahāyāna* path, but not the *Theravāda*, resolves Danto’s *bodhisattva* paradox, because the

bodhisattva does not need to selfishly abandon other sentient beings, even though the *bodhisattva* is fully enlightened (Buddhahood) and has realized the oneness of all *kāyas*. According to the three-*kāyas* view in the *Geluk Mahāyāna*, buddhas enter the permanent *dharmakāya* as ultimate truth because the continuum of pure radiant awareness never ceases (emptiness of intrinsic existence). Yet, buddhas also never enter final *nirvāṇa* because there are some beings who will never attain enlightenment and buddhas remain to save infinite sentient beings or help to provide more pleasant rebirths. Therefore, buddhas remain in the *rūpakāya* (form-body of *sambhogakaya* and *nirmanakaya* called the Buddha's transformation bodies) exerting their infinite compassionate deeds so long as a single being remains unenlightened (Williams, 2010).

Pelden's (2007) interpretation of the *bodhisattva*'s paradox stressed that buddhas of the past were able to enter *nirvāṇa* although poverty and beggars remained. Still to this day there are many beggars, starving people, homeless, traumatized, or deluded people who suffer one way or another. How is it then possible that past *bodhisattvas* have realized Buddhahood despite being bound by endless compassion to help suffering sentient beings until all of them are liberated? The answer is "that it has been achieved by them" (Pelden, 2007, p. 168). This view elegantly discerns relative reality (compassion for sentient beings) and ultimate reality (Buddhahood) whereby ultimate liberation is unconditional irrespective of beggars or other suffering beings in existence.

The *bodhisattva* paradox also loses potency from the *Madhyamaka* Buddhist perspective. According to Nāgārjuna's *Mādhyamakakārikā*, the root

verses on the *Madhyamaka*, *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra* are identical in the sense that they have the same nature, that is, absence of intrinsic existence which is interpreted as true understanding of emptiness (Williams, 2010). The tetra negation of existence (“is”), nonexistence (“is not”), both existence and nonexistence (“is both”), and neither existence and nonexistence are true (“is neither”) from the *Madhyamaka* view undergirds the empty nature of the *bodhisattva* (Duckworth, 2019b).

In the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* contrasting claims are made, such as “no beings are really saved” (denial of positive consequences of *bodhisattva* actions) and “there is no *nirvāṇa* to attain” (no attainment; Thich Nhat Hanh, 2009). This same paradoxical situation of the *bodhisattva* is expressed in the Diamond *Sūtra* suggesting that the *bodhisattva* has led innumerable beings to *nirvāṇa* and at the same time no beings at all have been led to *nirvāṇa* (Conze, 2001). Williams (2010) pointed out that the *bodhisattva* may manifest Buddha qualities to benefit all beings due to superlative psychic abilities, which are beyond space and time.

Ray (2000) asserted that the idealized vision of the *bodhisattva* in the *Mahāyāna* tradition is of one who postpones one’s own bliss until all beings are saved as an act of compassion. The view that *bodhisattvas* remain in *saṃsāra* for the sake of others because they cannot stand the unbearable sorrow of suffering beings was corroborated by Pelden (2007), but has been debated fiercely among different Buddhist traditions. The notion of the *bodhisattva* appears incoherent and impossible to resolve because of the widely held notion of an infinite number of beings in *Mahāyāna*. Williams (2010) noted that “there is never any mention of

really postponing or turning back from Buddhahood. Otherwise, any *bodhisattva* who did become a Buddha would be presumably either deficient in compassion or have broken one's vow" (p. 59). A somewhat ambiguous position was adopted by Kensur Pema Gyaltzen stating that the notion of postponement to enter *nirvāṇa* should not be taken literally and treated as textual uncertainty because the *bodhisattva* adopts the position of complete renunciation of both—*saṃsāra* and Buddhahood, and thus precisely the *bodhisattva* attains Buddhahood (Williams, 2010).

Makransky (1997) asserted that the *bodhisattva* postponement model of *nirvāṇa* is explained by discerning nonabiding or unrestricted *nirvāṇa* of Buddhahood (Sanskrit, *apraṭiṣṭhita*) in the *Mahāyāna* and the more limited *pratiṣṭhita-nirvāṇa* of an *arhat*. The *apraṭiṣṭhita-nirvāṇa* allows the *bodhisattva* to manifest Buddha qualities of superlative psychic abilities beyond space and time dimensions to benefits all beings without the need to postpone liberation (Williams, 2010). For the *bodhisattva* to avoid becoming stuck as an *arhat* and therefore prevent to attain *apraṭiṣṭhita-nirvāṇa* the divine abiding (Sanskrit, *brahmavihārās*)—compassion, empathetic joy, immeasurable friendliness, and equanimity—are profoundly critical as suggested in the *Aṣṭa Sūtra*. Through the *brahmavihārās* the *bodhisattva* can simultaneously combine meditative awareness of emptiness with awareness of suffering of sentient beings and help them to reduce suffering. Whereas the *śrāvaka* (disciple) in deep meditation becomes inactive and enchanted by falsely believing to have attained liberation, the *bodhisattva* moves beyond the *arhat* and *pratyekabuddha* (lone or private

Buddha) and attains full Buddhahood and liberation in the form of *apraṭiṣṭhita-nirvāṇa*. This view of the *Yogācāra* means that the *bodhisattva* completely renounces *saṃsāra* and moves beyond greed, delusions, and attachment, however, does not abandon sentient beings. In essence, the *bodhisattva* attains wisdom and also preserves compassion (Kawamura, 1981; Williams, 2010).

Bodhisattva Ethics

The ethics and morals undergirding the *bodhisattva* are multiperspectival. The similarities and differences of *bodhisattva*-inspired ethics of Eastern Buddhism (*Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna* Buddhism) and Western non-Buddhist *ones* (naturalized *bodhisattva* and integral *bodhisattva*) will be explored in this last section of Chapter 5. These ethical models undergird what kind of practices and paths a *bodhisattva* chooses, one's social engagement relating to a contemporary world facing social, political, and ecological dilemmas that bring profound suffering of people, and living and embodying *bodhisattva-ness* (i.e., being *bodhisattva*).

The emergence of hybridized Western *bodhisattva* models blends *bodhisattva* assertions and cultural memes—modernist *bodhisattva*, postmodern *bodhisattva*, and metamodern *bodhisattva*. Participatory ethics of the integral *bodhisattva* shares commonalities with the metamodern view. Western-inspired *bodhisattvas* have stressed virtue ethics, deontological ethics, and consequentialist ethics based on egoism and utilitarianism, while traditional Buddhist *bodhisattva* ethics have been multifaceted with normative ethics (i.e., moral discipline), *karmic* consequentialism with compassionate behavior and pro-social

engagement, universalist consequentialist ethics (i.e., available universally to all people Buddhist or non-Buddhist), nonconsequentialist ethics of skillful means rooted in case-by-case moral deliberation, and *bodhisattva*'s individual virtue ethics (i.e., the *bodhisattva* as a compassionate role model).

Buddhist Ethics and the Eastern Bodhisattvas

Buddhist notions of the *bodhisattva*, specifically *Mahāyāna bodhisattvas*, have brought forth community and social transformations, for example, engaged Buddhism, altruistic and compassionate principles in conscious economies, and spiritual-ecological activism (Badiner, 1990; Queen, 2000; Rothberg, 2006). In terms of Buddhist ethics (Pāli, *sīla*; Sanskrit, *śīla*) in *Theravāda* Buddhism, the *bodhisattvas* are expected to avoid the 10 unvirtuous actions based on egocentricity (e.g., killing any sentient being, stealing, sexual conduct, lying, slander, abusive speech, idle chatter and gossip, covetousness, thoughts of wanting to cause harm to others, and wrong view) and adopt the 10 meritorious actions (Pāli, *dasa-kusala-kamma-patha*; Goodman, 2009). These itemized *śīlas* are not behavioral absolutes, but rather intended to guide the *bodhisattva* toward generating virtue and positive *karma* by saving and protecting all beings, who are considered equal in that they all seek happiness (P. Harvey, 2000). Such virtue ethics rooted in internal transformation and the cultivation of virtues (i.e., the *pāramitās*) predominate Buddhist ethics (Vasen, 2018).

Goodman (2017) pointed out that *śīlas* are better translated as “moral discipline,” as they codify models of spectacular altruism to be emulated. In early Buddhism, *śīlas* were considered rules to be obeyed, whereas in the Western

context *śīlas* have been interpreted as moral developmental stages on the *bodhisattva* path. One's intention behind the action, and its wholesome/unwholesome impact, determine whether an action is considered virtuous (Pelden, 2007). In Tibetan Buddhism, *śīlas* are prominently found in the meditation practices of tranquility of mind (Pāli, *samatha*; Sanskrit, *śamatha*) and clear seeing (Pāli, *vipassanā*; Sanskrit, *vipaśhyana*), the latter associated with ethical outcomes (Ray, 2000).

According to Goodman, *Theravāda* ethics adopts a consequentialist foundation for the path of *bodhisattvas*. *Consequentialism* asserts that deviations from otherwise binding moral rules are justified by a compassionately acting person when they would have good consequences (Goodman, 2016b). The discernment of what is considered the most wholesome moral action is tied to the negative (unwholesome), positive (wholesome), and neutral consequences of a decision or action, but not the act/behavior itself (Goodman, 2017). Karma holds accountable *bodhisattvas* and all human beings who are carried into death and rebirth—the cycling from one of the six realms of existence to another that sentient beings undergo in accordance with their *karma*. According to *Mahāyāna* Buddhist beliefs, the human realm is considered particularly fortunate, because it is only in this realm that one can attain awakening, which liberates one from the cycle of suffering (Pelden, 2007; Shāntideva, 2011). The six realms of existence (hell, hungry ghost, animal, human, demi-gods, and god realms) match the physical, mental, and emotional states sentient beings go through in the worldly

life. From a personal *bodhisattva* stance, karmic consequentialism to attain Buddhahood is narrowly focused (Ray, 2000).

The stakes for the *bodhisattva* in the *Mahāyāna* Buddhist tradition are substantially higher: all beings are to be liberated, instead of just the *bodhisattva* oneself. According to Goodman, *Mahāyāna* Buddhist ethics advocates *classical utilitarianism*—a composite of hedonist, universalist, aggregative, and maximizing consequentialism. Consequentialist theories share in common the belief that certain things are objectively and intrinsically good, and therefore they should be promoted (Goodman, 2009). Such a consequentialist view is embraced in *Mahāyāna* Tibetan Buddhism by asserting that Buddha nature is present in *bodhisattvas* and all sentient beings alike (Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, 2013b). Value theories claiming intrinsic values, such as the notion of ultimate truth in Buddhism (Sanskrit, *paramārthasatya*), are the exceptional prerogatives of *bodhisattvas* (Davis, 2013). Among the characteristics of consequentialism is hedonism, which denotes the presence of happiness and the absence of suffering as constituting well-being. A universalist consequentialist view was advocated by the prominent *Mahāyānist* Śāntideva that extended moral concerns to all sentient beings; at the same time, Śāntideva promulgated aggregation, in which the suffering and happiness of all beings form an aggregate whole. Śāntideva also posited the principle of maximization, in which one could sacrifice a small amount of happiness to achieve a larger amount of happiness (Goodman, 2017). The *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, composed by Śāntideva around 700 CE, is a guide to the *bodhisattva's* way of life. Śāntideva declared that “Nirvāṇa is attained by giving

all, Nirvāṇa is the object of my striving; And all must be surrendered in a single instant, Therefore it is best to give it all to others,” making massive demands of the *bodhisattva* to attain liberation (Shāntideva, 2011, p. 48). The moral stakes of the *bodhisattva* to liberate all beings from suffering in order to attain full Buddhahood are high according to the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.

The *Mahāyāna* ethics asserted by Śāntideva is classified by Goodman as consequentialist and normative, in the sense that they assign impartial benevolence to how beings should behave toward one another (Goodman, 2017). This assertion was refuted with the argument that *bodhisattva* ethics are both consequentialist and non-consequentialist, as shown by the diversity of *bodhisattva* vows (Davis, 2013). There are deontological elements in the *bodhisattva* ethics pointing toward a nonconsequentialist perspective, similar to Kant’s ideal of moral deliberation of a *kingdom of ends* (R. Johnson & Cureton, 2018). Immanuel Kant proposed that every person contributes equally to a system that safeguards virtue and happiness, whereby eventually an equal distribution in sustaining the highest good will be achieved (Davis, 2013). Nonconsequentialist refers to the concept of realizing a value by not honoring the idealized consequences (Davis, 2013). For example, the killing of a mass murderer by a *bodhisattva* may still generate positive karma if the action was sincerely altruistic and beneficial to many others who would have suffered severely otherwise (Ray, 2000). The story of Captain Goodheart, who killed Black Spearman in order to protect him from going to the hell realm, protrudes the relative morality weighting negative and positive consequences and what brings the greatest benefit to beings.

The radical notion that even attackers, tormenters, and enemies deserve the *bodhisattva's* compassion is grounded in emptiness recognizing that nobody is an independent agent and beings are inherently empty of real existence (dependent origination). All agents of harm are without autonomy and act due to karma and circumstantial conditions; therefore, they are themselves driven by anger, afflictions, ignorance, selfishness, and delusions (Pelden, 2007).

Another nonconsequentialist example is the practice of skillful means (Sanskrit, *upāya*), which in some instances may mean to act against normative *bodhisattva* guides and standards. In such cases of moral deliberation, it is one's own virtues that matter most, according to traditional virtue ethics (Davis, 2013). This reliance on a *bodhisattva's* individual virtue contrasts with the agent-neutral notion of universalist consequentialism, which asserts that the lives of all sentient beings should go as well as possible (Goodman, 2009). Any moral particularism that can be ascribed to *bodhisattvas* serve as practical moral guide (Davis, 2013). Pelden (2007) stressed that all actions of the *bodhisattva* are expected to directly (through material support or the gifts of dharma) or indirectly (meditation practice and cultivation of the *pāramitās*) are for the sake of others.

The *ownerless suffering argument* seeks to justify the impartial benevolence of the *bodhisattva* by appealing to the notion of non-self that the *bodhisattva* seeks to attain (Goodman, 2016b). If one considers the assumption that there is no personal self (non-self) to be true, what motivates the *bodhisattva* to act compassionately, maximizing the welfare of sentient beings? Although Buddhist traditions share the eliminativist view of the ontological freedom from

self, it is strange that the *bodhisattvas* found within Buddhist scriptures commonly talk as if people and things in the material world are inherently substantial. For example, in the *Sūtra of the Inquiry of Avalokiteśvara on the Seven Qualities*:

The Buddha is approached and asked by the *bodhisattva mahāsattva* Avalokiteśvara about the qualities that should be cultivated by a *bodhisattva* who has just generated the altruistic mind set on attaining awakening. The Buddha briefly expounds seven qualities that should be practiced by such a *bodhisattva*, emphasizing mental purity and cognitive detachment from conceptuality. (Degé Kangyur, 2016, p. 5, s. 1)

Goodman (2016b) noted that fatalistic reductionism rejecting the ultimate existence of an individual's self leads either to an extreme nihilistic view or universal, impartial benevolence. The latter is aligned with intuitionism, asserting that because suffering is a reaction to experience, it is bad and should be avoided, based on previous experience:

Neither that experience, nor the knowing that arises from it, depends in any on that suffering being yours. Through that experience, you know that suffering is bad regardless of who experiences it. Since there is no self—whether or not you realize this—the experience of knowing that suffering is bad could not possibly have depended on there being a self who experiences the suffering. (p. 642)

Some modern Buddhist scholars and spiritual leaders deny a dualistic split between the spiritual path of awakening and social domains and fully embody social engagement (e.g., Thich Nhat Hanh, 1987; The Dalai Lama, 2009; Loy, 2019), while modernists argued that engaged Buddhism must be inextricably bound up in the advance of the modern world and Western ideas. It has been recognized that modern Buddhist encounters in the West require new models for engaged Buddhism rooted in both modern and traditional forms of engaged Buddhism (Gleig, 2019; Temprano, 2013). Depending on whether the *bodhisattva* practice is more solitary oriented and focused on one's own liberation ("private"

bodhisattva) or *sangha* (community) oriented and focused on the liberation of all sentient beings, different forms of engaged Buddhism emerge. Clayton (2018) pointed out that although the pragmatic and material-oriented relief of suffering (e.g., foodbanks, medicine, or shelters) are positive, these forms of social engagement are only palliative. The ultimate goal of the *bodhisattva* is to free other beings from suffering, and thus, liberating beings by helping them to achieve complete awakening (e.g., teach others mindfulness meditation or the dharma) is considered more important than palliative relief from suffering. Importantly, inner motives need to undergird compassionate altruistic actions to help others reap merits instead of mechanical outward compassionate conduct (Pelden, 2007).

Compassion is at the core of relieving suffering from self, others, and the world by evoking compassionate behavior and prosocial engagement (Goleman & Davidson, 2017). While *Theravāda* and early *Mahāyāna* Buddhism (specifically the Ugra) advocate compassion and loving-kindness (Sanskrit, *maitri*) to a degree (Nattier, 2003), these kinds of compassion and loving-kindness are more abstract/mental than embodied. Western psychology recognizes various kinds of empathy (Neff, 2003): *Cognitive empathy* describes how the other person thinks and sympathetically views and understands the other's perspectives, while *emotional empathy* is focused to feel what the other is feeling in one's body, allowing deep relating at a visceral level to the suffering of another person. But *empathic concern* lies at the heart of genuine compassion that evokes behavior to alleviate discomfort or suffering of others (Goleman & Davidson, 2017; Zahn-

Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990). Purely cognitive empathy provides factual understanding but has no sympathetic feelings toward others, while emotional empathy is the capacity to experience affectively the state of others without acting on it. Both rely on each other to support action, but empathic concern is a necessity to bring forth compassion that then evokes prosocial actions (Goleman & Davidson, 2017; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010).

According to Pelden (2007), authentic genuine compassion without self-interest is at the heart of the path of the *bodhisattva*. In the age of decadence, the most important pith instruction for the *bodhisattva* is to avoid dwelling on the defects and faults of others based on the *Bodhicharyāvatāra*. Importantly, it is not enough to feel compassion for other sentient beings, because one must take refuge in the wish that all beings attain Buddhahood—even enemies, liars, and those who harm others—and be determined to act for the sake of sentient beings liberating them from suffering.¹⁸ One is powerless to bring others to freedom as long as one is not free oneself. Prosocial behavior refers to social actions that benefit other people or society as a whole, and more embodied forms of empathy and compassion are more likely to enhance social engagement (Colman, 2015; Dovidio et al., 2012). In the North American context, new relational and interpersonal meditation practice modes (e.g., social meditation practices) have been developed by the Buddhist Geeks community (Gleig, 2019). Such collective practices motivated by the *Mahāyāna bodhisattva* model differ distinctly from traditional Buddhist retreat practice because of their deliberate emphasis of interpersonal relations and embodied social community. According to Nicol

(2015), collective global meditation strives for social and planetary transformation in support of peace and harmony for all of humanity. Such subtle activism combines transpersonal development (e.g., Buddhist meditation practice), collective consciousness, and social engagement to address global economic, political, social, and ecological dilemmas.

Chödrön (2007, 2018), a prominent Western teacher in the Shambhala tradition of Tibetan Buddhism aligned with the *Mahāyāna* view, asserted that contemporary social problems require *bodhisattva* warriors. Such contemporary problems (e.g., racism, social inequality, genderism, ecological crises) require compassionate citizens that are locally and globally oriented to engage for example in food security, global climate change, gender equality, and alleviation of suffering from wars. Loy's (2019) ecodharma combines personal liberation of the *bodhisattva* and socio-ecological engagement in the most embodied way turning the *bodhisattva* vow into an *ecosattva* vow. The *ecosattva's eco-dharma* conveys modern Buddhist perspectives of people and the environment with *bodhicitta* at its heart. The *ecosattva* participates fully in contemporary social and ecological dilemmas to relieve suffering of people (Grunwald, 2021a). The risk of *bodhisattva* traditions that are indifferent to eco-social justice and attached to individual liberation is to create a cosmological dualism, which posits that there is another spiritual world/realm out there that is somehow better or higher and less deserving than the worldly human realm.

Non-Buddhist Ethics and the Western Bodhisattvas

Predominant Western Ethics and the Naturalized Bodhisattva

Ethical paths deeply engrained in Western philosophy and culture entail (a) virtue ethics (“being good”) based on either character or relationships, (b) deontological ethics (“right action”) based on duty and rights, and (c) consequentialism based on egoism and utilitarianism (Traer & Stelmach, 2007). According to (Hursthouse & Pettigrove, 2018) and K. Flanagan and Jupp (2001), virtue ethics has a long history in the West and is a normative ethics emphasizing virtues or moral character. Specifically, eudaimonist virtue ethics stresses the virtue of eudaimonia (happiness, flourishing, or well-being) for humans, animals, and even plants, evoking an expansive worldview of “shared humanity.” Deontological ethics that emphasizes duties and rules are also deeply ingrained in Western culture dating back to Greek philosophy. Consequentialist ethics are more pluralistic than deontological theories. Consequentialist ethics may differ widely and exhibit ambiguities based on what is considered a “good” consequence (e.g., pleasure, happiness, individual satisfaction, welfare of others (Alexander & Moore, 2020). The motivation for moral action according to moral rules, permission, and codes within deontology that are socially constructed are based on the avoidance of social sanctions and penalties. Thus, within the deontological morality framework, an individual has no or lacks internal motivation, unlike Buddhist *bodhisattvas*, to act compassionately, but follows externally imposed rules dutifully to avoid punishment.

The emergence of the *naturalized bodhisattva* upsurging of neurophysicalism has coincided culturally with modernism, which is characterized epistemologically by objectivism, politically and economically by liberal capitalism and competition striving for profit, and an ethics of individualism (Hicks, 2011). Individualism and its social consequences have created a void in ethics. Thus, Western *modernist bodhisattvas* are focused on individual fulfilment rather than compassion directed toward others (Wellmer, 2007).

The *naturalized bodhisattva* has persisted through postmodernism, with the tenets of social subjectivism, social constructivism, deconstruction, relativism, and ethically collective egalitarianism (Hicks, 2011). In postmodernism, truth is acclaimed to be relative and determined by the individual alone with overtones of anarchistic irreverence, amorphous personalized narratives, and cultural metanarratives (Lyotard, 2003). Postmodern thought perceives objectivity as a myth and claims that there is no Truth, which stands in sharp contrast to Buddhist beliefs. According to a radical postmodern view, all interpretations are equally valid. Postmodernity is deeply rooted in collectivism, altruism, and social determinism (Hicks, 2011). Thus, *postmodern bodhisattvas* are moved to equalize all individuals and fight for racial, sex, and gender equality. Despite their social engagement, postmodern *bodhisattvas* may also express a nihilistic shadow side that is focused on deconstruction rather than empathetic care and compassion.

Participatory Ethics and the Integral Bodhisattva

The *integral bodhisattva* is grounded in a participatory knowing that is not limited to the mental representation of a pre-given, independent object (i.e.,

Cartesian dualism). Participatory pluralism is non-perennial and entails a multiplicity of not only spiritual paths (e.g., Christianity, Islam, New Age spirituality, or esoteric *Tantra*), but also spiritual liberations, including Buddhist liberations (Ferrer, 2011). Ferrer (2002) asserted that participatory spiritual events are an enaction dynamically cocreated by the different elements in the event (e.g., opening of the mind, the body, or the heart; the creative force of life or reality) as lived experience. Cabot (2018) discerned various kinds of such lived participatory experiences: Ordinary vital, sensuous, erotic experiences (shamanic ecologies of participation); heart-centered relational experiences (divinatory ecologies of participation and their absolute but ultimately arbitrary performative truth); and contemplative mind-centered experiences (mystic ecologies of participation and their ultimately relative truths). Participatory events can emerge in the locus of an individual, a relationship, or a social collective (Ferrer, 2002). Thus, the participatory framework affirms personal development as well as social engagement. Participatory events bring forth transpersonal experiences and provide multidimensional access to reality that involves the creative power of the mind, body, and heart (Lahood, 2007). Such a participatory knowing of reality is considered multidimensional fusing the somatic, emotional, rational, intellectual, intuitive and other ways of human knowing (Ferrer, 2002, 2017).

According to Ferrer's (2011, 2017) participatory spirituality, there are three dimensions of spiritual cocreation:

1. *Intrapersonal cocreation* consists of the collaborative participation of all human attributes—body, vital energy, heart, mind, and

consciousness—in the enactment of spiritual consciousness; this intrapersonal cocreation affirms the embodied, immanent dimension of the mystery that is the “spirit within” (descendent spiritual path; immanent, embodied spirituality).

2. *Transpersonal cocreation* refers to dynamic interaction between embodied human beings and the mystery in the enactment of spiritual insights, states, practices, and worlds. It affirms the enactive, inquiry-driven participatory spirituality as “spirit beyond,” emphasizing spiritual transcendence directed toward freeing oneself (ascending spiritual path; creative spiritualities beyond ego).
3. *Interpersonal cocreation* emerges from cooperative relationships among human beings through peer-to-peer relationships, the environment, possible subtle energies and entities, or the cosmos emphasizing communion with “spirit in-between” (extending spiritual path; relational spiritualities).

According to Ferrer (2017), if a person is intrapersonally, transpersonally, and interpersonally participating in spiritual co-creation, that person is affecting the world in prosocial ways.

The three spiritual cocreation domains of intrapersonal, transpersonal, and interpersonal cocreation mirror the principles of equiprimacy (i.e., equality of human attributes with no one intrinsically superior or more evolved than another), equiplurality (i.e., the potential of multiple spiritual enactions), and equipotentiality (i.e., human beings in totality cannot be ranked because some

individual expressions may be superior while others may be inferior), respectively (Ferrer, 2017). In totality these principles are pluralistic without bounds to the cocreation of participatory events. This view frees the integral *bodhisattva* to live life to the fullest. To avoid the postmodern madness of too many liberative choices and to assess if one path of spiritual cocreation is better than another, three tests were suggested that evaluate the outcomes of spiritual practice (Ferrer, 2017). Intrapersonal cocreation is assessed by the dissociation test, which discerns between embodied and disembodied spiritualities. In essence, this test assesses how equally each human attribute (e.g., mind, body, instinct) participates in the unfolding of the spiritual life path. Transpersonal cocreation is assessed by the egocentrism test, which assesses the freedom from self-centeredness achieved by each particular enaction. Transpersonal cocreation affirms openness to the subtle dimensions of spirit beyond. Interpersonal cocreation is assessed using the eco-socio-political test to discern between hierarchical (e.g., elitist exclusivism and sectarianism) and relational spiritualities (e.g., deep dialogue and spiritual humility). Interpersonal cocreation may include other human beings or nonhuman intelligences, such as archetypal forces or subtle beings of the unseen world. Cabot (2018) pointed out that the eco-socio-political test aims to assess equalities (e.g., gender, race, class equality), social justice, fundamental human rights, and freedom (e.g., religious or political freedom). Overall, the underlying ethics of these tests is rooted in consequentialism.

According to Ferrer (2002, 2017), participatory theory asserts the creative spiritual unfolding of the individual and the alive cosmos. One major assumption

of participatory theory is that the cosmos is not pregiven but rather participatively and cocreatively brought forth out of a dynamic matrix of spiritual mystery. Thus, it shifts the personal view of an individual from a Cartesian split ego that experiences the sacred as “other” (subject–object) to a whole human being that spontaneously and naturally participates in the deeper dimensions of life. This expansive view from ego-centric, ethno-centric to cosmos-centric dimensions evokes humility and compassion toward a “larger-than-self” dimension. The participatory view honors all truths based on other theories and spiritual traditions, thus overcoming reductionistic tendencies in Western modernity that tend to limit, simplify, or distort the vast and rich possibilities for human spiritual flourishing.

Participatory theory and ethics is rooted in metamodernism (Freinacht, 2017). Metamodernism is a proposed reactive cultural, philosophical, and aesthetic response to postmodernism. The potential of metamodern academic study of religion was explored by Clasquin-Johnson (2017) and Ceriello (2018a). Metamodernism blends aspects of both modernism and postmodernism, with the latter characterized by relativism, nihilism, reconstruction, and the rejection of grand narratives. In contrast, metamodernism is characterized by hope, romanticism, sincerity, affect, and the potential for universal truths and grand narratives (van den Akker & Vermeulen, 2017). Metamodern participatory ethics is closely aligned with relational (care) ethics (Burnor & Raley, 2011; B. Taylor, 2010). Such ethics places care, compassion, and relationality at the center of morality guiding choice about one’s life, communities, humanity, and planet

Earth. A participatory approach engages people in the environment to bridge the separateness between people and nature. From a metamodern perspective, what touches people's hearts intimately and personally rather than rationally evokes ethics of care through deep empathic relations with the environment and sentient beings as an unknowable mystery. What one cares about deeply is valued and preserved in service of many future generations (Grunwald, 2021c).

Conclusions

In conclusion, the *bodhisattva* arcs across major understandings of the mystical with elements stemming from absolutism or spiritual objectivism (e.g., according to *Mahāyāna* the sphere of the *dharma* or ultimate reality, Sanskrit: *dharmadhātu*), idealism (e.g., idealized *bodhisattvas*), metaphysics (e.g., mystical and cosmic *bodhisattvas*), pluralism (e.g., multiple liberation models), constructivism (e.g., constructed illusory self; non-self), naturalism (e.g., personified and naturalized *bodhisattvas*), and metamodernism (e.g., integral *bodhisattvas*). There is not one *bodhisattva*, but many different kinds. Eastern and Western views of the *bodhisattva* differ profoundly, as exemplified by *bodhisattvas* in the *Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna* Buddhist view and non-Buddhist conceptions, such as the integral and naturalized *bodhisattvas*. The contextualization and different interpretations of *bodhisattvas* aiming to symbolize, personify, idealize, mystify, naturalize, and integrate what is “knowable” and part of the spiritual realm testify to a pluralistic frame. The partial knowing within, through, and beyond the *bodhisattva* resembles the immanent, descending, and ascending (transcending) dimensions of spirituality

and ways of knowing. The mystical kernel of the idealized *bodhisattva* in Buddhism is still alive in contemporary forms of the *bodhisattva*. This may be the case because the *bodhisattva*'s creative and paradoxical nature attempts to unify “knowing” and “not knowing.” This chapter touched only briefly on moral and ethical paradoxes of *bodhisattvas*, which deserve to be studied in more depth in future scholarly work. The ethical underpinnings of the Buddhist *bodhisattva* are particularly relevant in contemporary non-Buddhist cultures in which modern, postmodern, and metamodern thoughts predominate.

CHAPTER 6: A PARTICIPATORY VIEW OF FEMINIST SPIRITUALITY: TOWARD A FEMININE-IN-SPIRITUAL DIVERSITY

The focus of feminists on emancipation from social and political restrictions and the strive of feminist spirituality for liberation have been intertwined historically in complex ways. Both feminism and feminist spirituality have endured countless debates and critiques questioning the meaning of the rather ambiguous term *feminine* that has resulted in a pluriverse of divergent femininities. These feminine voices emanate sensibilities, passion, healing, caring, novelty, and much more. A wild amalgam of sexualities, gender, ecologies, societies, spiritual and social identities, beliefs, and perspectives are implicated in the process of spiritual cocreation that undergirds the emergence of novel feminine-spiritual hybrids. The motivations and cocreation of new hybrids that leads to embodied liberation are still poorly understood. Participatory theory provides a platform to approach this inquiry, while critical theory allows this researcher to discuss ontological, phenomenological, and epistemological elements of prominent feminist spiritualities.

The term *feminist* refers alternatively to a political identity often due to sexual, gender, social, or other types of perceived oppression, a movement to achieve social justice for all, or a methodology to investigate people and communities through feminist lenses (Crasnow & Intemann, 2021). Feminist theorists have conceptualized a multitude of different accounts of oppressions, different methods of the causes of oppressions, kinds of politics and practices that might perpetuate oppression and inequalities or might be put to liberatory ends,

and different conceptions of what the ideal society liberated from oppression may look like. Fernandes (2003) proposed *spiritualized feminism* as a practice that is grounded in spiritual understandings to foster nonviolent social transformation and social equality, specifically for oppressed women. Such spiritualized feminism entails multiple emancipatory and liberative societal and spiritual elements.

Feminist epistemologists maintain that gender with other intersecting social categories, such as sexual orientation, race, social status, is one of the axes along which power is distributed in society (Crasnow & Intemann, 2021). Power imbalances translate into various oppressive social structures that also affects spiritual freedoms of people curtailing embodied liberation.

Note that in this chapter I the author takes a fluid pluralistic non-essentialist stance to approach the topic of feminine spiritualities that acknowledges different perspectives. The plurality of femininities suggests that the feminine is understood in many ways. Feminine, as a socially constructed term, is not value-free nor solely owned by women's spirituality, and often has been used in derogatory and devaluing ways. The *feminine* has been variously understood as a powerful invisible force and beacon of love (Emily-Anne, 2015), principle or psychological perspective (Nicholson, 1989), and feminine archetype (Neumann, 2015; Wehr, 1988). In addition, the feminine has been romanticized in literature and poetry (e.g., Smith & Occhi, 2009). Deep care about the feminine was one of the reported motivations behind some feminist activists to deconstruct patriarchy and fight for gender, social, racial, and other equalities (Kinser, 2004;

Mackay, 2015; Purvis, 2004); reconnect with ancient matrifocal and matrilineal cultures (Gimbutas, 1982); reconstruct nonpatriarchal embodied utopias (Bingaman et al., 2002; Markus, 2002); and foster individual transformation and social change (Wilkinson, 1997). In Jungian psychology, the feminine has been understood as the dark unconscious, while the conscious has been equated with the masculine (Neumann, 1994). Such dark feminine (e.g., diabolical snake, Satan, earth, or evil) holds transformative healing power, specifically when balanced with the nurturing and protective indwelling feminine archetypal force (Woodman & Dickson, 1997). The feminine and maternal embodiment as an archaic mother and monstrous womb have been experienced as disruptive in self/other relationships (Torkild et al., 2014).

From a critical theory perspective, Tyson (2015) provided a contemporary account of the feminine addressing questions of identity, oppression, empowerment, quality, virtue (e.g., compassion, love, and fertility), appearance (e.g., feminine body), polarity (feminine-masculine), and derogatory attitudes (e.g., femme fatale). Phallogocentric thinking (i.e., phallus as a symbol of male dominant thinking), androcentric philosophy, and “masculine” religion are deeply rooted in Anglo-European civilizations that have embraced a patriarchal ideology. In past and contemporary patriarchal cultures women have been objectified, commodified, genderized, sexualized, and stereotyped (see Barratt, 2013; J. J. Butler, 1988), which have arguably impelled some feminist scholars to search for more positive images of the feminine such as those of certain goddesses (Bolen, 2014; Rayburn, 2012; Spretnak, 1992) or to articulate a spiritual or mystical *via*

feminine, a path to heal oppression and wounding of the “patriarchal feminine” (Lanzetta, 2005, p. 18).

This multiperspectival, multidimensional understanding of the feminine extends into the psychological, spiritual,¹⁹ and transpersonal realms. A variety of feminine archetypes (e.g., Mother, Crone, and Maiden) have been equated with goddesses (Bolen, 2001; Neumann, 2015) and enshrined as the sacred divine feminine (Christ, 1979; Griffin, 2003). Female deities have been recognized in various religions, among them female *bodhisattvas* in Buddhism (e.g., Green and White Tarā; Leighton, 2012). Ancient goddesses, such as Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, were integral features of Greek classical mythology (E. Hamilton, 2017), while the ancient tradition of shamanism recognizes many feminine spirits, many worlds, and mystical unions with the spirit world (Tedlock, 2005). Extremely diverse mythological metaphors, symbols, images, and signs have been used to express femininities in diverse religions and spiritualities (Kripal, 2014). The feminine has been also personified in the form of witches (e.g., the Wicca movement; Berger & Ezzy, 2009; Griffin, 2003), conceptualized as an immanent spiritual power (Skott-Myhre, 2018), and idealized in the form of feminist superheroines (e.g., Wonder Woman; Robinson, 2004). Subtle energies have been femininized and spiritualized as a primal energy of the universe that manifests in forms of kundalini power (Starr, 2019). These examples of how diversely the feminine is portrayed in the literature could be endlessly multiplied.

Despite the multiplicities of spiritualities and femininities, it is unclear whether spirituality informs the feminine and brings forth social action, whether

the feminine enacts a multiplicity of spiritualities and social transformation, or whether both spirituality and the various forms of the feminine enrich each other and foster social change. In this sense, spiritualities and femininities can be seen as mysteriously interconnected in complex ways. This externalized notion of femininities is countered by phenomenological work that revealed deep subjective inner knowing of the timeless feminine (Fielding & Olkowski, 2017; Fisher, 2000). The multifaceted feminine is intuited subjectively and intersubjectively through a vast array of expressions and practices (e.g., arts, stories, poetry, rituals, contemplation, prayer, meditation, sex, women's circles) and is implicated in personal, transpersonal, and social transformation. The multiperspectival nature of the constructs of "feminine divine," "sacred feminine," or "feminine spirituality" express the blending and blurring of the feminine and spiritual without precisely defining them. Despite extensive discourse related to femininities and feminist spirituality, these concepts have not been explicitly studied through the participatory lens. Participatory theory provides a foundation for the general study of transpersonal and spiritual phenomena (Ferrer, 2002, 2017), and thus this theory is poised to explore feminine spiritual phenomena. Although the alignment between feminist spirituality and participatory theory has been tentatively noted by some authors (e.g., Brooks, 2010; Brooks et al., 2013), the ontological, epistemological, and phenomenological underpinnings of the participatory view applied to feminist spirituality have not been explicitly discussed.

Prominent themes of study in feminist spirituality and theology include the Goddess/goddesses as the sacred feminine divine (Birnbaum, 2005; Christ, 2012;

Christ & Plaskow, 1979; Mihaltses, 2012; Plaskow & Christ, 1989) and feminine archetypes as psychological expressions of the collective unconscious associated with various goddesses (Bolen, 2001; Neumann, 2015). The spiritual path aligned with the Goddess/goddesses is supposedly based on transcendence to connect with the divine, while feminine spiritual immanence is related to archetypes that touch the sacred divine through contact with nature or within the body (Christ, 1997; Komjathy, 2015; Woodman & Dickson, 1997). Weaver (1989), Long (1997), and Griffin (2003) pointed out that a concise definition for the Goddess/goddesses in the field of feminist spirituality has not been found because of the diversity of epistemological and ontological viewpoints. Whether there is one Goddess or multiple goddesses inherently involves differences in philosophical and metaphysical assumptions related to spiritualities. Long (1997) and Skott-Myhre (2018) asserted that the ambiguity of singular and pluralistic expressions of the divine feminine is prevalent in communities of feminist scholars and practitioners worshipping the Goddess/goddesses. This ambiguity of the feminine construct in feminist spirituality calls for more clarity in the scholarly discourse. In counterpoint, however, the potential power of the multiplicity of the feminine will be explored grounded in participatory theory.

The purpose of this chapter is to apply Ferrer's (2017) participatory theory to critically discuss some central ontological, phenomenological, and epistemological elements of prominent feminist spiritualities, specifically the Goddess/goddesses, feminine archetypes, and feminine spiritualities standing in opposition to masculine spiritualities. Feminine and masculine spiritualities may

be also considered to stand on their own as a way to de-center male/masculine experience. This hermeneutic critical analysis also explores whether the plurality of feminist spiritualities (e.g., one Goddess/many goddesses) meets the assumptions of participatory theory. Distinctions between fluidity and hybridity of feminine spiritual constructs are critically discussed, and novel transpersonal constructs that hybridize what I call the “feminine-spiritual” as a participatory event or cosmology are presented.

Participatory Theory and Participatory Spirituality

Participatory theory of human spirituality was articulated by Jorge N. Ferrer’s (2002) *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory* as a response to the perennialism and neo-perennialism that had dominated the field of transpersonal psychology since its inception. The epistemological and ontological foundations of participatory thinking that embrace multiple ways of knowing were provided by Tarnas (2001) and Heron (1996). Heron stressed that the knowledge of the *subjective–objective* is revealed in relation to others:

An epistemology that asserts the participative relation between the knower and the known, and, where the known is also a knower, between knower and knower. Knower and known are not separate in this interactive relation. They also transcend it, the degree of participation being partial and open to change. Participative knowing is bipolar: empathic communion with the inward experience of a being; and enactment of its form of appearing through the imaging and shaping process of perceiving it. (p. 11)

According to Heron (2003), the participatory nature of human knowing is inherently an experience with someone or something, implying that the experience is always shared intersubjectively, that is, it is *participatory*. In a spiritual or religious context, this subjectivity is always contextually engaged

based on the intersubjective culture and beliefs of spiritual schools or traditions (e.g., God or Goddess or the sacred divine), as well as gendered, sexualized, politicized, and flavored through a socially constructed field. Heron emphasized that the spiritual and the subtle as transpersonal experience are also subjective–objective through *knowing by acquaintance*, that is, by personal participation. This participatory view rejects both a purely subjectivist account of transpersonal phenomena (e.g., as human inner experiences) and an objectivist account that considers such phenomena as fully independent from human cognition, as the perennial philosophy posits with the notion of “One all-inclusive Absolute.” The radical shift the participatory approach proposes, in contrast to those of perennialist and Eastern theologies, is that notions of one reality and one transcendent consciousness with the absolute identity of subject and/or object are considered untenable. Instead, the subjective–objective transpersonal experience is considered fluid, meaning that what is subjective in one type of experience may appear objective in another, and vice versa (see Ferrer, 2002; Heron, 2003). This notion implies a plurality of different realms and many ways of being-in-the-world (“Many-in-One”) that Heron (2003) called *diunity* (i.e., not a duality and not a nonduality).

For Heron (2003), human participation with the transpersonal motivates inner transformation, while participation with the phenomenal world of culture and nature evokes social, political, and ecological transformation. Reality is viewed as mixed relative-universal truth consisting of the perspective born of one’s own lived inquiry, which is relative to one’s critical subjectivity even as it is

simultaneously universal in what there is (i.e., Being). People cocreate paths in dynamic relation with a set of choices emerging from their inner spiritual life.

According to Ferrer (2002), the participatory vision turns away from intrasubjective experiences to *participatory events* in the understanding of transpersonal and spiritual phenomena. These events are not confined to individual inner subjective experiences; instead, they can emerge multilocally—in the locus of a relationship (e.g., women’s circle), a collective identity (e.g., women of color), a place (e.g., a sacred mountain), or an individual (e.g., a meditator experiencing subtle energy as empowering). This view frees spiritual participation from the confines of inner subjective space and expands its range to include intersubjective and objective worlds. A nonparticipatory view considers a person “having” a specific experience (e.g., feminine divine) with a specific state of consciousness (e.g., feminine consciousness), which reifies the Cartesian subject–object split and objectifies the experienced phenomena (i.e., makes it something pregiven or fully independent). In contrast, the participatory view asserts ontological (not merely phenomenological) subject–object identification with the participation of the individual’s consciousness in a spiritual event. Budgeon (2003) argued for the body to be conceptualized as an event instead of an object to enact embodied identities from a feminist perspective. This ontology rests on the dynamics of “bodies becoming” through a variety of participation with other bodies, practices, and activities.

Participatory knowing occurs through knowing by presence, identity by the virtue of being, enaction, and transformation of self, social communities, and

the world (Ferrer, 2002). *Enaction* refers to bringing forth or cocreating rather than encountering something pregiven that is ontologically fixed (Varela et al., 2016); therefore, an enactive understanding of the sacred conceives of spiritual phenomena, experiences, and insights as cocreated events. Participatory enaction is epistemologically constructivist and metaphysically realist, which means that the participatory model boldly affirms spiritual realities without naïve essentialisms of dogmatic certainty or reified metaphysics of presence (Ferrer, 2002; Ferrer & Sherman, 2008b). However, participatory enaction contrasts with prominent epistemological and metaphysical philosophies that make explicit truth claims denying the possibility of cocreation (e.g., substance monism).

Participatory theory embraces a critical pluralism to explain the multiverse of spiritualities (Ferrer, 2000, 2009). Participatory pluralism involves celebrating different spiritual views or beliefs while offering grounds for critical discernment and qualitative distinctions among them. Furthermore, participatory ethics is grounded in three criteria (self-centeredness, dissociation, and eco-social-political transformation) to discern consequential value among different spiritual traditions (Ferrer, 2017), which are discussed below.

Multiple ways of knowing are supported in participatory theory through cultivating the *integration* of all human dimensions (body, vital energy, heart, mind, and consciousness) to embody wholeness and fullness of being (e.g., bodyfulness; Ferrer, 2006). Embodiment embraces the equiprimacy principle, which gives equal weight to all human dimensions without allocating supremacy to one or another. A fully embodied spirituality entails transcendent (e.g., cosmic

bodies) as well as immanent spiritual sources (e.g., chakras and subtle energy flow in the body; Ferrer, 2017).

The participatory view of reality embraces the plurality of liberative spiritual paths and goals grounded in subjective–objective participatory events beyond Cartesian duality, which separates object and subject and assumes that a pregiven world exists independently of human cognition. Such a dualistic view became pronounced in modernity (Ferrer, 2002; Heron, 2003), though it is still lived reality for many individuals in contemporary postmodern cultures (e.g., Freinacht, 2017; Leder, 1990). Importantly, participatory theory moves beyond a subject–object fluidity merely based on a phenomenological perspective; instead, it argues for ontological subject–object hybridity. Versions of subtle Cartesianism, in which a subject has experiences of transpersonal objects (e.g., a visualized female deity) or someone (i.e., a “who”) has an experience of something (i.e., a “what”) assume an experiencing subject in relation to objects of experience. This Cartesian account is questioned and problematized by the enactive epistemology embraced by the participatory approach (Ferrer, 2002).

According to Ferrer (2002), participatory theory voices reservations against varieties of perennialism, including basic perennialism (with one path and one ultimate spiritual Truth, e.g., “only Goddess”) and ambiguous “hidden” perennialisms, such as esotericist, structuralist, perspectivist, and typological types. The types of perennialism are (a) *basic perennialism*, which assumes that there is one path and one ultimate spiritual Truth (e.g., Goddess) for all traditions and practices; (b) *esotericist*, which states that there are many different paths, but

only one ultimate Truth (implying that Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sufism, etc. will all culminate in the same spiritual ultimate with different labels); and (c), *structuralist*, which asserts that there are many spiritual paths and goals (surface structures), for example, Christianity → Godhead, Shamanism → Spirit, or *Mahāyāna* Buddhism → Emptiness (Ferrer, 2002). However, underlying these surface structures are deeper universal structures that ultimately constitute one path and one ultimate Truth. Another type is *perspectivist*, which claims that there are many paths and spiritual goals representing different perspectives or manifestations (e.g., many different goddesses) of the same ultimate Truth. The last type, *typological universalism*, refers to the notion of a limited number of paths and spiritual goals with spiritual types that are independent of time, place, culture, and religion.

Feminist Spirituality Viewed Through the Participatory Lens

The multifaceted concept of *feminist spirituality* emerged in the West (United States and Europe) in the early 1970s (Brooks, 2010). Stuckey (2010) provided a comprehensive account of the history of feminist spirituality and Eller (1995) wrote a history of women's spirituality. According to Brooks (2010), feminist spirituality is pluralistic and includes the goddess/es movement, Wicca, paganism, shamanism, women's circles, earth-based spiritual traditions, and other transformative feminist spiritualities. A major goal of feminist spirituality has been to address power imbalances due to privileging of maleness and male experience in religious and spiritual imagery, liturgy, theology, and practice (Pukkila, 1999).

According to Pukkila (1999), feminist spirituality can be sorted into three major approaches: (a) the reformation of present religious and spiritual traditions that are considered oppressive to women's spiritual blooming; (b) the search for historical prepatriarchal practices, cultures, and religions; and (c) the creation of new spiritualities based on personal experience. This chapter discusses mainly feminist spiritualities focused on goddess spirituality, feminine archetypes, and those spiritualities standing in opposition to "masculine" spiritualities.

In her study of gender and Western mysticism, Jantzen (1994) pointed out that women's lived subjective experience, specifically ineffable spiritual experience, has been marginalized through gendered constellations of patriarchal power structures. Similarly, Wright (1995) underlined the claim that women's oppression caused them to spiritually detach at the expense of their connectedness with nature and the earth, empathic permeability of self, generativity, and sensual immanent human bodily experience. This spiritual oppression came in the form of an invidious divine monism—hailed as a sort of male perennial hubris—that emphasized transcendence as a superlative spiritual goal. This hierarchical view elevated enlightenment as it downgraded women's experience of connection and relatedness, with its emphasis on immanent spirituality (Minnich, 1990). Such immanent spirituality is deeply emotional, visceral, and ecstatic (S. Coakley, 1997; Yasuo, 1987). An embodied participatory spirituality that emphasizes the aliveness in subject-object events holds a container for the emancipation of women's oppression (Ferrer, 2017).

Lanzetta (2005) juxtaposed women's oppression in patriarchal cultures and spiritual suppression, which disparage women both socially and spiritually. According to Lanzetta, women's struggle for spiritual equality is rooted in healing the ancient fracture in consciousness that distorts the feminine and entails going beyond apophatic (i.e., knowledge of the divine obtained through negation) and kataphatic (i.e., knowledge of the divine through the naming of its discernable qualities) spiritual pathways. The way of the feminine (*via feminina*) is an alternative path of "un-saying, un-doing, and un-being" that reforms the spiritual journey from a feminist perspective through negation and deconstruction of the patriarchal feminine, while it concomitantly affirms the fullness of being female (p. 21). For Lanzetta, the *via feminina* is based on an embodied immanent spirituality aimed to directly experience a deeper unity—whether of sex, gender, culture, or divinity—to transform the underlying causes of internal suffering, rather than transcending and "othering." Similarly, from a participatory perspective "otherness" is embraced and appreciated in contrast to perennial spiritualities that demotes alternate views (see Fernandez-Borsot, 2017). Hollywood (2002) argued that mystics such as Teresa of Avila and Angela of Foligno have arced the gaps between body and soul, and affect and reason. These accounts of the spiritual path offer new ways to appreciate feminine spiritual experiences.

Feminist spirituality has supported women and feminist scholars in their search for feminine spiritual expressions (e.g., images, symbols, practices, and rituals) as a response to religious, social, gender, and racial oppressions of

women. In the beginning, feminist spiritual voices were antithetical to patriarchal Christian and other religions: among them were Daly's (1968) revolutionary call for a radical transformation of the Christian church to counter women's oppression, Tribble's (1978) reformist voice offering new interpretations of female imagery for God, and Brock's (1988) reinterpretation of Christianity as a nonpatriarchal religion with communities of divine love, intimacy, eroticism, and self-sacrifice. Other feminist spiritualities followed from those seeking dual freedom from spiritual and gender suppression: for example, womanists for Black feminists and feminists of color (Walker, 1983); those arguing for freeing womanists and a restoration of wholeness through reinterpretation of the religious canon (Holiday, 2010); and those advocating for equal rights and spiritual liberation for Hispanic and Latina women (*mujerista theology*; Isasi-Diaz & Tarango, 1992). Additionally this period saw the rise of *Spirita*—a mujerista and womanist spirituality arguing for protest, resistance, and r/evolution that places race and gender at the center of women's lives to bring forth collective healing and global social justice (Comas-Diaz, 2008b); Chicana/Latina feminism drawing on inner spiritual transformation to address outer social inequalities (Saavedra & Pérez, 2017); and a feminist spirituality of American Indian women rooted in creation stories (cosmogony), ritual magic, and Goddess/goddesses (Allen, 1986, 1992).

The Western goddess movement emerged in the 1970s with mainly neopagan but also monotheistic, polytheistic, and pantheistic spiritual beliefs and female deity worship. Christ's (1979) widely acclaimed *Why Women Need the*

Goddess and Rebirth of the Goddess (Christ, 1997), as well as Morton's (1985) search for women's wholeness and the goddess as metaphoric image, exemplify goddess spirituality. This spirituality also appears in other religions, among them Judaism as shown by the reconsiderations of Shekhina (Patai, 1990); Kuan Yin, the Buddhist goddess of compassion (Leighton, 2012); Durgā, the warrior goddess; Kālī, the divine mother of the universe; or Pārvatī, the goddess of fertility, love, and beauty (Kinsley, 1988). In general, the plurality of female deities is consistent with a participatory spiritual approach that fully gives voice to different spiritualities.

Different religious traditions have claimed the objective superiority of their preferred spiritual truths, countering the idea that spiritualities are participatorily cocreated (Ferrer, 2008a). As mentioned, the participatory approach rejects basic, esotericist, structuralist, and perspectivist perennialism as well as typological universalism (Ferrer, 2002). Ferrer (2017) even questioned the *soft perennialism* proposed by S. Taylor (2016), which aims to arc across participatory theory and perennialism through a shift from metaphysics to phenomenology. Soft perennialism rejects spiritual hierarchies, the superiority of spiritual ultimates, and a final spiritual ultimate, while stressing the psychological transformative process. The latter view is prominent among feminists who emphasize the spiritual healing journeys of psychologically wounded women through goddess spirituality rather than laying an ontological claim in regard to spiritual truths (Bouie, 2005; Farella, 2005; Lanzetta, 2008; Plagens, 2009). For example, healing through the Black Madonna may be illuminating for Christian

women of color (Comas-Díaz, 2008a), while Vajrayoginī holds personal healing power for Buddhist women (Simmer-Brown, 2001). Such women-centered spiritualities may also retain a Cartesian duality that marginalizes spiritualities to the subjective and private (Ferrer, 2017). Ferrer's critique suggests that goddess worship following any form of perennialism—or the reduction of spirituality to psychological inner subjective transformation—is not aligned with the participatory view. However, if goddess spirituality enacts healing and wholeness, it aligns with the consequentialist ethics of the participatory view.

Ethical considerations do not limit the richness of participatory spiritual events. Cabot (2018) remarked that participatory spiritual events are exuberantly rich because they entail diverse human capacities, such as sensuous, erotic, heart-centered, and mind-based faculties. In this context, goddesses may represent symbols and metaphors emanating deep spiritual meaning: for example, African cosmological goddesses of creation and abundance; Middle Eastern goddesses of sacred marriage; the Eastern Goddess of gentleness and fierceness; or European goddesses of the mysteries of sexuality, birth, and death (Keller, 2005). Likewise, the personification of the Goddess as priestess empowers women and evokes trust in a divine idealized self (Platner, 2005). According to Christ (1997), the image of the Goddess is transformative because it contrasts the image of God as patriarchal male, which has been consciously and unconsciously internalized in the visual images and language of Western culture. Ferrer (2008a) argued that participatory cocreation overcomes the reductionism of psychological (e.g., goddesses as fabrications of human imagination), cultural-linguistic (e.g., goddesses as cultural

or textual artifacts), and purely naturalistic/biological explanations of spiritual realities (e.g., goddesses as creatrix).

Feminists' lived spirituality is often grounded in knowledge from ancient cultures (such as the pre-Indo-European culture that worshipped the Goddess) gleaned from artifacts that support the beliefs of matriarchal, matrifocal, peaceful, agricultural, and egalitarian social structures (Gimbutas, 1982, 1991). Although Gimbutas was first acclaimed in the feminist spiritual community, her archeological research was later critiqued for its biased interpretations of findings and lack of scholarly precision (Long, 1997). Eller (2001) provided an important feminist critique of the romanticized myth of matriarchal prehistory, which undergirds feminist belief systems. Eller pointed out that the evidence to substantiate matriarchal prehistory is rather weak, often relying on biased interpretation. For example, Sumerian texts dating to 2000 BCE depict Inanna as the goddess of love, describing a cycle from adolescence and womanhood toward a unified whole, and linking godship with the different identities of girl, wife, seeker, decision maker, and ruler with fertile power (Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983).

White feminists looked to woman-centered Indo-European roots—for example, the feminine divine in Greek mythology, paleolithic cultures, and the Goddess as nature (Campbell, 2013). Kerényi (1967) and Carlson (1997) analyzed the ancient Greek mystery cult of Eleusis that flourished for more than 2,000 years. Archetypal images of mother and daughter, based on the story of Demeter and Persephone, were associated with the search for wholeness as part of a feminist spirituality that contrasted a masculine spirituality. Gadon (1989)

provided a historical account of the feminine divine based on archaeological evidence, from the origin of Earth as Mother during the Ice Age to the birth–death cycles of regeneration of the mystery, the patriarchal takeover, the reemergence of the goddess expressed as earth-based spirituality, the Goddess within as a source of women’s empowerment (Mother archetype), and the contemporary, Goddess-inspired Gaia consciousness. Archeological justifications, however, have been fiercely debated due to the speculative methods and symbolic inferences of goddesses and feminist essentialism from dusty and broken figurines (Conkey & Tringham, 1998). In any event, the multiplicity of feminine archetypes personified in goddess forms with specific feminine attributes are consistent with the participatory view, except for any possible claims that elevate one specific goddess (or a primordial archetypal Goddess) as a supraordinate spiritual ultimate (Ferrer, 2017).

A major critique of the Goddess–God dichotomy is the substitution of a masculine supreme creator and source-of-all-being that is immanent and everywhere with a sacred feminine Goddess (Nicholson, 2012; Stuckey, 1998). The feminine-masculine divine duality creates power struggles, risking further oppression of the feminine in androcentric cultures. The participatory view rejects feminine/masculine binaries and any hierarchical ranking in which a polar reality subjugates the other. Participatory theory invites the enaction of multiple spiritualities that emancipate practitioners irrespective of gender and sex (Ferrer, 2017). Spiritual and social goals may cross-fertilize and amplify each other to enact an individual’s wholeness; in fact, the participatory view stresses spiritual-

social *hybridization* and engagement in mutually supportive relationships with others to cocreate novel interpersonal spiritualities. When viewed as a sex or gender polarity, otherness “disconnects”—and thus does not serve women’s struggle for spiritual equality (Lanzetta, 2005). Christ (2012) argued that the Goddess, as a feminine pendant to the masculine God, was born out of the feminist movement in the West to fight for gender and social equality. This argument suggests that spiritual equality (i.e., God for man and Goddess for woman) was equated with social, sexual, and gender equality; such a view reifies the divine feminine on social and political grounds. Multiple authors have critiqued the binary constructions of biological sex (man/woman) and gender (male/female; J. Butler, 1988; Fernandes, 2010; Ferrer, 2017; Tyson, 2015), as well as gender–race (non/women of color; Comas-Diaz, 2008a; Crenshaw, 1991), because these constructs have led to extensive oppression of women and other individuals. Feminist postmodernism, Foucauldian discourse analysis, deconstruction, and critical theory in particular have undermined and arguably overcome the binary categorization of “man–woman” as well as “masculine–feminine” (Frost & Elichao, 2014).

The deconstruction of the God/Goddess binary, however, is more ambiguous. Hauke (1993) asserted that the earlier, woman-centered approach focused on liberating women from sexual and gender inequality brought forth a Goddess feminism aimed at overturning patriarchy (with the most prominent proponent being Mary Daly (1968, 1973, 1979), while later third-wave equality feminism presented the image of God (or Goddess) as an androgynous blend of

masculine and feminine symbols, such as Ardhanārīśwara, a composite form of the Hindu deities Shiva and Pārvatī, the former the supreme God in Hinduism and the latter Goddess of love, fertility, beauty and harmony; or intersex and transgender deities, such as Mawu-Lisa, a celestial creator deity of Dahomean mythology. Similarly, J. P. Bloch (1997) used an empirical analysis to assert that women (even those who do not label themselves as Goddess worshippers) believe that the Goddess is a necessary half of the spiritual whole, one that included non-Goddess images of the divine (e.g., images of the male divine). For others, Goddess spirituality is not only a feminized version of monotheistic transcendentalism (God); it is bound to a unitary, or at least partially, transcendent divine Creatrix immanent within the universe. The Goddess may also be personified as a life-generating energy flowing through and interconnecting all things, or as a symbol of the sacred feminine separate from male forces (Rigby, 2001).

*Thealogy*²⁰ proposes the female divine Goddess in opposition to the male divine God that legitimizes patriarchal male power. This radical departure from the phallogocentric male monotheism prevalent in Western metaphysics opened the door to the vaginal divine, which empowers and legitimizes the feminine (Christ, 1979). Controversial viewpoints related to genderizing and sexualizing the sacred divine as God/Goddess and subsequent attribution of specific characteristics (essentialism) have divided feminists and nonfeminists alike (Hauke, 1993). As a symbol, the Goddess affirms the female body and its cycles, the positive value of the female will, and the mother–daughter bond (Christ, 2012). The aim of

feminizing the divine was to free women's psyches and Western societies' dependence on men as symbolized by a masculine God (Morton, 1989). Participatory theory, for its part, values pluralistic spiritualities in the form of God and Goddess if they enact emancipation from oppressive patriarchal structures (Ferrer, 2002). In this sense, participatory theory adopts consequentialist ethics that conditions spiritualities to desired outcomes, such as emancipation or spiritual liberation, and compassionate enactment. Ardel and Grunwald (2018) emphasized the emancipatory potential of pluralistic liberative, transpersonal, and spiritual models in adult human development resulting from the transformation of self that enacts less self-centeredness and prosocial emotions, such as compassion and loving-kindness.

Christ (1997) presented pluralistic spiritualities characterizing the Goddess/goddesses that are based on various theological conceptions, such as transcendence, immanence, theism, and pantheism. Participatory theory rejects monolithic spiritual conceptions based on the ontological perennialist assertion of a singular spiritual ultimate and (usually) associated Cartesian objectivist assumptions (Ferrer, 2002, 2017). In this regard, Komjathy (2015) posited that theistic conceptions of the sacred, such as God or Goddess, are commonly based on subject–object dichotomies, although the transcendence–immanence spectrum of theological views within religious and spiritual traditions is a broad one. The “most transcendent” endpoint regards the sacred as outside of space and time and completely different from the world, while “immanent” refers to humans as contained in the sacred, and “most immanent” views nature and the world as

sacred rejecting the existence of transcendent dimensions of reality. According to Daly (1973), “God is Be-ing” connotes a transcendent dimension expressed by verbs—”being,” “live,” and “move”—rather than God as “father” and noun (i.e., patriarchal consciousness of God). Schneider (2000) touched on how the transcendent states of “Women’s Be-ing,” “New be-ing,” and ultimately “Metabe-ing” could overcome patriarchy. The strive to overcome patriarchy and achieve equality between men and women dates back to the second feminist wave, exemplified by Daly’s (1968) *The Church and the Second Sex* and Daly’s (1979) *Gyn/Ecology*. The third wave shifted from the fight against patriarchy; instead, it focused on diversification and inclusivity in terms of gender, sexual orientation, race, and class (Kinser, 2004; Purvis, 2004).

Dualistic notions of God and Goddess were adopted by Christ (1997) based on essentialist assumptions, while Rountree (1999) debated essentialist and anti-essentialist notions of goddesses. Christ contrasted qualities attributed to God by patriarchal religions (e.g., Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) with those attributed to Goddess by feminist spirituality. According to Christ (1997), prevalent Western conceptions of God have been both monotheistic and grounded in dualistic and hierarchical thinking with God as the superior spiritual ultimate; they also recommended transcendence of self, body, and mind and accordingly enacted righteous morals and ethics. God has been viewed as an omniscient or omnipotent deity entirely separated from humans, as Lord of nature and the world, and as “Wholly Other,” emphasizing dualistic notions (Otto, 1958). In contrast, the Goddess’s power has been associated with Earth-based spirituality,

immanence, interconnectedness, care, and community. According to Christ (1997), the Goddess is found in nature (immanent view, “Goddess is the female body”) and in the deepest self of people (pantheistic view, “all is God”). Such a view moves beyond the polarities of immanence/transcendence, theism (“God is above or beyond all”), and pantheism. Process theology, developed from Alfred North Whitehead’s process philosophy, holds the notion of panentheism (“all is in God”) embraced in Christ’s (1997) more recent version of feminist spirituality (Epperly, 2011), which views the earth as the body of Goddess and the Goddess as the ground of all being. Process theology views God as both transcendent and immanent because God is “more” than the sum of all discrete beings/things in the universe; God is perceived as a single unified reality pointing to nonduality (Mesle, 1993). Cosmologically, process theology is grounded in the idea of *God as organism*, which unites the body of the world and its enlivening energy (Christ, 1997; Segall, 2013). Process theology and participatory theory share in common the view of multiple spiritualities cocreation and creative transformation (Christ, 1997; Epperly, 2011; Ferrer, 2017).

Are god(s)/goddess(es) transcendent, immanent, or both? Divine(s) may be viewed from monistic (one impersonal reality), monotheistic (one personal God/Goddess), pantheistic (sacred immanent in the world), panentheistic (sacred in and beyond the world), or polytheistic (multiple gods/goddesses) perspectives (Komjathy, 2015). However, the God–Goddess dichotomy is problematic: it perpetuates the dualism of divinity, which mirrors the dualist binaries in gender and sex promoting heteronormativity (Nicholson, 2012; Wilton, 2000), as well as

in monogamy/nonmonogamy (Ferrer, 2018). Overcoming the subject–object split and associated dualisms, participatory theory rejects dualistic notions of divine versus nondivine or God versus Goddess (Ferrer, 2002).

Ferrer's (2017) participatory spirituality emphasized cocreation of novel spiritual understanding, expanded states of freedom, and practices that engage in spiritual inquiry. *Cocreation* implies that individuals cocreate with the undetermined mystery and participate in spiritual knowing, wherein both the mystery and individuals are changed. According to Ferrer, participatory theory asserts three dimensions of spiritual cocreation: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal. *Intrapersonal cocreation* focuses on collaborative participation of multiple human dimensions (i.e., body, heart, mind, vital energy, and consciousness), while *interpersonal cocreation* refers to participatory relationships between individuals (e.g., within ecological, political, and social communities) as well as nonhuman intelligence (e.g., archetypes, natural powers, and subtle entities). *Transpersonal cocreation* describes the participation between individuals and the mystery to enact transpersonal states of being (Ferrer, 2017). Cocreation with the mystery enacts a plurality of novel spiritualities emanating in a diversity of spiritualities—the “spirit-beyond” (enlightenment), “spirit within” (enlivenment), and “spirit in-between” (eco-social-political engagement)—ultimately leading toward religious hybridization (Ferrer, 2017). Participatory spirituality is grounded in an openness to creatively enact novel spiritualities (e.g., God, Goddess, or spirit) in the present moment without predefined, rigid notions.

In a sense, participatory events are plastic and fluid with no firm boundaries or dichotomies.

In summary, feminist spiritualities have been imbued by the quest for spiritual emancipation of women motivated to enact authentic spiritualities other than masculinized spirituality (God), deconstruct the subjugated patriarchal feminine, embrace embodied immanent spiritualities to heal inner wounds, and unify feminine-masculine duality. Such contemporary reframing of traditional spiritualities has entailed the deconstruction and emergence of a plurality of novel feminist spiritualities including monotheistic, polytheistic, monistic, transcendent, pantheistic (immanent), and panentheistic (immanent and transcendent) forms of spiritualities. The participatory frame extols this multiplicity of feminine spiritualities, while offering grounds for constructive criticism of spiritual doctrines and practices somehow leading to self-centeredness, mind/body dissociation, and eco-socio-political injustice (Ferrer, 2017).

Fluidity in Feminist Spirituality

To essentialize or universalize categories such as God/Goddess or masculine/feminine principles or energies amplifies the tension between these stylized concepts instead of transcending or unifying them. From a participatory perspective, the mechanisms to make binaries plastic or fluid (or transcend them) first require their deconstruction or disruption before novel spiritualities and ways of being can emerge. In sexual relationship context, for example, Ferrer (2018) analyzed three relational modes—hybridity, fluidity, and transcendence—that disrupt the Procrustean monogamy/nonmonogamy polarity. Ferrer coined the

term *nougamy*²¹ to convey the conceptual and existential movement beyond the mono/poly binary in relations, which opens a liminal and multivocal dimension. Nougamy can be realized in diverse ways, including the rejection of all relational categories (anticategorical path) through radical relational fluidity and transgression—or through transrational or nondualist modes of being and knowing (transcategorical path). Feminist Goddess spirituality has mainly focused on disruption and deconstruction of binaries such as feminine/masculine, while the participatory-nougamy view adds the elements of knowing and honoring ambiguity, liminality, and embrace of paradox beyond the mono/poly binary to cocreate novel spiritualities.

C. Bloch (2000) found that flow experiences move beyond the fluidity and rigidity of conceptual categories using empirical and phenomenological analyses in which participants reported characteristics of unity/totality, achievement of a goal, and novel spheres of meaning. Phenomenologically, in flow experiences the everyday life fades away from awareness and “inner time” takes over; the person feels completely present in a different sphere of space and time, and in unity with the totality of everything. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1993), flow states are characterized by a one-pointedness of mind in which awareness and actions merge, a sense of transcending ego boundaries, a lack of self-consciousness, an emergent sense of being part of a greater totality, and an autotelic experience. While flow states are temporary, fluidity is more of an oscillation between states, a hallmark not only of sports but also of mystical and spiritual traditions (e.g., Zen or Taoism) when the mind becomes flexible, steps out of the ordinary self, and

creates and re-creates experiences (German, *ist ausser sich*), transcending socially constructed boundaries (Zerubavel, 1991).

Fluidity aims to go beyond fixed boundaries of categories such as gender, sex, race, and spirituality. This notion has been conceptualized with a flexible quality (Saperstein & Penner, 2012) that facilitates multiple identities within an intersectional frame of different marginalized sexual, gender, and racial identities (L. R. Warner & Shields, 2013). In the sexual domain, fluidity has been described as oscillation between binary categories (e.g., male/female; Brubaker, 2016). Fluidity has significantly contributed to the deconstruction of sexual and gender boundaries, as evidenced by the diversity within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+) communities and the questioning of traditional socially constructed categories (e.g., privileged white male; Adam, 2017). Gender fluidity viewed through a feminine lens (Linstead & Brewis, 2004) and masculine lens (Plank, 2019), as well as sexual fluidity among women (L. M. Diamond, 2008) and men (Savin-Williams, 2017), indicate the plurality of sex and gender constructs. In Ferrer's (2018) proposal of nougamy, fluid relationships can take four pathways—human developmental, definitional, interpersonal, and contextual—which can also apply to spiritual identities/matters.

In spiritual fluidity, persons may adopt two or more spiritual communities, traditions, or practices at the same time, contextualizing spiritual beliefs for a day or for a season to their lives (e.g., oscillating between New Age spiritualities, Buddhist-Christians, or Hinjews; Bidwell, 2018). Bidwell (2018) pointed out the ambiguities of spiritually fluid individuals: they may be confused, unable to

commit (e.g., cafeteria spirituality), syncretistic, or deeply passionate seekers longing for spiritual fulfillment and meaning (e.g., Jesus as savior or nondual liberation). Through an analysis of case studies, Bidwell intersected spirituality, gender, and race (e.g., Mexican American woman, East Indian American woman, and a man from Puerto Rico living in the United States) and argued that religious multiplicity in the modern West is a cognitive choice usually made by socially privileged, educated, and usually white people (cf. Yetunde, 2019). The integration of Buddhist mindfulness meditation practices into Western culture attuned to Hindu practices of yoga suggests widespread spiritual fluidity (Bidwell, 2018; Van Gordon et al., 2015). The hybridization of Asian and convert (American) Buddhist traditions and practices, as well as novel hybridized forms of the dharma, have emerged in the United States; many of them are socially engaged and explicitly aim to transgress gender and sexual binaries (e.g., Radical Dharma, Buddhist Geeks, Boundless Way Zen, Pragmatic Dharma, and Buddhist Peace Fellowship; Gleig, 2019). In summary, fluidity enables appropriations and erasures of hybrids, and thus, avoids creating feminist spiritual monoliths. The participatory frame invites co-creative dialogue that fluidly oscillates between feminist spiritualities.

Spiritual fluidity is also found among the increasing number of individuals that claim being spiritual but not religious (Parsons, 2018). For example, Fuller (2001) asserted that these modern spiritual seekers are secular humanists who either deny the supernatural or reject organized religious institutions, while Bartunek (2019) provided numerous reasons that inspire spiritual seekers (e.g.,

search for healing, community, safety, joy, or enlightenment). However, none of these authors explicitly addressed the fluidity of feminist spirituality. A feminist perspective was provided by Skott-Myhre (2018) in *Feminist Spirituality Under Capitalism: Witches, Fairies, and Nomads*, in which she argued for fluidity among immanent feminist spiritualities. Scott-Myhre's vision seeks to revitalize the nonphallogentric apperceptions of the world and valorize women's spirituality as forces against 21st-century capitalism and many-centuries-long women's oppression. Although this vision aims to liberate women from patriarchal oppression it falls into the binary trap of replacing masculine spirituality with feminine spirituality, which is not aligned with the participatory view.

Examples of fluid spiritualities that aim at nondualistic liberations and acknowledge life's suffering in the phenomenal relative world are found in various traditions, including *Advaita Vedanta* and *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna* Buddhism. In Tibetan Buddhist Tantra, male and female practitioners alike cultivate nondual practices such as guru yoga (to visualize oneself as a tantric deity) or the fierce liberating fire of *tummo* that is enhanced in dual practice with a partner aiming at liberation. Despite historical patriarchal distortions (see Gross, 1993) the purpose of sexual yoga in Tantric forms of Buddhism is ideally to empower nonpossessive forms of human relationships through ecstatic arousal, sexual union, and erotic love with the aspiration to attain nondual liberation in *tathāgatagarbha*, the womb of ultimate Buddhahood (Baker, 2019).

Although the ideal tantric Buddhist traditions aim at nongendered and nonsexual blissful total unity in emptiness and wisdom, transgressions in forms of

abusive patriarchal power relationships and sexual abuse have been documented (Gleig, 2019). Androcentric power orientations, patriarchal monasticism, and the legitimization of unconventional or even abusive behavior by some tantric male gurus, compounded by secrecy, have culminated in various moral scandals associated with Tibetan Buddhist lamas and teachers—for example, Ösel Tendzin (Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche’s successor), Sogyal Rinpoche, or Kagyu master Kalu Rinpoche (Gray, 2017). In Tibetan Buddhism, the psychospiritual tensions due to gender, sex, and spiritual striving for liberation are found in exalted images of sexual transcendence juxtaposed with yearnings for the absent mother and nurturing womb (June Campbell, 2002). Devaluation of women and gender discrimination has been persistent in traditional and contemporary Buddhist traditions (e.g., Faure, 2003), despite the claims that the dharma is neither male nor female (Gross, 1993) and idealized father–mother iconography (*yab yum*) pointing to male and female deities in sexual union, representing the indivisibility of the qualities of compassion and wisdom (Buswell & Lopez, 2014).

From a Buddhist ethical perspective, any discrimination against a living being, including women, is considered harmful. According to Collett (2018), gender and sexual discrimination are detrimental to attain liberation because inherently both gender and sex are considered concepts that are empty from a Buddhist perspective (i.e., empty of intrinsic nature pointing to the construction of things; see Duckworth, 2019a, 2019b). However, from a Buddhist doctrinal perspective, women’s equality in the attainment of Buddhahood, the highest level, has been contested (Nattier, 2003). As Schuster (1981) pointed out, in *Mahāyāna*

Buddhist sutras like the *Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra*, the female body must first be transformed into a male body before Buddhahood can be attained, which blatantly devalues women's spiritual status—although in the *jātaka* tales of the Buddha's past life, the Buddha was depicted as a woman (Collett, 2018). A transformation that transgresses socially constructed sexual and gender binaries and reified spiritualities brings forth novel forms of feminist spiritualities.

In summary, fluidity in feminist spirituality softens rigidly held conceptual categories (e.g., sex, gender, relationship, spirituality, and religion) and polarities (e.g., masculine–feminine) through oscillation between momentary states of being. The process of fluidity serves to disrupt and deconstruct firmly held identities and prepares the soil for the construction and emergence of novel forms of the spiritual-feminine. As the next section elaborates, hybridization is the mechanism undergirding such a transformation.

Hybridization of the Spiritual-Feminine as a Participatory Event

Hybridization²² involves the ambiguous mixing of phenomena and processes that are thought to be different, separate, disparate, and unequal into novel forms, which may include religion (P. C. Johnson, 2016; Komjathy, 2015); culture and race (Pieterse, 2015); politics, economy, and social systems (Stockhammer, 2012); language (Sanchez-Stockhammer, 2012); plants and genetics (Rieseberg et al., 2000); transpersonal psychology (Lahood, 2010); and intimate relationships (Ferrer, 2018). Globalization as hybridization differs from both a simple clash of cultures and McDonaldization (Ritzer, 2014) because it mixes subcultures like interconnected and interpenetrated rhizomes that also

create new buds in subterranean plants (Pieterse, 2015). Hybridization is not merely multiculturalism or transculturation; rather, it involves a complex amalgam of social, cultural, political, spiritual, or other phenomena (Hutnyk, 2005).

Hybridization and bricolage emphasize mixing as an analog to “melting pot,” avoiding negative overtones commonly found in anthropological and historical hermeneutics. Said (1993) asserted that contemporary cultural hybridization will give way to tomorrow’s hybridization; the hybrid will be created in a dynamic unfolding of historical, political, and social events, and contingencies. Therefore, according to the hybrid view there is no pure spirituality, pure feminine, or pure Goddess; likewise, there are no separate and universal divinities or identities. In this regard, Lahood (2008) affirmed that all religious and transpersonal formations have always been and will continue to be hybrid constructs. Such *cosmological hybridization* calls for hybrid spiritscapes—“the oceans of many hybrids of hybrids” (p. 180). Further, Lahood asserted that in transpersonal psychology the cosmological hybridization has brought forth both Wilber’s neo-perennialist integral spirituality of one spiritual ultimate (i.e., “the nondual ocean”) and Ferrer’s participatory theory of multiple spiritual ultimates (i.e., “ocean of many shores”). However, Bhabha (1994) argued that all cultural hierarchical claims to the inherent purity and originality of cultures are untenable, refuting any form of perennialism. The assertion that the spiritual ultimate is undetermined suggests that a specific hybrid is not the ultimate goal

(perennialism); instead, the process of hybridization is never-ending, a view that is inherently aligned with participatory spirituality.

The process of hybridization involves both deconstruction and creation at the same time and in the same place, requiring difference as well as sameness to be situated in an apparently impossible simultaneity of an event (Young, 1995). The notion of hybridity, then, involves reconfiguration, potency, and creative spiritual forces that unify. Bidwell (2015) posited that spiritual embodiment as *unity-in-diversity* of the spiritual self resembles a cocreated participatory event, in which the unified-but-distinct spiritual/religious identities (e.g., Buddhist-Christian) are experienced as a whole (i.e., as two natures/essences in one being). The paradoxical and alchemistic unity-in-diversity emerges through cocreative participation, which involves subject–object hybridization, embodiment, suspension of self-centeredness, and enaction of novel spiritualities that go beyond the ordinariness of singular identities (e.g., Buddhist or Christian identity).

Participatory events that enact the *feminine-in-spiritual diversity* bring alive novel spiritualities that emancipate the mysterious, undetermined, and apparently infinite femininities. This spiritual diversity is not concocted of separate and inferior or superior spiritualities. From a participatory perspective, spiritualities are interrelated and express the nature of femininities without reducing them to a single, unique spiritual ultimate. Therefore, the diversity of goddesses or gods, women’s archetypes, and polytheistic notions of Hindu goddesses are not separate entities but interconnected enactions of the feminine-

in-spiritual diversity that are interspiritually hybrid in nature. Such a unity-in-diversity approach is analogous to the metaphor of a forest that is “tree-ness” without reducing the forest to the diverse, separate trees.

Ferrer (2009, 2017) asserted various degrees of spiritual hybridizations, ranging from the conceptual and practical to the visionary. Scenarios of future religions/spiritualities ordered by decreasing levels of monolithic spiritual identities and increasing levels of hybridization are as follows: (a) emergence of a single world religion (monolithic spiritual identity), (b) mutual transformation of religions (multiple religious participation, e.g., as Hindu-Christian), (c) interspiritual wisdom (e.g., transtraditional spirituality or universal mysticism), and (d) spirituality without religion (e.g., participation in secular and nonsecular practices with agnostic attitudes toward dogmatic religion and the ontological status of spiritual realities; Ferrer, 2017). The participatory vision for the future of religion embraces cosmological hybridization with spiritually individuated people in a global spiritual world that recognizes respect and civility as it moves toward an infinite *differentiation-in-communion* of spirit and the cosmos. Importantly, the participatory view embraces any ethically rooted spirituality that rejects oppression (based on gender, race, class or other) and dissociative religious beliefs. This view is aligned with feminist spiritualities’ hybridization of spiritual, social, and individual emancipatory goals and the healing of patriarchal wounds (Anzaldua, 2007; Comas-Diaz, 2008a; Fernandes, 2003).

Furthermore, Ferrer (2009) stressed that spiritual traditions cannot be ranked based on ontological validity or according to their accuracy in representing

an imagined pregiven truth. However, some spiritualities may be considered more adequate than others, which can be assessed by using a participatory consequentialist ethic. This ethic is very broad and requires refinement for the development of a critical theory of participatory feminine spirituality. Inspired by such participatory ethic, to assess the ethical consequences of feminine-spiritual participatory events or cosmologies, I propose the following pillars: (a) inner dimensions, or the psychological pathway to healing from oppression (e.g., authenticity, empowerment, self-care, self-love, self-worth, embodiment, mindfulness, body awareness, and integration/wholeness); (b) relations with others, the world, and spirit (e.g., empathic concern, compassion, altruism, spiritual connection, spiritual well-being, spiritual transformation, and sacredness in life); and (c) applied alive participation (e.g., human rights, spiritual and subtle activism, community events to practice feminine spiritualities, feminist scholarship, creativity, harmony, and peace). According to H.-D. Lee (2005), interreligious dialogue is fostered through a *participatory freedom* that secures individuals' and others' freedom alike, and recognizes participatory parity in a hybridized cultural, political, and social space. Lee pointed out that a unifying interreligious hybrid identity liberates one from the epistemic imprisonment of rigidly held identities (e.g., spiritual, religious, social).

Participatory freedom emancipates individuals to enact novel feminine spiritualities through the hybridization of feminine-spiritual participatory events and cosmologies. Several feminine-spiritual hybrids have emerged in feminist spirituality—though not labeled as such—with hybridization based on

polarizations, commonalities, and holistic synergy. For example, the hybrid Black Madonna is symbolized by black or brown skin color in protest of the “whitening” of the historic Virgin Mary. The Black Virgin Mary mirrors the black skin of women of color, which bears witness to the misogynist Christian spiritual beliefs rooted in the Madonna-Whore complex²³ (Comas-Diaz, 2008a; Rose, 2005). In this case, the repression of women of color was hybridized with ancient feminine qualities attributed to the Virgin Mary, including intuition, healing, and wisdom, to enact a novel feminine spirituality. Another example of hybridization rooted in polarizations of sex (man/woman), gender (male/female), principle or energy (masculine/feminine), or archetype (anima/animus)²⁴ are androgynous *bodhisattva* images that transcend gender (Leighton, 2012), archetypes expressing wholeness through the transcendence of gender (Kaler, 1990), and merging of traditional gender boundaries in Hinduism through new forms of spiritual dance as an expression of nonduality (Shah, 1998). Historically, the half-male and half-female Ardhanārīśwara deity is considered a composite androgynous form of the male Shiva and female Pārvatī Hindu deities. Ardhanārīśwara signifies the inseparability of masculine and feminine principles (Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). Such androgynous composites are found in ancient mythology and also in contemporary forms, for example, androgynous priests or neo-shamans.

According to participatory theory, deconstruction and cocreation are implicated in enacting novel feminine-spiritual hybridizations. Specifically, femininities that have been suppressed, marginalized, or oppressed offer fertile

ground to bring forth novel hybridizations because the underlying motivations to cross beyond (e.g., androcentric structures and devaluation of femininities) provide strong impetuses for emancipation and liberation. Here the reframing of *feminist spirituality* to *feminine spirituality* is proposed to indicate a participatory perspective rather than a feminist perspective to interpret femininities and spiritualities.

Cosmological feminine-spiritual hybridizations are exemplified by the emergence of Wicca neo-pagan spiritual traditions with polytheistic, pantheistic beliefs rooted in varying forms of earth-based feminine spirituality (Warwick, 2014). Hybrid Wicca cosmology emerged from the suppression of witchcraft through medieval inquisitions by the Catholic church and the participatory freedom that allowed the social emancipation of women in liberal cultures. The feminist Wicca movement encourages women to connect to the feminine divine, worship goddess figures, and practice magic in response to patriarchal oppression (Greenwood, 2000).

Other forms of hybridization aim to break down dualities between human/machine, physical/nonphysical, God/man, God/Goddess, male/female, among others. Haraway (1987) proposed *cyborg feminism* in which the cyborg metaphor points to duality. Haraway critiqued notions of feminism, specifically identity politics, and suggested working across boundaries toward a hybridized posthuman beyond feminism, gender, and politics. Cyborg feminism has certainly contributed to Gen X Buddhist communities in the United States that have hybridized gender, sex, and racial equality, collective orientation (humanity,

globalization), social meditation practices, social activism (intersectionality and feminism), political orientation (e.g., radical dharma), and traditional Buddhist meditation practices. Such Gen Xers have embraced the dharma and meditation practices from American Boomer-generation Buddhists, who went to the East, trained in various Asian Buddhist traditions, and then returned to the United States. Buddhist Boomers tend to hold liberal and psychotherapeutic orientations with a focus on individual meditation practice (retreats), while Gen X Buddhists have hybridized traditional Buddhist elements and Western culture (Gleig, 2019). Hybridizations involving religious cross-pollination to overcome polarities have been common (e.g., Jewish and Buddhist practitioners hybridized to “Ju-bu”; P. C. Johnson, 2016); similarly, there has been a hybridizing of spiritualities within a single tradition (e.g., patriarchal *Theravāda* Buddhism and feminine magical, supernatural practices hybridized into Thai Buddhism; Kitiarsa, 2005).

The participatory hybridized cosmology of ecofeminism combines spirituality, politics, and ecology; it asserts that the ways in which patriarchy treats both women and nature are interrelated. Spiritual ecofeminists have argued that women mirror Gaia, the womb of the Earth, and both flourish with love and care to become whole (Warren, 1997). Earth-based feminist spiritualities have hybridized with social transformative movements within religious settings as exemplified by the WomanChurch feminine spirituality (Halligan, 1990) or Earth goddess Gaia inspired sociopolitical movements to fight climate change (MacGregor, 2014; Starr, 2019). Black ecofeminist activism hybridized womanist, ecological, and artistic expressions to foster harmony with the feminine

Earth (L. Craig, 2014). Integrative feminine spiritualities that draw on multiple human, social, and subtle dimensions are also powerful examples of novel spiritualities. For example, Sointu and Woodhead (2008) presented a spirituality that holistically integrates body, mind, selfhood, and spirit to enact a novel feminine-spiritual hybrid inviting women to move away from selflessness and caring to expressive selfhood.

Cabot (2018) asserted that participatory knowing encapsulates the possibility that multiple and seemingly contradictory outcomes can be held simultaneously. However, participatory knowing and hybridization bears risk, because the processes sometimes involve strange mixtures, breaking down or dissolving boundaries and identities while touching on unfamiliar kaleidoscopic and liminal spaces (Lahood, 2008). Assimilatory hybridity may turn into subsumption and suppression of one of the participating elements, which may lead to destabilization of the participatory feminine spirituality. Although hybridization is a self-regulating process—a hybrid spirituality may not survive for long—while other hybrids have been enacted for thousands of years; the ancient goddesses Inanna, Anu, and Nanna live on. The simplicity of mysterious femininities is inherently found in the “oceans of many hybrids of hybrids” (Lahood, 2008, p. 161).

Conclusions

Participatory theory provides a helpful epistemological and ontological framework for situating diverse feminist spiritualities. The participatory nature of human knowing is by acquaintance and involves multilocal participatory events

and cosmologies. Two major tenets of participatory theory are as follows: (a) knowing occurs by presence and enaction rather than through an encounter with something pregiven and ontologically fixed, and (b) participatory knowing is cocreative and transformative. Among prominent Goddess/goddesses and feminine archetypes, not all spiritualities met the assumptions of participatory theory based on ontological grounds; from an ontological participatory perspective, perennialist feminine spirituality in all of its various forms is rejected. From an epistemological participatory perspective, however, all practices of feminist spiritualities need to be honored (e.g., healing journeys of women) as long as they do not cause psychological, relational, social, or ecological harm as proposed by the participatory feminine-spiritual ethical pillars. Viewed as participatory events, spiritual phenomena (e.g., feminine deities, goddesses, or archetypes) are neither subjective nor objective, but subjective—objective—an understanding that cuts through different Cartesian debates regarding the ontological status of such phenomena as either fully independent from human cognition (naïve objectivism) or mere subjective human projections (naïve subjectivism). Bordo (1987) had cautioned in regard to the Cartesian masculinization of thought that dismissed the feminine as subjective and sense oriented.

To reframe spiritual feminists' experiences as feminine-spiritual participatory events that recognize the plurality of subject—object hybridizations speaks to the lived embodied spirituality of the feminine and a cocreative participation with anything spiritual. Participatory cosmologies allow comparison

of the individual, social, spiritual, and other forms of hybridizations of ancient and contemporary feminist spiritualities. Intentional future feminine-spiritual hybridizations that unify femininities, spiritual, and social dimensions, while honoring diversity, hold the potential to reduce adversities perpetuating the oppression of women and femininities (e.g., Lanzetta, 2005). Reframing of feminist narratives from spiritual and social identities (othering) and opposition (feminine vs. masculine) into a participatory frame offers the possibility of emancipating femininities through wholeness, embodiment, and integration of human and subtle/spiritual dimensions. The application of participatory feminine spirituality in worldly matters—such as scholarship, politics, ecology, social dilemmas—inherently bears profound transformative potential. Participatory freedom irrespective of gender, sex, race, social or educational status that is anchored in feminine-spiritual parity, rather than polarity or opposition, embraces metamodern sensibilities stressing affect, sincerity, nurture, and care and also grand narratives of how to live life to the fullest. Participatory theory embraces unity-in-diversity, which transferred into a feminist spiritual frame as feminine-in-spiritual diversity—arguably revealing a more holistic/complete account of the mysterious, undetermined femininities.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

In summary, Chapter 4: Embodied Liberation in Participatory Theory and *Vajrayāna* Buddhism explored body constructs along the descending, ascending, and extending body-soteriological pathways (BoSoP). This analysis laid the foundation to identify their potential for transbody and transpersonal transformation.

Embodied Liberation

Embodiment is critically important to foster transbody and transpersonal transformation in both *Vajrayāna* and participatory spirituality. According to participatory theory embodied spiritualities enact enlivenment and intrapersonal cocreation of the mystery, specifically in cultures like North America where the body has become disenfranchised and commodified. The thesis statement of this dissertation that disembodiment limits the emergence of constructive, novel subject–object hybridizations as participatory events or participatory cosmologies can be confirmed based on the hermeneutic analysis presented in Chapter 4. The more disembodied the greater the barriers to intrapersonal cocreation of participatory spiritualities. Disembodiment enacts lopsided personal development (e.g., dissociation), spiritual bypassing, aggrandized forms of spiritualities, and ego-centric spiritualities that manifest in form of oppressive spiritualities. In Chapter 4, neuroscience and psychology research was presented that undergirds the close association between mind and body along the three BoSoP pathways.

Reflection 1: Embodied Liberation and Leap Into Metamodernism

Interestingly, both participatory theory and *Vajrayāna* Buddhism stress the significance of embodiment, in form of embodied co-created spirituality and embodied mind–body practices and the tri-bodies, respectively. Mind–body practices have become increasingly popular in Western psychotherapy and integrative medicine (Walach et al., 2012). According to Wang et al. (2019), mind–body use has increased significantly between 2002 and 2017 from 5.8% to 14.5%, respectively, in the United States due to the popularity of practices such as yoga, breath meditation, qigong or tai chi that were moved from Asia to Western nations (p. 755). The reasons participants ($N = 116,404$) noted for using mind–body practices included that they were viewed as beneficial to supporting health, consider the whole person, and are natural (i.e., involved no medications or psychopharmacology). Participants showed less interest in the ontological and spiritual assumptions undergirding the mind–body practices and instead were most interested in their individual well-being and health. Participatory spirituality as a theory is preoccupied with ontological assertions, such as subject–object hybridization, pluralistic spiritualities, and spiritual assumptions. Although participatory theory is aligned with metamodern cultural ideals and whole person spirituality it has emphasized theory and scholarship rather than the development of participatory mind–body practices to deliberately enact transpersonal and transbody states.

In the United States, *Vajrayāna* has contributed to the popularity of mind–body practices, though *Vajrayāna* Buddhist communities are still relatively small

and usually cluster around specific teachers (gurus). For example, prominent *Vajrayāna* teachers in the United States and other Western nations include Reginald (“Reggie”) A. Ray, who teaches somatic meditation (Dharma Ocean); Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche (Shambhala International); Lama Tsultrim Allione (Tārā Mandala); Daniel P. Brown (who synthesized Western clinical psychology and Eastern traditions, e.g., *Mahamudra*); Lama Sonam Tsering Rinpoche and Lama Sechen Yeché Wangmo (*Vajrayāna* Foundation, Nyingma Tibetan Buddhism); and Pema Khandro (Ngakpa International, Nyingma Tibetan Buddhism). Several of these Western Buddhist *sanghas* have faced scandals (due to sexual, financial, emotional, and/or power abuse) demonstrating lack in ethical behavior (Bell, 2002; Gleig, 2019; Nash, 2014). These abuses point to incongruences between the Buddhist philosophy, intra- and interpersonal development (teacher/guru and students), community/sangha (hierarchical social/organizational structure), ethics, and behavior.

The traditional patriarchal structure in Indo-Tibetan *Vajrayāna*—with the guru on the top and disciples following the guru— has been transplanted into Western *sanghas*, which has created tensions, misunderstandings, oppression, and clashing of cultural and social values and spiritual/religious assertions. The patriarchal-autocratic-hierarchical leadership style in *Vajrayāna sanghas* uses rituals, guru aggrandizement, forced silence for meditation practice, restricted communication with the guru/senior teachers, and limited participatory engagement of *sangha* members and *tantrikas* (*Vajrayāna* practitioners) in regard to community matters. Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse (2016) described the

dichotomy between traditional Indo-Tibetan *Vajrayāna* Buddhist lineages embedded within patriarchal-hierarchical cultures, and Western *Vajrayāna* communities situated in Western societies that are more diverse, egalitarian, individualistic, and liberal. The masculine guru power structure appears more aligned with conservative social views focused on duty to the leader, traditional family and community values, and patriarchal morals. The traditional Indo-Tibetan guru model contrasts metamodern cultural ideals—for example, compassionate feeling tones, social equality, and parity.

Women in general have been suppressed in patriarchal *Vajrayāna* communities despite gender neutral Buddhist doctrinal claims and female enlightened Tibetan role models, such as Machig Labdrön and Yeshe Tsogyal (E. Coakley, 2012). Western feminists have critiqued Buddhist institutions for being nonegalitarian and sexist, despite Buddhist doctrines' promotion of gender equity (Gross, 1993). Gender inequality limits embodied spiritualities due to genderizing bodies and its preferences for hierarchical spiritualities and spiritual polarizations; for example, those between the often male guru/teacher and spiritual seeker, spiritual oppressor and oppressed person, spiritual inflation/pride and spiritual humiliation. Genderism in the *Vajrayāna* stands in opposition to the ideals of metamodern culture, and it limits the full embodiment of its liberative path.

Reflection 2: McMindfulness Foreboding the Fate of *Vajrayāna*'s Mind–Body Concepts and Practices

Shonin et al. (2014) cautioned about the misapplication of Buddhist practices and enlightenment models in Western settings due to misconstrued

understanding of the Buddhist view (e.g., emptiness, non-self) and lack of integration of ethics. To decontextualize the mind–body practices of *Vajrayāna* Buddhism from Buddhist ethics inherently bears risks in jeopardizing all three participatory principles—equiprimacy, equipotentiality, and equiplurality. McRae (2018) pointed to the psychology of moral judgement and perception in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist ethics that undergird practices and beliefs (e.g., *tri-kāya* view or emptiness) in the four boundless qualities (Sanskrit, *brahmavihārās*)—loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. *Vajrayāna* Buddhist mind–body practices, such as transpersonal and transbody-oriented somatic meditation and prostration practice, may lead to a cognitive-somatic chasm if practiced in a decontextualized non-Buddhist context, specifically without moral context. These mind–body practices may degrade to rote mechanics of endless repetition if decontextualized from spiritual inquiry and ethics that bring forth deeper insights and wisdom.

In the first wave of Buddhism arriving in North America, *Theravāda* Buddhist philosophy, including *vinaya* ethics and meditation practices rooted in the *Pāli* Canon, dominated. The technique of meditation, without Buddhist view and ethics, stimulated the development of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and evidence-based mindfulness research in the West (Baer, 2015). In the second wave, *Mahāyāna* Buddhist philosophy, some of the Buddhist ethics associated with the *bodhisattva* ideal as well as compassion and loving-kindness meditation were integrated into Western psychology and therapy (Gilbert, 2010; Shonin et al., 2015). The *Mahāyāna* has inspired the mindfulness-compassion

movement in North America. *Vajrayāna* Buddhism and its mind–body practices are poised to contribute to the third wave of Buddhism to increase body awareness, bodyfulness, whole person transpersonal psychology, and embodiment in North America and elsewhere in the West. Whether this third wave can break out of the sectarian, cultish realm, and male guru eccentricities remains unclear.

Batchelor (2012, 2015) argued for secularizing Buddhism, instead of reforming or modifying traditional Buddhist schools and practices to make them more compatible with contemporary Western culture. This Buddhism 2.0 denotes a pragmatic approach that goes beyond the belief-based metaphysics of classical Indo-Tibetan soteriology (Buddhism 1.0). However, Batchelor neglected to fully address how a secular Buddhism 2.0 would fair in contemporary Western cultures. The culture in the United States is deeply fragmented politically between right-wing conservative and left-wing liberal parties (Mooney, 2012), and spiritually/religiously the divide between intransigent, pluralistic, and relativistic spiritualities is palpable (Geoffroy, 2004). Over the past decades, socially the divide between wealthy and poor, people in power and the disempowered, as well as socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and gender privilege and disparities have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Gauthier et al., 2020). A far-right hate- and anger-based culture has formed in the homeland of the United States through radicalization and disinformation weaponized by protagonists and propaganda machinery in the misconstrued name of freedom (Miller-Idriss, 2020). Such hate-based culture breeds fear in society and is antithetical to metamodern and *bodhisattva* ideals, and the cultivation of the *pāramitās*. The amplification of

emotional spaces has been conjoined by progressive secularization of society. The secularization of Buddhism in the West and reduction of mindfulness meditation and other Buddhist mind–body practices to techniques stripped off the ethical, philosophical, and metaphysical richness of Buddhism has been extensively critiqued (Samuel, 2015; Sharf, 2015; Shonin et al., 2014).

Purser and Loy (2013) and Purser (2019) argued that secularized mindfulness has been decontextualized from its Buddhist roots and ethics. The commodified forms of Buddhist mindfulness, “mindfulness light,” was denoted as McM mindfulness. Cho (2017) and Cozort and Shields (2018) pointed to the importance of Buddhist ethics due to its moral guidance for lay people, monastics, and all human beings alike in how to engage in the world and relieve suffering. Purser (2019) asserted that secularized mindfulness serves Western neoliberal corporate industry as an expedient tool for assuaging stress and improving productivity and profit without providing meditators spiritual insight and wisdom about its roots. In Purser’s view, the tragedy is that Buddhist liberation was reframed in the McM mindfulness movement to arrest its practitioners, quieting their “busy and stressed” minds and internalizing a submissive position in regard to modern society with social, political, economic, and other dilemmas, limiting deeper spiritual inquiry and interpersonal spiritual cocreation.

In contrast, Bhikkhu Anālayo (2020b) argued that McM mindfulness is a myth because MBSR offers a resource for spiritual activism to face global climate change and other social dilemmas. Secular mindfulness is not a tool that teaches subservience to the neoliberal capitalist system, but grounds practitioners within

contextual ecosystems. Repetti (2016) defended Western secular mindfulness on the ground that its purpose is not to change and help engage in the world to address social dilemmas. The latter has been refuted by subtle activism (Nicol, 2015), engaged spirituality (Sheridan, 2014; Stanczak, 2006), spiritually advanced social change (Coder et al., 2014), and sacred activism (A. Harvey, 2009). Activists within these approaches draw from spiritual worldviews and mind–body practices to sustain both themselves and their work, foster embodiment, and an inner core of being, such as a spiritual (connected) self (Deikman, 2000) or spiritual identity (Poll & Smith, 2003). 2019) metamodern Nordic Ideology also suggested that inner transformation through mind–body practices inform outer social and political engagement and view.

Walsh (2016) echoed concerns that Buddhist mindfulness has been commodified into McMindfulness self-help techniques that should be replaced by critical, socially aware, and participatory forms of mindfulness. Privatized mind-numbing religion/spirituality turns away from collective social perils. The trends in Western societies of spiritualizing religions as “spiritual but not religious” (Parsons, 2018) and personalizing religions to fit a secular social world (Moore, 2014) undergird the commodification and decontextualization of spiritualities and religions (Carrette & King, 2005).

Similarly, disconnecting yogic and Buddhist practices by appealing to a broad, and sometimes ambiguous, sense of spirituality bears risks of misappropriations (Gold, 2011). Gold’s (2011) critical analysis of the American appropriation of Asian meditative traditions casts light on the sinister outcomes of

half-understood appropriations. Antony's (2018) findings from a discourse analysis concluded that yoga in the West has been detached from its religious origins allowing rearticulation as a (a) means to achieve physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing; (b) flexible experience amenable to other beliefs; and (c) elite and exotic commodity embedded within overlapping consumerist structures of capitalism and spiritual renewal. In some cases, rearticulation eliminated religion entirely, instead coalescing yogic meditation around undeniably worldly material outcomes.

Reflection 3: The McDonaldization of the Body as Peril to Embodied

Liberation

In analogy of the McDonaldization of mindfulness, the decontextualization of mind–body practices from its *Vajrayāna* Buddhist origin are at risk of McDonaldization of the body. A secular version of the *Vajrayāna* would mean to practice meditative and body-practices separate from its Indo-Tibetan view (e.g., tri-*kāya* view, emptiness of self and phenomena, and liberation as spiritual ultimate). The appropriation of the *Vajrayāna* toward sole secular motivations and goals (e.g., bodily health, wellbeing, body beauty to enhance self-perceptions) runs counter to genuine embodiment of nondual conceptions of the body as—*rūpakāya* (form body) and *dharmakāya* (inconceivable body). The misappropriation of *Vajrayāna*'s path as—becoming body, being body—that leaps into embodied liberation sharply contrast the McDonaldization of the body as an individual health object. McBody, similar to McMindfulness, faces the brute

force of objectification and clinging to the body in America and the West in general, which are antithetical to the *Vajrayāna* view.

According to Ritzer (2014) four factors undergird McDonaldization: (a) efficiency, which is geared toward the minimization of time for accomplishing a task or goal; (b) calculability, viewing quantity as quality; (c) predictability, meaning that all clients as consumers can predict the same exact service and the same product every time they interact with the McDonaldized organization; and (d) control of people in the McDonaldized organization, who become replaced by nonhuman technologies. The application of these four factors to *Vajrayāna* Buddhism means efficient meditation and liberation on fast-track, emphasis of the body as object or product rather than a lived visceral somatic experiencing vessel with subtle energies and bodies, mass production of promised enlightenment, and control of mind–body practitioners being treated as factotums rather than suffering human beings longing for liberation. Such a dehumanized and desacralized path counters *Vajrayāna* Buddhist assertions of embodied liberation and embodied participatory spirituality. The digitalization trends in all areas of life—from health care, education, communication, and office workplaces—that aim to control the processes and the products in a globalized capitalist whole are expected to amplify McDonaldization in multiple spheres (Ritzer, 2018). The perils of McDonaldizing the body as understood in the *Vajrayāna* and participatory spirituality are pervasive, specifically in the United States.

From the participatory perspective focused on embodied, relational, and creative spiritualities and intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal

cocreation of spiritualities the de-McDonalidization of spirituality and the body is an imperative. Spiritual materialism in any form runs counter to the lived experience of subject–object hybridization of spiritual participatory events. From a participatory cosmological viewpoint, the creation of compassionate social organizations and systems that support the full participation of mind, body, heart, and subtle energies of spiritual practitioners underpin the importance to turn away from oppressive systems and McDonaldized organizations to emancipate mind, body, and heart. Participatory enaction within compassionate, caring, and nurturing environments support the transpersonal and transbody exploration of the mystery.

The de-McDonaldization of the body in *Vajrayāna* Buddhism entails the valorization of people's body on the path to embodied liberation rather than guru-mind control and control of *sanghas*. Miller (2014) stressed the importance of emancipation from mind control and ritual, emotional, and sexual bodily abuse in cults or esoteric sects. Outer control in Western *Vajrayāna sanghas* often mirrors the inner-directed control, indoctrination through nonhuman parts, and emotional arrest of mind–body practitioners. Progressive voices in American Buddhist communities have called for more inclusivity and diversity in communities (Yang, 2017), deliberate social meditation practices and development of new community structures, for example Buddhist Geeks (Gleig, 2019), and radical forms of dharma focused on fierce compassion (A. K. Williams et al., 2016). These voices are not prevalently expressed in Western *Vajrayāna* communities yet that hold on to rituals and hierarchical structures. It remains unclear whether

these *Vajrayāna sanghas* will transform or hybridize the doctrinal views and mind–body practices with postmodern and metamodern sensibilities. Importantly, the pluralistic views of postmodern and metamodern thinking would require the *Vajrayāna* to embrace both—religious/spiritual pluralism (Banchoff, 2008) and social/cultural pluralism (Hicks, 2011)—acknowledging a diversity of spiritual ultimates and social/cultural values and organizational structures. These are contentious ideas that certainly challenge the very core beliefs of *Vajrayāna* Buddhism—specific assertions of true reality (spiritual ultimate) and the guru model.

According to Kühle and Hoverd (2018), religious/spiritual pluralism and cultural pluralism are debatable postmodern concepts. The embrace of pluralism in *Vajrayāna* is a delicate matter because of its rigid truth claims and social structure. Traditionally, in a given *Vajrayāna* lineage/tradition there is one accepted spiritual ultimate and view (“the spiritual truth”), the *sanghas* are hierarchically organized with enlightened individuals at the top, and the path to liberation is pre-defined with specific stages of attainment (*bhūmis*). One exception, are the *siddhas* (perfected ones) in India and Tibet who were practitioners (men and women) of the unconventional tradition of the highest *tantras* (Ray, 2000). *Siddhas* practiced in secrecy on their own after, sometimes few encounter(s) with a guru roaming and practicing in the forest and cremation grounds. Contemporary *Vajrayāna siddhas* may also be living at the periphery of American society in radical renunciation and deep meditation, specifically those *Vajrayāna* practitioners that were traumatized in sanghas, though not much is

known. *Vajrayāna* Buddhist Modernism expresses itself through commodification in form of expensive retreats, widespread and readily accessible sacred *Vajrayāna* teachings blasted via the Internet, social media, video recordings, and books, as well as oversized mandalas, designer meditation shawls, and cushions for comfort. Contemporary Western *Vajrayāna* Buddhism is an amalgam of tantric eccentricities and superlative forms of emptiness and *rig pa*.

Pedersen and Wright (2018) discerned *deflationist plurality* and *inflationist plurality* based on differences in notions whether or not the truth is considered a substantive property. Inflationists endorse this idea, while deflationists reject it. A property is substantive just in case there is more to its nature than what is given in the concept of the property. Inflationists concur that there is precisely one such property for the truth (e.g., Buddha nature), but may have different views about the appearance, coherence, correspondence, identity, or other of the truth (e.g., how Spirit or emptiness appears to people). Based on my own personal experience, spiritual pluralism that is privatized in form of the *siddha* model with decentralized mind–body practitioners may take a very different form, as evidenced by those *Vajrayāna* communities that imploded due to scandals. Tweed (1999) remarked about the American “Accidental Buddhist” who practices Buddhist meditation but does not affiliate with any Buddhist tradition or community. This trend points to the fluidity of contemporary American Buddhism that is undergoing cultural and social hybridization. In analogy, a contemporary “accidental” mind–body practitioner could practice transpersonal (e.g., embodied mindfulness meditation) and explore transbody

states of consciousness (e.g., emptiness and *dharmakāya*) without holding a *Vajrayāna* Buddhist identity and connection to the historical dimensions of *Vajrayāna*.

Reflection 4: Participatory Freedom and Embodied Liberation

Participatory spiritual freedom at the individual level implies a pluralistic view of spiritual ultimates and enaction of cocreative spiritualities, while *social emancipation* rests on the democratization of social organizational structures that honors subjective individual experiences and at the same time serves the greater whole of society. The *liberation of the body* rests on the body's freedom from social, political, and spiritual oppressions, and judgement implying that some bodies are behold as more valuable, healthy, or desirable than others. An *embodied participatory spirituality* situated in emancipated social systems/communities with liberated physical, subtle energetic, and metaphysical bodies inherently offer the broadest freedom spectrum. To limit hybridization constraints spiritual and social engagement, the cocreation of novel spiritualities, social democratization, and body emancipation; and vice versa, the relaxation of spiritual, social, bodily, and other identities unleashes participatory freedom.

In conclusion, embodied participatory spirituality rather than mind–body views and practices of the *Vajrayāna* offers the greatest freedom of choices to respond to contemporary individual and collective disembodiment, social, ecological, and political dilemmas of our time. The spiritually and socially intransigent *Vajrayāna* subdues participatory freedom of individuals and communities due to reified spiritual/religious positions, social hierarchies, and

antihybridization tendencies to preserve the dharmic doctrinal view. The appropriation of spirituality/religion has been justified on grounds of publicizing the private preserves parochial groups or religions élites (York, 2001); for example, secret teachings of Tibetan *Vajrayāna* yoga of lamas and tulkus (Baker, 2019). Until the *Vajrayāna* gurus, teachers, and communities leap from modernist, autocratic, or relativistic views into postmodernist or even metamodernist embodied authenticities it will continue to arrest social and emotional intelligences, which are in dire need to address the profound social, health, and ecological problems humanity faces. The very survival of humanity as faced with global climate change, mass extinction of species, public health pandemics, and other wicked social and environmental dilemmas rely on discovery of novel spiritual-social-body-political-ecological hybridizations.

Participatory freedom of embodiment rather than sectarian *Vajrayāna* embodied liberation unlocks the creative unfolding of novel hybrids in social, cultural, political, and ecological spheres. The emancipation of the body is situated in a process of creative and pluralistic exploration of body concepts and practices that, if limited by social and cultural settings, stay arrested. The *Vajrayāna* is limited to its doctrinal predefined body conceptions and practices, while participatory spirituality allows novel body conceptions and mind–body practices to be discovered. Pluralistic embodied participatory spirituality has the potential to free both—individuals and the collective—because lived participatory freedom (a) serves to cocreate novel hybridized body-spiritual-social-ecological-political forms; (b) supports the discovery of individual and collective spiritual

liberation; (c) takes a pluralistic stance in regard to spiritual ultimates, (d) refutes all forms of perennialism and absolute truth claims (e.g., the correct view on emptiness) that only create more spiritual and social hierarchies, polarities, and identities; (e) acknowledges subtle vital energies enacting embodied spiritual events; and (f) enacts social, ecological, and political spheres for the greater good.

A limitation of participatory freedom of embodiment is its absolute stance to reject cosmic, metaphysical body conceptions, including those recognized in the *Vajrayāna* (e.g., *rig pa* or *dharmakāya*), that reify a spiritual ultimate. Another constraint of participatory freedom is that to elevate embodiment as superior to disembodiment creates hierarchies devaluing the latter. The construct of embodiment as defined by Mehling et al. (2009) localizes the felt sense of being in one's own body that serves as medium to perceive one's lived immediate experience. This means that those spiritualities where individuals completely lose their sense of being (i.e., sense of self) and are completely dissociated and disembodied (e.g., out-of-body experiences, experiences of spaciousness and timelessness, states of nonduality in which subject–object distinctions are not perceived by an internal observer or witness) would consequentially point to participatory unfreedom. However, from the *Vajrayāna* phenomenological perspective it is through the state of complete embodiment that embodiment-disembodiment distinctions dissolve and metaphysical bodies are realized temporarily (graduate liberation) and completely (complete liberation) in which the person crosses over beyond ordinary body and mind conceptions.

In those *Vajrayāna* traditions that recognize a spiritual ultimate, the liberative process is considered a disassociation that indicates separating and uniting simultaneously. This separation from self, physical body, worldly and mental phenomena through the process of nonattachment, and union with a primordial way of being beyond space and time are considered one and the same thing. Such transbody-transpersonal separation-union dissolves subject–object distinctions and touches the paradoxical mystery through expressions such as “appearance is emptiness,” “emptiness is form, and form is emptiness,” or “groundless ground.” In contrast, those *Vajrayāna* traditions that recognize the dynamic unfolding of beingness through embodied present moment experience (e.g., *Mahāmudrā* and Great Perfection) and participatory spirituality that emphasizes subject–object hybridization, cocreation of spiritualities as participatory events and cosmologies, and embodiment of many ways of being-in-the world refuse to recognize a specific spiritual ultimate. This leads to the conundrum that these traditions and participatory theory inherently devalue disembodied spiritualities even though impersonal-disembodied liberation as spiritual ultimate may be attainable through the fullness of present moment cocreation of personal-embodied spiritualities. In this sense, participatory freedom refuses to accept the possibility of concurrently disembodied-embodied spiritualities and nonduality as a permanent end state of beingness. Heron (2003) had stressed that the participatory view embraces diunity, which is not duality and not nonduality. These negations of participatory theory constraint participatory freedom although people may sense and perceive liberations.

In contrast, the *Vajrayāna* assertions of the existence of a specific spiritual ultimate implies the possibility of ultimate liberation, which is rejected from the participatory perspective. Instead, Sisyphus-like cocreation of novel spiritualities are reduced to transpersonal and transbody momentary participatory events lacking deeper purpose. Thus, the participatory denial of the possibility of ultimate embodied liberation may be perceived as a Sisyphean punishment rather than a motivational driver to seek embodied liberation through participatory enactments.

The traditional transpersonal trajectories (ascending, descending, and extending) solely centered on the self/ego identified by Daniels (2005) were enhanced through explicit incorporation of the body and transbody transformations in the BoSoP model. From a scholarly perspective, BoSoP provides a map of transpersonal and transbody pathways of immanent, transcendent, and expansive spiritualities or hybridized forms of spiritualities. The BoSoP map holds value for practitioners to discern choices of available mind–body practices and participate in the co-creation of novel ones. Situating a specific spiritual, meditation, or body practice in the BoSoP map raises awareness about the purpose of a practice (goal or fruition stage), the direction of a path, and associated phenomenological experiences. McBody, stress-reduction, health, wellness, sacred spiritual, attention, awareness, somatic, ritualistic, feminine, and other practices can be localized in the BoSoP map and understood from the scholarly view, psychological, spiritual, psychotropic, social, and phenomenological perspectives. Thus, the BoSoP approach supports discovery of

participatory spiritualities and empowers the spiritual practitioner to discard those practices that may not serve them. The approach also allows practitioners to build spiritual capacity and competency and avoids blindly following gurus or spiritual teachers. In the *Vajrayāna* it is common that the guru expects from practitioners to perform 100,000 or more full body prostrations, chant specific mantras (e.g., in Tibetan), recite liturgies, perform specific visualizations in similar large numbers, and surrender into 3-year intensive retreats to progress on the path. However, individual's predispositions, trauma, and aptitude differ widely. For some practitioners one or two body prostrations may leap one person into a deep nondual state of consciousness and embodiment, while others may lack significant transpersonal and transbody transformations even after 100,008 prostrations.

Participatory theory provides the epistemological and ontological philosophy, while the BoSoP approach empowers practitioners to become their own personal spiritual authority and grow spiritual and somatic intelligences. The BoSoP practice approach is not relativistic (i.e., trial-and-error of spiritual practices for the sake of doing them) but allows to combine strategy (spiritual path), balance mind and body practices (i.e., transpersonal and transbody practices), pursue a goal (i.e., embodied spiritual liberation, nondual effortlessness). The pluralistic BoSoP map fosters discovery, playfulness, and creativity and discern practices that cocreate novel spiritualities from others that do not (e.g., McBody). Importantly, *novel* refers to new spiritualities cocreated by people, groups, organizations, sanghas or authorities (e.g., guru or transpersonal

psychologist). BoSoP is versatile in fostering the integration of human faculties and supports a plurality of cocreated intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal spiritualities in context of embodied liberation.

The next section will explore the significance of *bodhisattvas* to bring forth embodied liberation. From a pluralistic perspective, what role do *bodhisattvas* play in freeing themselves and all sentient beings?

Bodhisattvas

Chapter 5: Bodhisattvas: Personified, Idealized, Mystified, Naturalized, and Integral juxtaposed the *bodhisattva*, an awakened being in most Buddhist traditions, as viewed through different lenses—as a personified symbol, idealistic vision, mystical manifestation, naturalized sentient being, and integral vision. Specific attention was given to the contrasting *bodhisattva* motivations and ideals articulated in *Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, the naturalized *bodhisattva* (neurophysicalism), and the integral *bodhisattva* (embodied participatory spirituality). The paradox of the traditional *bodhisattva* is to liberate oneself and all sentient beings by ending suffering and to act compassionately while realizing an empty self (non-self) in an empty universe lacking intrinsic existence. The paradoxical nature of the *bodhisattvas* was discussed in regard to illusional ideation, moral agency, mystical nature, idealized devotion, and naturalized form. The ethical underpinnings of the traditional Buddhist *bodhisattvas* and non-Buddhist ethics of Westernized *bodhisattvas* were critically examined.

Based on the critical hermeneutical analysis, the thesis of this dissertation that lack in *bodhisattva*-ness limits the emergence of constructive, novel subject—

object hybridizations as participatory events or participatory cosmologies can be accepted from the relative perspective of the idealized *bodhisattva*, though the thesis is rejected from the absolute truth perspective of Buddhist doctrine. The *bodhisattva* ideal of compassionate aspiration that evokes compassionate actions and the arising of *bodhicitta* in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism exemplifies openness to novelty in the worldly realm. The *bodhisattva* vow (e.g., to free all beings from suffering or end all delusions which are inexhaustible) confronts one with the impossibility to ever attain these goals. The idea of the vow is to shift from doing and goal-orientation (liberation) to fully being present in the moment. This participation in each moment is met by the *bodhisattva* with curiosity as it is accepted as—perfect and imperfect, conditioned and unconditioned, form and emptiness—at the same time. Therefore, from a relative perspective the *bodhisattva* lives from a place of participatory curiosity and an insurmountable amount of subject–object hybridizations.

However, from an absolute Buddhist view, irrespective of different Buddhist traditions or lineages, there are pre-defined spiritual ultimates (e.g., *dharmakāya*, Buddha nature, emptiness, or *rig pa*) that are unchanging and indestructible. This means that, for example, the *dharmakāya* in itself is considered unchanging, while the worldly manifestations are everchanging moment-to-moment; through subject–object hybridization (nondual state of consciousness) the nature of the *dharmakāya* is supposedly revealed to the individual.

While the relative view is all about participatory cocreation of the mystery, the absolute view evokes either indifference or demotivation to engage intra- and interpersonally in worldly affairs (e.g., social and ecological crises) or hyper-engagement in worldly affairs due to extreme concern about the flourishing of people and the world (e.g., ecosattvas of the Extinction Rebellion). In regard to nature and the environment, belonging rather than escapism from worldly suffering is stressed in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, whereas *Theravāda* Buddhism ascertains that *samadhi* (complete meditative absorption) and focus on emptiness of self are most important on the liberative path (Grunwald, 2021a). Darlington (2017) pointed out that most Thai forest monks who practice in the *Theravāda* tradition are not outwardly concerned with the condition or health of the forest ecosystem despite its current destruction, because their aim is focused on individual meditation practice and enlightenment rather than outward environmental activism or socio-political engagement. Literally, earthly matters and their feeling tones are irrelevant in the realm of enlightenment.

Reflection 1: Significance of the Buddhist Bodhisattva in Contemporary America

Buddhist *bodhisattvas* provide an alternative role model for cultures entrenched in achievement, profit, power, and doing mode rather than being mode. O. Flanagan's (2011) naturalized *bodhisattva* model grounded in neurophysicalism objects to Buddhist metaphysical assertions and is aligned with mainstream American memes. According to N. Campbell and Kean (2015), American culture has been dominated by American identity politics,

exceptionalism, strive for power and social position, and hegemony despite its diverse voices related to race, ethnicity, gender, and minorities. Historically, the enslavement of people represented the power divide in American society, which at the present time is replaced by meritocracy, power, and control based on merit and/or money relegating many immigrants and socio-economically disadvantaged to the bottom of society.

According to Weisz et al.'s study (1984), to live life from a place of primary control predominates American culture compared to secondary control, which is prominent in Japan and other Asian countries with Buddhist roots. In primary control, individuals enhance their rewards by influencing existing conditions aiming to control a situation, circumstances, or other people. In contrast, secondary control means that “individuals enhance their rewards by accommodating to existing realities and maximizing satisfaction or goodness of fit with things as they are” (p. 955). Primary control stands in sharp contrast to the *bodhisattva* ideal focused on compassion, equanimity, and acceptance with deliberate attention to the present moment-to-moment experience.

The healing modalities of Buddhist *bodhisattvas* as compassionate role models that run counter to control and intra- and interpersonal control issues have been recognized in Western psychology, counseling, and psychotherapy. For example, Buddhist *bodhisattvas* offer pathways to human flourishing and have been introduced in positive psychology (Walsh, 2015). Cheng and Tse (2014) empirically demonstrated the arising of wisdom through *bodhisattva*-spirit oriented counseling based on the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra*. Young-Eisendrath

(2008) elaborated on the similarities in Jungian psychoanalysis and Buddhist practice in regard to relief of suffering, perceived pain, and the healing capacity of compassion in patients. Specifically, the *bodhisattva* archetype (i.e., the archetype of compassion), has been recognized in Jungian depth psychology as a powerful source of healing and transformation (Bolen, 2001). Importantly, mainly only Buddhist psychological ideals attributed to the *bodhisattva* (e.g., compassion, selflessness) have been integrated into Western psychology, while the doctrinal assertions, Buddhist rituals, and historical context have remained separate. This partial hybridization of Buddhist *bodhisattva* ideals and Western psychology is not surprising because Buddhist doctrine (e.g., non-self, emptiness, nonattachment) is antithetical to primary control-oriented Western thinking. Welwood (2002) elaborated on the value of Buddhist concepts to enhance Western psychotherapy, though the full adoption of Buddhist philosophy and psychology into mainstream Western psychology by the American Psychological Association has not occurred. According to Ching-chung and Lin (2020), the inter-projection between Buddhist and *bodhisattva* concepts and Western psychology that advances wisdom, enlightenment, and emotional healing emphasize the potential benefits of transpersonal shifts.

Reflection 2: Individual and Collective Bodhisattva-ness

Who are well-known people who emanate qualities of a *Mahāyāna* bodhisattva? The Dalai Lama, Pope Francis, Thich Nhat Hanh, or Malala Yousafzai, who cheer compassionately for world peace. Philanthropists like Bill and Melinda Gates, who care and promote the welfare of others at grand scale.

Community activists like Fannie Lou Hamer, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Martin Luther King, who fought against racism and inequality, and for civil rights. Christiana Figueres, Greta Thunberg, and Naomi Klein, who have engaged as environmental activists to fight global climate change. Those people whose legacies and deep suffering makes them *bodhisattvas* in an instance, like George Floyd, Eric Garner, or Breonna Taylor. The health experts, like Anthony Fauci and medical doctors and nurses who have worked countless hours to help people in a global pandemic of COVID-19. There are countless ordinary *bodhisattvas* who bring joy and happiness to local communities.

These examples of the *bodhisattva* archetype emanate (fierce) compassion and loving-kindness for loved ones, strangers, and a greater good. These *bodhisattvas* are not gendered or can be attributed to a specific race, ethnicity, or educational background. *Bodhisattvas* go beyond their ordinary self and embody something larger than themselves—becoming fully human, being human, for all of humanity, for all sentient beings. Transpersonal and transbody characteristics undergird the *bodhisattva* archetype. Do all of these *bodhisattva* exemplars identify as Buddhists? Unlikely. Have compassionate *bodhisattva* exemplars appeared across time? Yes. Will *bodhisattvas* walk on this planet in the future? Likely.

The essential qualities of a *bodhisattva* are aligned with metamodern qualities such as hope, romanticism, sincerity, authenticity, affect, feeling tones, and the potential for universal truths and grand narratives (van den Akker et al., 2017). For example, the embodiment of the universal truth that all people have the

capacity for compassion that dissolves any kind of othering, or the grand narrative to create a metamodern society that is just, inclusive, democratic, equitable, and flourishes express the spirit of *bodhisattva*-ness. According to Freinacht (2017), a pluralistic metamodern stance rather than a relativistic one, allows one to discern what may bring the least harm and suffering and the greatest good among multiple choices. The metamodern view differs markedly from contemporary aperspectival relativism and conspiracy hyperreality in which knowledge of the world floats free from any verifying reference (King, 1998). According to postmodern philosopher Baudrillard (1994), hyperreality is not a false view of the world, but it constructs a hyperreality where ultimately in its final simulation stage images stop pretending to be appearances or representations of something that does not exist because they have no relation to reality (so-called simulacra).

Ferrer (2017) asserted that the *integral bodhisattva* of the participatory theory embraces metamodern sensibilities. The *integral bodhisattva* vow stresses the integration of all human faculties (body, heart, mind, subtle energies, and consciousness) without disembodiment from any of them. This vow is inherently focused on the emancipation of the individual from a whole person perspective. However, the *integral bodhisattva* does not explicitly stress a collective vision or motivation for the greater whole—the Earth or living beings—besides participation in the mystery. An undefined vision or goal inherently implies to primarily trust in the process of participation to enact the mystery based on egolessness, embodiment, and relational spiritualities, while ecological, social, and political dilemmas seem secondary. The risk is that without a vision or goal

for flourishing of collective social systems, ecologies, and politics it is unknown whether the *integral bodhisattva* will extend its qualities from individual to collective level. This goalless stance of participatory spirituality differs from other voices that urge to pursue the goal of creating compassionate systems and a culture that embodies *bodhisattva* qualities. For example, Elgin (2020) asserted that human community must rise to a higher level of cooperation and care for the well-being of the entire Earth threatened by climate disruption, resource depletion, and mass extinction of species. Work (2017) argued for sustainable development and mindful activism to cocreate a compassionate civilization in response to challenges of misogyny, racism, systemic poverty, global climate warming, oligarchies, and autocracies. Work emphasized that the interconnection between social, cultural, environmental, and political transformations with participatory governance and empathetic social activism are critical to create compassionate civilization. The leap from the *bodhisattva* inner qualities embodied by an individual, to deliberately choosing to embody *bodhisattva*-ness of a collective system of all sentient beings or civilizations supports the move from modern and postmodern toward metamodern culture.

Transpersonal and transbody transformations toward metamodern sensibilities are critical to enact a *bodhisattva* collective. Participatory freedom to the mystery of life, rather than Buddhist liberation from suffering, avoids being halted in pre-determined religious doctrinal assertions. The *integral bodhisattva* provides a secular alternative to the Buddhist *bodhisattvas* that is not bound to a specific religion, and accessible to Eastern and Western cultures alike. In this

sense, integral liberation rooted in the integral *bodhisattva* is both—a fully embodied way of freeing oneself and the collective of all sentient beings.

The *integral bodhisattva* is rooted in the three principles of participatory spirituality—equiplurality, equipotentiality, and equiprimacy—viewed from the perspective of an individual seeking participatory freedom (Ferrer, 2017). I propose to add the principle of *antifragility* which allows to express the thriving and flourishing of communities and systems at a collective level. *Antifragility* is a new philosophical concept coined by Taleb (2013, 2014) that can be applied to organizations, politics, technology, education, ecology, society, ethics, and more.

The underlying idea of fragility/antifragility is to discern how to enact the least harm and create the most benefit for all living beings. Antifragility addresses how humans can thrive in an uncertain world in which stressors (e.g., oppression, anger), shock (e.g., natural disasters), volatility (e.g., economy), attacks, and failures are present. Fragility denotes something that breaks easily or deconstructs, while antifragility can gain from disorder, diversity (e.g., in gender, race, ethnicity, age), and non-conformity. Antifragility is beyond resilience; the resilient merely resists shocks and stays the same, whereas the antifragile gets better and flourishes (Taleb, 2014). According to Fortunato (2017), resilience and robustness of a system represent immunity or indifference to distress or stressors, whereas antifragility refers to things, people, or phenomena that actually improve with stress, disorder, being harmed, and abuse.

Antifragility is at play when stressors or abuse enact more healthy ways of being or systems. For example, sex and gender induced oppression, abuse, and

anger of women propelled the feminist movement and the 19th Amendment of the United States that granted all citizens the right to vote irrespective of sex (Traister, 2018). Unfathomable harm of enslavement in American history spawned the abolitionist movement to end slavery followed by the civil rights and Black Lives Matter (BLM) movements to enhance racial equality, human dignity for all, and contribute to creating a more diverse and inclusive society. Inner work to heal collective Black intergenerational trauma and racial justice to transform society are pivotal to turn a fragile society claiming white privilege and supremacy into an antifragile one (R. V. Magee, 2019). DiAngelo (2018) addressed white fragility that refers to internalized emotions (fear, anger, and guilt), and behaviors including silence, rationalization, and argumentation to reinstate white racial equilibrium and racial inequality priming whites as superior over blacks. Antifragility involves the deconstruction and demythologization of whiteness and racial implicit bias to foster radical reformation of American society.

Chaos and distress are disastrous for all that is fragile, but essential and beneficial for all that is antifragile. Applied to social systems antifragility arises through diversity. According to Taleb (2014), antifragility produces a convex response curve that leads to more benefit than harm to a harmful stressor, while fragility produces a concave curve. Antifragility is a mathematical theorem derived *a priori* and not derived from empirical data. “An ecosystem is antifragile if it benefits from environmental variability. Antifragility therefore goes beyond robustness or resilience because while resilient/robust systems are merely

perturbation-resistant, antifragile structures not only withstand stress but also benefit from it” (Equihua et al., 2020, p. 1).

Buddhist *bodhisattva*-ness conceptions do not consider antifragility as a guiding principle, instead they place compassion and other *brahmavihārās* on a pedestal, which creates a polarized view between compassionate/non-compassionate people with the *mahāsattva* (Sanskrit, great being; an epithet of a *bodhisattva*) at the top of the compassion hierarchy. The lens of Buddhist *bodhisattvas* is individualistic, whereby people inoculate themselves from harm, stress, abuse, chaos, and disruption of any kind by developing mindful presence and equanimity (mental calmness or composure).

In contrast, the antifragility view looks through the collective lenses on the world aiming to create just, fair, and flourishing systems that provide equal opportunities rather than oppress people. Antifragile philosophy accepts that harm, randomness, abuse, chaotic perturbations, and uncertainty are inevitable parts of life. The best course of action to flourish and thrive as a person and collective system is to create diverse and variable environments; adopt openness and flexibility; opt for simplicity (rather than complexity), redundancy, and layers in systems (to protect from single point failures); resist the urge to suppress randomness (e.g., disasters); avoid risky behavior that would wipe people or systems out completely from the planet; and respect habits and rules that are time-tested (Taleb, 2014). Examples of antifragile system conceptions are found in racially oppressive systems (DiAngelo, 2018), finance (Taleb & Douady, 2013), computerized digital systems (De Florio, 2014), capital management (Cavanagh,

2017), communications (Lichtman et al., 2018), blockchains and smart contracts for climate finance and renewable energy (Duchenne, 2018), environmental racism (Dillard-Wright, 2019), ecosystem science (Equihua et al., 2020), and other fields.

Participatory View of Feminist Spirituality Arcing to Feminine Spirituality

Chapter 6: A Participatory View of Feminist Spirituality: Feminine-in-Spiritual Diversity critically discussed feminist spirituality through the participatory lens. Feminist spirituality is profoundly diverse and the multiple perspectives on the meaning of the term *feminine* render the field's subject matter somewhat mysterious and undetermined. The purpose was to utilize participatory theory and critically discuss ontological, epistemological, and phenomenological assumptions of prominent feminist spiritualities, specifically the Goddess/goddesses movements, feminine archetypes, and feminist spiritualities explicitly standing in opposition to “masculine” spirituality. To reframe spiritual feminists' experiences as feminine-spiritual participatory events that recognize the plurality of subject–object hybridizations speak to the lived embodied spirituality of the feminine and the cocreative participation with anything spiritual. From a participatory view, spiritual experiences of femininities are not merely subjective inner experiences, but rather participatory enactions of individuals' consciousness in such spiritual events. Intentional future feminine-spiritual hybridizations that unify femininities, spiritualities, and social dimensions, while honoring diversity, bear potential to reduce adversities that perpetuate the oppression of women and femininities. Reframing of feminist narratives from spiritual and socially

constructed identities (othering) and opposition (feminine vs. masculine) into a participatory frame offers potential to emancipate femininities through wholeness, embodiment, and integration of human and subtle/spiritual dimensions.

Participatory theory embraces unity-in-diversity, which was transferred into a feminist spiritual frame as *feminine-in-spiritual diversity*. The thesis of this dissertation that the oppression of femininities limits the emergence of constructive, novel subject–object hybridizations as participatory events or participatory cosmologies is acceptable based on the critical theoretical analysis presented in Chapter 6.

Reflection 1: Feminine-in-Spiritual Diversity and Spiritual-in-Feminine Diversity

Participatory theory supports the construct of unity-in-diversity, which was transferred into a feminist spiritual frame as feminine-in-spiritual diversity in Chapter 6. This kind of participatory informed feminine spirituality unifies the wide variety of feminist spiritualities by giving them equal voice, while at the same time honoring other existing spiritualities. Unity expresses harmony without imposing uniformity, and goes beyond mere tolerance of different religious, spiritual, psychological, and social aspects in the cultivation of feminist spirituality.

Differences of race, ethnicity, and gender have been shown to enrich social interaction, and enhance pro-social behavior (Dovidio et al., 2012); and diversity has been proposed to enhance antifragility (Taleb, 2014). In the latter case, more diverse understanding, and practices of the feminine enacts fuller

expressions of femininities through the cultivation of participatory spiritualities. In this sense, the fullness of femininities is analogous to bodyfulness (Caldwell, 2018), mindfulness, and heartfulness (Daugherty, 2014).

The fuller expression of femininities is not simply achieved through discovery of new understanding of femininities, which would make femininities even more ambiguous and may raise questions how to best define femininities which has been debated (see Chapter 6). If the diversity of a system increases beyond a certain point it becomes less likely to converge to unity, meaning for example, if new feminist spiritualities would be discoverable they may not contribute much to preserve/increase unity within feminine-in-spiritual diversity. However, hybridizations of feminine spiritualities with other feminine spiritualities (e.g., Earth-feminine healing spirituality), non-feminine spiritualities (e.g., Black Madonna), social (e.g., feminine-spirituality inspired social activism), or social-ecological spheres (e.g., radical eco-feminine activism to mitigate global climate change) would enhance the fullness of expressions of the feminine-in-spiritual diversity. Hybridizations between one of the femininities and “something other” allow to integrate and harmonize, and increase the entropy (i.e., the number of states a system can take on). Feminine-other hybridizations cocreate new transpersonal constructs that hold the potential to reduce adversities, oppression of the feminine, and subjugation of women.

From the participatory perspective, participatory events enact the feminine-in-spiritual diversity and bring alive novel spiritualities that emancipate the mysterious femininities. Conversely, could participatory events enact the

spiritual-in-feminine diversity and bring forth novel femininities? To reflect on this possibility three different eminent feminist spiritual/religious scholars and teachers and their work are discussed.

First, Dr. Beverly Lanzetta, an eminent voice in feminist spirituality. Her latest work is *A New Silence: Spiritual Practices and Formation for the Monk Within* (2020) following book publications *Foundations in Spiritual Direction: Sharing the Sacred across Traditions* (2019), *The Monk Within: Embracing a Sacred Way of Life* (2018), *Emerging Heart: Global Spirituality and the Sacred* (2009), and *Radical Wisdom: A Feminist Mystical Theology* (2005). As a theologian, contemplative scholar, and spiritual teacher situated in Christian feminine mysticism, interfaith and interspiritual dialogue, monastic initiatives, archetypal feminine, and embodied spirituality, Lanzetta has bridged diverse spiritual and religious traditions to explore the mystical path of femininities. Lanzetta resembles the new “spiritual but not religious” scholar and teacher who has formed a community of new modern monks (single, married, partnered, celibate, etc.) dedicated to spirituality of nonviolence and the universal mystical heart. Beverley Lanzetta has coined the term *via feminina* (the feminine way) that describes a feminine mystical path that connects to ancient roots in women’s experience. Whether the feminine is found in the diversity of spiritualities, or vice versa, whether spirituality provides the womb to explore the depth of femininities is unclear based on Lanzetta’s work. Lanzetta (2018) has explicitly recognized the participatory nature and mutuality of spirit and mind which is evidenced by a multiplicity of feminine-spiritual hybridizations in her work. Both—diverse

feminine expressions (e.g., the feminine personified in Teresa of Avila; the feminine in the divinity of monks; female bodies, wombs, and oppression of via feminina) and a variety of spiritualities (e.g., divine love as freedom, embodied spirituality, nonduality, compassion of *bodhisattvas*, and Divine feminine) are acknowledged by Lanzetta.

Second, Lama Tsultrim Allione, known for her books *Wisdom Rising: Journey Into the Mandala of the Empowered Feminine* (2018), *Feeding Your Demons: Ancient Wisdom Resolving Inner Conflict* (2008), and *Women of Wisdom* (2000); the latter exploring enlightened women and Tibetan female mystics, such as Machig Labdrön and Drenchen Rema. Born as Joan R. Ewing in Maine, she travelled to India, Nepal, and Tibet in her twenties and was ordained as a nun in the *Karma Kagyü* school of Tibetan Buddhism. Allione (Ewing's married last name) extensively studied and practiced Tibetan Buddhism with various teachers, among them Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. Allione was recognized as an emanation of Machig Labdrön by the Eighth Karmapa. Lama Tsultrim's teachings are focused on the Tārā Mandala and sacred feminine in the lineage of Machig Labdrön. After her return from Asia, Lama Tsultrim founded the Tārā Mandala retreat center in southern Colorado. Allione did not seek out femininities but was a spiritual seeker who discovered the sacred feminine through experience, recognizing rigid gender and sexual hierarchies in Tibetan Buddhist sanghas, and inner listening to auspicious signs that guided her path. Lama Tsultrim's teachings were inspired to train others in the inner, outer, and secret mandala, *dakinis* (sacred energetic female beings called sky dancers), and

an empowered feminine despite being trained in patriarchal hierarchical Tibetan Buddhist communities and by mainly male teachers. Allione enacts both—the feminine-in-spiritual diversity (i.e., the diversity of different Tibetan Buddhist lineages) and spiritual-in-feminine diversity (e.g., feminine diversity of personified female Buddhas, *bodhisattvas*, Tārā the liberator, *dakini* principle, body of women, fierce compassion out of the womb of the Earth, inner emanations of the feminine).

Third, Dr. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, situated in Catholicism, has engaged religious pluralism. Schüssler Fiorenza's significant book publications include *Congress of Wo/men: Religion, Gender, and Kyriarchal Power* (2016), *Method in Women's Studies in Religion: A Critical Feminist Hermeneutics* (2002), *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origin* (1994), and *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (1992). Schüssler Fiorenza's impetus was to empower women in patriarchal Christianity through personifications (e.g., Mary of Magdala and Sophia), deconstruction of the subordination of women and misogyny in Christianity (e.g., Paul the Apostle), and silencing of women in the church. As a feminist theologian, the struggle for radical justice and democracy in religion, deconstruction of oppression of women in the church predominated her work. Schüssler Fiorenza coined the term *kyriarchy* that touches on the interconnected systems build around oppression and domination (e.g., sexism, racism homophobia, transphobia, economic injustice, colonialism) that define non-gender-based systems of power. Schüssler Fiorenza's lens is critical feminist

political and her theory is the*ology of liberation. The hybridization of social-Christian and feminist-religious themes aimed at social transformation in religion as a place of feminist politics. Interestingly, in Schüssler Fiorenza's view femininities are placed within a diversity of social and religious contexts to explore how they can be liberated from kyriarchal power.

In summary, participatory events may enact both the feminine-in-spiritual diversity and the spiritual-in-feminine diversity. Diversity has the propensity of antifragility, and thus, bringing forth emancipatory hybridizations that liberate the femininities, the spiritual mystery, and human beings. These emancipations hold power to transform ecosystems of the social, culture, and environment and facilitate to overcome wicked contemporary dilemmas.

Reflection 2: Freedom, Emancipation, and Liberation of Femininities

Globally, kyriarchal power has been persistent and pernicious and has been reinforced through mainstream rationalization, violence, socialization, and education (Schüssler Fiorenza, 2016). Historically, different structures of oppression feed each other, and those in power tend to remain in power. Internalized oppression of femininities has extended intergenerationally around the globe (Delap, 2020). Feminist activism, scholarship, theology, and theory have aimed to emancipate femininities and succeeded to some extent. Though many feminists and non-feminists would attest that kyriarchal power is still in place to various degrees and femininities are not fully emancipated (c.f. Mackay, 2015; Traister, 2018).

According to Ferrer (2017), participatory spirituality provides both an ontological and epistemological frame to emancipate femininities. From a theoretical perspective, participatory freedom secures both individuals' and others' freedom irrespective of gender, sex, or other factors to cocreate embodied, relational, and creative spiritualities. An unanswered question is whether participatory spirituality provides a practical frame to emancipate femininities from oppression. In other words, does participatory spirituality enact the freedom or emancipation of femininities in kyriarchal systems that are designed to oppress, abuse, and/or subdue femininities and specific spiritualities?

Freinacht (2017) proclaimed that “even freedom does not set us free” (p. 110) and “freedom is struggle; freedom is terror; it is terror of facing pure chaos, the pristine meaninglessness of reality, the vastness of potential, and the weight of the responsibility that follows” (p. 112). Would freedom of femininities lead to terror, chaos, and meaninglessness? Or would freedom of femininities from oppression, imprisonment, and enslavement of kyriarchal global power assemblages fully emancipate and liberate femininities? In my view, the emancipation of femininities refers to the act of setting free from power of kyriarchy, while liberation of femininities refers to the (absolute) state of being fully liberated.

It is impossible to imagine a society in which everybody has the highest level of freedom and all kyriarchies are deconstructed, and all femininities are fully liberated. The paradox of freedom is that one's individual freedom depends on somebody else's un-freedom (or less freedom); likewise, the collective

freedom of one social community depends on another community in a resource limited system like planet Earth with a current world “over” population of about 7.8 billion people. In my view, the argument that freedom for all people is achieved when all dimensions of humanity (social, race, education, human physiology, gender, sex, etc.), subjective experiences (e.g., subtle experiences, perceptions), and intersubjective experiences (e.g., among partners, in larger communities, nation states) are equal can be refuted as a fantastic chimaera. The claim that completely equal objective and subjective human participation is realizable seems out of reach from a pragmatic perspective.

According to Freinacht (2019), equality is a paradox due to (a) human developmental differences; (b) differences in human capacities/faculties that are not equal (meritocracies or “equality of opportunity” have some merit but are limited to obtain perfect or even near-perfect equality of all); (c) recognition of abilities to produce things other people want, for example, products, services, elicited emotions), and societies have different needs implying inequalities; (d) lived and felt experiences differ among people and people desire recognition from the recognized (i.e., those one recognizes as equals/peers, the ones we respect, admire, desire, or the ones that have the authority to control); and (e) envy that serves as a pervasive counterforce to human dignity and equality. Although equality in any absolute sense seems unachievable, it does not mean it is meaningless or does not have value as a guiding principle. Feminists have fought for gender equality, equality to vote, and spiritual equality which have provided more freedom of choice, for example, to practice specific feminist spiritualities

without oppression (Mackay, 2015). The dimensions of inequalities are pernicious because multiple ones—economic, social, emotional, ecological, and information inequalities—have profoundly increased in the 21st century globally (Freinacht, 2019).

The coexistence between the femininities, other principles such as equality, and parity in human faculties mean that the freedom of femininities is not independent. Freeing femininities may lead to un-freedom of something else (e.g., masculine). Freedoms as a common good flow from personal intimate relations with oneself, interpersonal relations, organizations, social systems, and larger collectives. Political freedom assertions rest in the philosophy of Isaiah Berlin (see Berlin, 2002) who discerned *negative and positive liberty or freedom*, which differ from the basic freedom of choice for free will (Carter, 2019). According to Carter (2019), negative freedom (*freedom from*) is usually attributed to individual agents and refers to the absence of barriers, constraints, and obstacles, while positive freedom (*freedom to*) is more of a mixed individual and collective affair defined as the possibility of acting in such a way as to take control of one's life and realize one's fundamental purposes. In the political realm Berlin's freedom conceptions have been a matter of dispute due to the complexities between individual and collective freedoms (Baum & Nichols, 2013), and misconstrued freedom conceptions as ideologies of totalitarian movements (e.g., Fascist Nazis and Communists) which claimed to liberate people by subjecting and often sacrificing them to collective ideologies or principles. Therefore, for Berlin it was not about championing negative over

positive freedom, or vice versa; but on advocating individualism and value pluralism against collectivism and metaphysical rationalism (Cherniss & Hardy, 2020).

Applying Berlin's (2002) freedom constructs to feminist spirituality means to consider (a) negative freedom from oppression or subjugation of both the feminine and spiritual that are in one way or another constraint by collective culture (e.g., patriarchy, authoritarian governance), dogma (social constraints), or ideologies that impose on people rather than emancipate them; and (b) positive freedom as individual choices to fulfill one's purpose or true self through agency to participate in cocreative feminine, spiritual, or hybridized feminine-spiritual practices. Balancing negative and positive freedom grounded in feminine-spiritual pluralism, embrace of the participatory view, and metamodern sensibilities would allow the full blossoming of feminine-spiritual hybridizations. To deprive human beings of certain basic citizenship, social, health, and ecological rights is to dehumanize them, and likewise to deprive human beings of their participation in the mystery and femininities is to despiritualize and defeminize people.

According to Ferrer (2017), participatory freedom rests on three principles of equality: (a) equiprimacy principle with all human faculties as equal partners in the cocreation of spirituality; (b) equipotentiality asserting that human beings cannot be ranked hierarchically in their totality; and potentially, interrelations between human and subtle energy enhance the plurality of cocreated spiritualities, and (c) equiplurality acknowledging multiple spiritual enactments to emancipate and liberate (e.g., feminine-in-spiritual-diversity).

In my interpretation, participatory freedom does not strive to maximize equality of these three principles to foster emancipation and liberation of femininities. Rather participatory freedom is attained through the integration, harmonization, and hybridization of cocreated spiritualities, among them feminine spiritualities. Thus, femininities in a diverse multiverse of spiritualities, human and subtle energies, and socially constructed dimensions is freed through the unbound exploration of the spectrum of possibilities, the intimate participation in cocreating novel subject–object hybridizations, and novel cocreated feminine-spiritual hybridizations. Intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal cocreations strive to emancipate femininities and liberate the spiritual mystery in a dynamic continuous interplay. From a participatory perspective, fully embodied liberation is attained in the moments of subject–object hybridizations refuting the possibility of absolute embodied liberation as an unchanging and static end-goal.

Participatory metamodern sensibilities allow the fuller expression of feminine spiritualities. Freinacht (2017) proposed the metamodern stage of human development that is able to see through the concepts of hierarchies (e.g., social, class, racial, ethnic, spiritual hierarchies), yet acknowledges that functionally human existence depends on them. According to Freinacht, freedom as a collective good is achieved through different levels of hierarchies from enslavement, serfdom, subjected, impoverished, basic, socially active, integrated, norm-defining, and cocreative citizenship. Freinacht pointed out that the metamodern stage exhibits the ability of taking and integrating often paradoxical perspectives, and ability to listen deeply and act from a place of balance. Van den

Akker et al. (2017) echoed that the metamodern model emphasizes feeling tones, affection, authenticity, and synthesis between the modern and postmodern modes.

The metamodern points to the integration of modalities that cover a spectrum of possibilities. Freinacht (2017) emphasized that the extension of one's amplitude of subjective affective states (depth)—suffering, pain, helplessness, satisfaction, lively, joyous, bliss, enlightened, etc.—matters to acquaint one intimately with all of them. The abilities to integrate, harmonize, and eventually hybridize depend on the intimacy with the full human spectrum and depth of affective and inner states of being. Ultimately, femininities within the diversity of spiritualities and the plurality of social, ecological, political and other spheres, is emancipated through integration and hybridization rather than through opposition, othering, fighting, and deconstruction of oppressive kyriarchies. From a metamodern participatory lens, the polarization of feminine-masculine is substituted by “letting go” and “letting be” of polarizations.

SYNTHESIS: EMBODIED LIBERATION META MODEL

Participatory theory provided the container of this dissertation to explore the body, embodiment, the *bodhisattva*, and feminist spirituality. This Western transpersonal theory was juxtaposed with conceptions of the body in *Vajrayāna* Buddhism, the *bodhisattva* ideal of *Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, and feminine-spiritual hybridizations.

It was shown that embodied liberation in Buddhism, participatory theory, and feminist spirituality holds profound potential for transbody and transpersonal transformations which serve as a creative incubator to foster novel ways how to engage in contemporary social, ecological, and political dilemmas. Global climate change, food security, global land resource and energy issues are in urgent need of new approaches that go beyond business-as-usual to relieve harm, minimize suffering of humanity, and attain fullness of sentience. The metamodern participatory theory goes beyond whole-person psychology focused on the personal spheres. The power of the participatory lens is to expand the horizon of spiritual cocreations into social, ecological, and political spheres. It was shown that embodied liberation has been stymied to some extent by religious dogma, commodification of the body, radical conservatism, Trumpian style hyperreality, and antidemocratic cultural forces that have traumatized people, suppressed individual's freedom, and disrupted collective freedom. At the same time to romanticize embodied liberation or suggest striving toward the goal of maximizing the emancipation of body, mind, and femininities for the sake of people's liberation would be perilous.

Positive freedom perceived as self-actualization in order to realize one's true noumenal self may serve as motivator to seek participatory freedom. Specifically, people enslaved in contemporary technocentric cultures that constrain political, economic, and social freedom curtail freedom in the personal sphere and may also hamper enactment of novel cocreated spiritualities. Liberation is multifaceted and from a personal point of view invites the individual to be one's own master where life depends on self-agency and not on external forces (e.g., government, the nation state, public health, and education). In this sense, freedom is interpreted as self-realization—liberation from public duties and regulations, from oppressive social systems, from constructions of race and gender, from religious dogma and gurus, from self-centeredness, from dissociation from the body, from the social whole, from nature's ecological perils, and many more. This kind of "free" self may be inflated into some superlative personal entity (total self-identification and self-realization), complete self-abnegation, or some mix in between. Self-abnegation indicates retreat into an impersonal inner citadel of emptiness where one no longer feels attached to desires or property, no longer cares if one feels imprisoned (e.g., in form of oppressive social prison, mental prison, or a prison of an unhealthy toxic relationship), others are treated unjust, behave cruel or are harmed in some way. Such self-emancipation of individuals favoring personal freedom or ascetic *pratyekabuddhas* (lone or private Buddhas) escape the yoke of society and public spheres under the view that any form of control enslaves one. In such negative freedom, autonomy rather than any form of heteronomy matters. This kind of

embodied liberation is a narrow conception of freedom due to its heightened focus on intrapersonal and transpersonal participatory cocreation. Self-realization conflated with negative liberty may lead to propel tyranny and suffering but just in form of new clothes.

Although both participatory spirituality and various *Vajrayāna* Buddhist traditions place emphasis on embodiment and transpersonal and transbody transformations, both face various collective constraints due to the McDonaldization of the body (McBody), the objectification of the body that is prevalent in Western society, and pronounced patriarchal guru–student hierarchies in *Vajrayāna* sanghas (see Chapters 4 and 7). These limitations among others in the social, cultural, and political spheres curtail embodied liberation from the perspective of negative freedom. From the participatory point of view, subdued embodied liberation limits the cocreative enactment of subject–object hybridizations of novel spiritualities, while from the *Vajrayāna* Buddhist perspective it may hinder attaining liberation as a fruition state of completion. From the positive liberative perspective, participatory theory assumes that the mystery is undetermined and rejects any form of perennialism, while each of the *Vajrayāna* traditions offers a peculiar view of spiritual ultimates and provide a predetermined path of practices and liberative goals.

The Kantian positive conception of freedom as the free choice of people to align with the Western participatory or one of the *Vajrayāna* Buddhist views undergirds pluralistic cultures. The extend of people’s soteriological free choice for liberation must be weighed against the liberties of society and sentient beings.

The juxtaposition of liberation for one's own sake of happiness, joyfulness, bliss, mindfulness, bodyfulness, that is, the personal soteriological embodied liberation and the freedoms in the relational social realm (e.g., equality of freedom, justice, security, public order, and prosperity) reveals that neither positive nor negative conceptions of liberation alone bring forth a truer or more liberated humane ideal.

A Hegelian-inspired synthesis of embodied liberation integrates the (a) thesis of positive personal liberation, and (b) antithesis of negative interpersonal liberation for all sentient beings. A synthesis model of embodied liberation emerges that is grounded in ethics and balance of polarizing forces, such as feminine and masculine energies, or perennial and participatory spiritualities. This synthesized *Embodied Liberation Meta Model* entails the following: (a) personal, interpersonal, and transpersonal spheres; (b) soteriological pathways (BoSoP model)—ascending (transcendence), descending (immanence), and extending (expansion) pathways; (c) human faculties (e.g., mind, body, heart, subtle vital energies, and consciousness); (d) *bodhisattva*-ness and centrality of compassion in people and systems; (e) participatory events and participatory cosmology; (f) mind–body practices; (g) subject–object hybridizations; (h) a plurality of spiritualities, including various Buddhist traditions and feminist spirituality that have been subdued and suppressed historically; (i) embodiment as a dynamic process of lived immediate experience; and (j) positive and negative freedoms. The Embodied Liberation Meta Model synthesizes positive and negative embodied liberations that are viewed as an integrated whole grounded in participatory unity-in-diversity.

In Chapters 5 and 7 it was shown that the *Mahāyāna* Buddhist *bodhisattva* ideal and ethics entail morals and prosocial engagement rooted in compassion and loving-kindness that could greatly contribute to Meta Embodied Liberation in Western societies, specifically the United States of America. The *Mahāyāna bodhisattva* aspires to balance the paradoxical tension between personal liberation and liberation for all sentient beings. The amplification of compassion toward universal compassion for all sentient beings in the *Mahāyāna* emanates possibilities of liberation in the sense of absence of public constraints (e.g., harm through oppressive systems, clean air, abundance of food and water, healthy soils, unrestrained access to digital communication, open access to digital shared knowledge) and focus on individual embodied liberation (e.g., *tri-kāya*, emptiness, *nirvāṇa*). The *Mahāyāna* Buddhist *bodhisattva* ideal synthesizes positive and negative conceptions of freedom as well as individual and collective *bodhisattva*-ness and pro-social engagement; and thus, provides an ideal platform for moral and social engagement to enact Meta Embodied Liberation. The embrace of Buddhist *bodhisattva*-ness in the Western and global context offers transformational potential, specifically to expand the basic conceptions of human rights and dignity to grander compassionate conceptions of Meta Embodied Freedom.

The participatory integral *bodhisattva* ideal strives for one's own full liberation until the body, the heart, and the primary world is set free. This ideal implies a participatory way of living enacting freely in the unfolding of the mystery that is considered undetermined and dynamic. The integral *bodhisattva*

extends the commitment to free all sentient beings, including oneself, similar to the *Mahāyāna* Buddhist *bodhisattva* ideal. Though the integral *bodhisattva* does not limit its view to match Buddhist *bodhisattva* constructs or Buddhist dogmatic claims; instead, the integral *bodhisattva* ideal takes a more secular stance and fosters the harmonious participation of all human attributes within spiritual discovery without dissociations or bodily tensions and without striving to find a pre-given spiritual ultimate. Thus, the participatory integral *bodhisattva* supports the Embodied Liberation Meta Model and emphasis on mind–body practices without the baggage of Buddhist doctrinal views on emptiness that are complex and a matter of Buddhology and scholarship rather than practical ordinary lived reality. Though the well-developed Buddhist ethics, meditation, mind–body, and *pāramitā* practices provide ample opportunities to enrich Meta Embodied Liberation.

Does the Embodied Liberation Meta Model include all spiritualities, including esoteric Buddhist views that hold a reified spiritual ultimate in high regard? Participatory theory is adamant in refuting all spiritualities/religions that make claims in regard to spiritual ultimates. Therefore, a Participatory Embodied Liberation Meta Model would be bound to exclude specific Buddhist, feminist spiritualities, or other spiritual traditions that are not compliant with assumptions of participatory theory. However, on the spiritual path of development it cannot be denied that Buddhists are liberating their hearts, bodies, and minds and engulf in transpersonal and transbody transformations that lead to imperfect yet profound liberations. From an individualistic perspective there are ample of sequential

liberations and embodiment along the eightfold Buddhist path toward enlightenment that potentially free people. In my view, these incremental liberations toward the greater good need to be valued; hence, from a standpoint of inclusivity all *Theravāda*, *Mahāyāna*, and *Vajrayāna* Buddhist traditions are honored to enhance the diversity of spiritualities of the Embodied Liberation Meta Model. Each gradual (e.g., *Mahamudra*) and sudden (e.g., *Dzogchen* Buddhism) liberation and soteriological insights along the Buddhist paths can be viewed as a spiritual cocreation from the participatory point of view. The turnings of the wheel of dharma and different Buddhist traditions that have emerged over the past 2,500 years may be considered hybridizations with more to come as Western Buddhism is still in its infancy. Therefore, my proposition is to include all spiritualities that bring forth embodied liberation in the Embodied Liberation Meta Model irrespective of the assumptions these spiritualities make in regard to a specific spiritual ultimate.

My justification in regard to perennial assertions about the Embodied Liberation Meta Model is rooted in Karl Popper's (1963) falsification theory, which states that for a theory to be considered scientific it must be able to be tested and conceivably proven false. Spiritual ultimates, such as *rig pa*, *dharma-kāya*, or the *tri-kāya* in *Vajrayāna* Buddhism or other spiritualities, are not falsifiable by experience or measurements without doubt. But time-tested phenomenological experiences in meditation and qualitative and quantitative mind-body research have provided ample evidence for embodiment and

transpersonal and transbody development (see Chapter 4) that undergird the construct of embodied liberation.

Although Buddhist liberative constructs are irrefutable scientifically, these constructs may or may not be the ultimate truth. The Embodied Liberation Meta Model embraces an epistemological view of consequentialism (i.e., liberation as perceived by people), while no ontological assumptions in regard to spiritual ultimates or constructs are made. An important criterion for spiritualities to be included in the Embodied Liberation Meta Model is the potential a spirituality holds to enact novel cocreation of spiritualities that liberate in one way or another. Even mundane practices such as drinking a cup of tea completely present may bring forth a profound bodily or consciousness shift.

Feminine-spiritual liberation is also included in the Embodied Liberation Meta Model. Both feminine-in-spiritual diversity and spiritual-in-feminine diversity enact feminine-spiritual and spiritual-feminine hybridizations.²⁵ Such hybridizations hold profound potential to give more voice to femininities in spirituality. Femininities have been oppressed, subjugated, and viewed in opposition to the masculine specifically in patriarchal societies and religions. In this sense, to expand the liberation of femininities is critical for the thriving of local and global communities in which social and spiritual genderization and sexualization have been conflated.

Immanence, transcendence, and expansion of feminine spiritualities undergird potential novel antifragile states of being that mirror novel cocreated spiritualities in participatory theory. As such, the presented participatory feminist

spirituality holds profound power to liberate and emancipate femininities. The fuller expression of femininities enacts new understanding of femininities that are considered timeless at its core, yet dynamic and creative in its enactments of participatory spiritual events.

A radical participatory feminist spirituality will allow to nurture metamodern cultural sensibilities including honoring affects, nurture, care, and relationality at the same level as grand narratives of life and the world. The same principles as touched on above in the Embodied Liberation Meta Model apply to embodied liberation of femininities. It seems unfathomable to imagine a metamodern epoch that aims to integrate modern and postmodern values without a stronger expression of feminist spirituality. Critical analysis revealed the importance of cross-fertilization between femininities and spiritual, social, cultural, and political spheres. Metamodern sensibilities anticipate harmony and unity-in-diversity that undergird participatory feminist spirituality. An emerging metamodern participatory future holds promise for bridging polarities, including polarities between the feminine and masculine, female and male, and private spirituality and collective spiritualities. In contrast, hyperreality and post-truth attitudes have devalued objective facts in shaping public opinion and amplified emotion and personal beliefs. Metamodern plurality is fully aligned with assertions of participatory theory, and thus, participatory feminine spirituality is poised to foster embodied liberation.

The Embodied Liberation Meta Model allows to situate a plurality of spiritualities as exemplified by Buddhist traditions and feminine spiritualities in

this dissertation. But there is no limit to include other spiritualities as well in future research. Importantly, spiritualities cannot be isolated from the social, cultural, political, and ecological fabric in which they emerge. A critical theoretical approach of embodied liberation, as demonstrated in this research study, is only meaningful if fertilized by such a pluralistic fabric.

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ENDNOTES

¹ *Embodiment* has been defined as the felt sense of being localized within one's physical body and references the lived immediate experience of one's own body (Mehling et al., 2009). To embody the lived experience of a particular moment means to viscerally feel sensory, motor, emotional, and imaginal experiences rather than to funnel arousal into mental concepts, ideas, and categories (Fogel, 2013). The Western conceptions of embodiment bound to the human body differ from metaphysical body conceptions in Buddhism (and other spiritualities and religions) that include the cosmic, empty, and nondual bodies.

² The term *bodhisattva-ness* in this dissertation refers to the conceptions of the *bodhisattva* from the *Mahāyāna* Buddhist view, which developed the *bodhisattva* ideal and ethics to the greatest extent. Historically, Western *bodhisattva* conceptions, such as the integral and naturalized *bodhisattva*, were developed more recently due to enculturating the *Mahāyāna* Buddhist *bodhisattva* construct and Western theories and philosophies, respectively. Note that even within *Mahāyāna* Buddhism the *bodhisattva* resembles a plurality of aspects, such as aspiration and realization of bodhisattvas, personal characteristics, idealistic and mystical conceptions. Therefore, the term *bodhisattva-ness* does not attempt to essentialize, universalize, or reduce the *bodhisattva* to one specific thing. On the contrary, *bodhisattva-ness* refers to the plurality of characteristics and perspectives rooted in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism.

³ *Hybridization* refers to “the process whereby separate and disparate entities or processes generate another entity or process (the hybrid), which shares certain features with each of its sources but which is not purely compositional” (Sanchez-Stockhammer, 2012, p. 133).

⁴ Non-Buddhist *bodhisattvas* are Western philosophical conceptions that use the term *bodhisattva* but without attribution to its Buddhist roots. Two non-Buddhist *bodhisattva* constructs explored in this dissertation are: (a) the integral *bodhisattva* that is associated with participatory theory, a prominent theory in transpersonal psychology (Ferrer, 2017), while the (b) naturalized *bodhisattva* is rooted in neurophysicalism (O. Flanagan, 2011).

⁵ A participatory event is not to be confused with the state of *nondual consciousness*. Loy (1983) asserted the plurality of nonduality suggesting that there are many kinds of nondual states of consciousness, though he ultimately regarded them as perspectives of the same ground or phenomenon.

⁶ The participatory view assumes that the transpersonal *participatory event* results in a transpersonal experience, and considers the ontological dimension of the transpersonal phenomena as the primary one that then results in the experiential. Therefore, participatory theory rejects an egocentric position that essentially views transpersonal phenomena as human inner experiences claiming to own or possess something (Ferrer, 2002).

⁷ Note that in this dissertation I explored the feminist spirituality literature written from the positionality of feminists. I reframe *feminist spirituality* to *participatory feminine spirituality* based on participatory theory that acknowledges the plurality of femininities and spiritualities. This theory stresses subject–object hybridizations and unity-in-diversity, which is expressed as feminine-in-spiritual diversity and spiritual-in-feminine diversity.

⁸ *Perennialism* is “the idea that a philosophical current exists that has endured through centuries, and that is able to integrate harmoniously all traditions in terms of a single Truth which underlies the apparent plurality of worldviews ... this unity in human knowledge stems from the existence of a single ultimate reality which can be apprehended by the human intellect under certain conditions” (Ferrer, 2002, p. 73).

⁹ According to Heron (2003), “The more real the Many the more real the One, the greater the diversity the greater the unity of the whole, the more irreducible subjectivity to objectivity and vice versa, the greater their inseparable interdependence and the more variable their allocations, the more supreme in majesty the divine Many-One. And this, so far as it goes, is my contextually engaged, subjective–objective experience: not of a duality, nor of nonduality, but of a *diunity* ... this diunity affirms the distinctness of the inseparable two—Many and One, manifestation and spirit, subject and object—within the one” (p. 14).

¹⁰ *Substance monism* assumes that there is only one substance in the universe and everything that exists (including bodies, rocks, and mind) is made of this one substance, which is called God or “nature.” In substance monism, truth is oneness or singleness with all that is—which acclaims that there is only one substance and thus denies independent human agency and free will (Nadler, 2020).

¹¹ C. G. Jung conceptualized archetypes as complexes that reside in the collective unconscious of the psyche. According to Jung, *archetypes* (i.e., recurrent psychic symbols) populate the collective unconscious of the psyche. These archetypes transcend space and time, and thus are very powerful in shaping the lived life. Jungian psychology assumes that the structure of complexes is made up of associated images and frozen memories. Archetypal images include the Mother, the Father, the anima, the animus, and many others (Stein, 2004). D. S. Wehr (1988) pointed out that Jung made a distinction between archetypes and archetypal images, which have often been conflated in literature. The archetype (empty and purely formal) was considered merely a predisposition to form images; only the archetypes universally reside in the unconscious.

¹² In this dissertation the definition of *Therāvāda* provided by Buswell and Lopez (2016) in the *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* was adopted. The term *Therāvāda* has been bound with controversy. In Pali, *Therāvāda* means “Way of the Elders” and designates the traditional monastic and textual lineages. Buddhagosa used the term *Therāvāda*, but in reference not to a separate school but to a lineage of elders going back to the first Buddhist council. The term *Therāvāda* (Skt. *Sthaviravāda*, “School of the Elders”) is used in some instances

in the Buddhist literature, which is claimed to have been transmitted to Sri Lanka in the third century BCE. However, the term *Sthaviravāda* is not attested in Indian sources. By the 11th century, what is today designated as the *Therāvāda* became the dominant form of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, achieving a similar status in Burma, Cambodia, Thailand, and Laos by the 13th and 14th century. In the 1950s, the World Fellowship of Buddhism adopted a formal resolution replacing the pejorative term *Hinayāna* with *Therāvāda* (in reference to the non-*Mahāyāna* tradition). Despite the way in which scholars have portrayed the *Therāvāda* tradition, it is neither synonymous with early Buddhism, nor a more pristine form of the religion prior to the rise of *Mahāyāna*. Although *Therāvāda* soteriological theory includes a path for the *bodhisattva*, the *bodhisattva* is a much rarer sanctified figure here than in the *Mahāyāna*; the most common ideal is the *arhat* in the *Therāvāda*. Another distinction between *Therāvāda* and *Mahāyāna* is that in the former the *arhat* achieves the same type of *nirvāṇa*, the major difference between them being that the Buddha finds the path to *nirvāṇa* independently, while the *arhat* achieves his or her enlightenment by following the path set forth by the Buddha.

¹³ The 10 perfections (Pāli, *pāramī*; Sanskrit, *pāramitā*) in the *Theravāda* Buddhist tradition are: giving (Pāli, *dāna*), morality (Pāli, *sīla*), renunciation (Pāli, *nekkhamma*), wisdom (Pāli, *paññā*), effort (Pāli, *virīya*), patience (Pāli, *khanti*), truthfulness (Pāli, *sacca*), determination (Pāli, *adhiṭṭhāna*), loving kindness (Pāli, *mettā*), and equanimity (Pāli, *upekkhā*; Buswell & Lopez, 2014).

¹⁴ The Four Immeasurables (Pāli, *brahma-vihāra*), also called divine abiding, are lovingkindness (Pāli, *metta*), compassion (Pāli, *karuṇā*), empathetic joy (Pāli, *pamudita*), and equanimity or impartiality (Pāli, *upekkhā*; Buswell & Lopez, 2014).

¹⁵ In *Mahāyāna* Buddhism the six Great Perfections (Sanskrit, *pāramitās*) are: generosity (Sanskrit, *dāna*), moral discipline (Sanskrit, *śīla*), patient endurance (Sanskrit, *kṣānti*), perseverance or exertion (Sanskrit, *vīrya*), meditative concentration (Sanskrit, *dhyāna*), and wisdom (Sanskrit, *prajñā*; Pelden, 2007).

¹⁶ According to Buswell and Lopez (2014), *nirvāṇa* (“extinction”) has multiple meanings (e.g., soteriological goal of the Buddhist path; “blowing out” desire, the three poisons, and afflictions. In a more technical sense, *nirvāṇa* is interpreted as the cessation of the afflictions (Sanskrit, *kleśas*) of greed/sensuality, hatred/aversion, and delusion/ignorance, and eventually of the mind and body, such that rebirth ceases (i.e., the cessation of suffering). *Nirvāṇa* has been interpreted as an absence of suffering; not a specific place or state of existence since by definition that would mean it was part of *samsāra*. At the upper reaches of the path, the adept must pass through three gates to liberation (Sanskrit, *vimokṣamukha*), which mark the transition from the compounded realm of *samsāra* to the un compounded real of *nirvāṇa*. In approaching *nirvāṇa*, the adept first passes through the gate of emptiness (Sanskrit, *śūnyatā*), which reveals that *nirvāṇa* is empty of anything associated with a sense of self. Next comes the gate of signlessness (Sanskrit, *ānimitta*), which reveals that *nirvāṇa* has nothing by

which it may be perceived. Finally comes the gate of wishlessness (Sanskrit, *apraṇihita*), meaning that *nirvāṇa* can be achieved only when one no longer has any desire for, or attachment to, *nirvāṇa*. There are two types of *nirvāṇa*, “the *nirvāṇa* with remainder” (Sanskrit, *sopadhiśeṣanirvana*), the state of *nirvāṇa* attained prior to death, in which the causes of all future existence have been extinguished. The second is the “*nirvāṇa* without remainder” (Sanskrit, *anupadhiśeṣanirvana*), the *nirvāṇa* achieved at death. This latter *nirvāṇa* was believed to be achieved by the Buddha at the time of his demise at Kusinagari.

¹⁷ According to Buswell and Lopez (2014), the buddha vehicle (Sanskrit, *buddhayāna*) leads to the state of Buddhahood. When the path to Buddhahood is perfected, the adept achieves the full range of special qualities unique to the buddhas according to the Lotus *Sūtra*. In this *sūtra* three carts of salvation are promised. The first is the *śrāvakayāna* (the vehicle for disciples) in which teachings were learned from a buddha and which culminates in becoming a “worthy one” (*arhat*). Next is the *pratyekabuddhayāna* (the vehicle of the solitary buddha), those who strive for enlightenment but do not rely on a buddha in their past life. The third is the *bodhisattvayāna* (the path followed by the *bodhisattva*). The Buddha declares in the Lotus *Sūtra* that the three vehicles to be a form of skillful means for there is in fact only one vehicle (Sanskrit, *ekayāna*, single vehicle), also referred to as the buddha vehicle (*buddhayāna*) which carries sentient beings from *samsāra* to *nirvāṇa*.

¹⁸ According to Pelden (2007), the *bodhisattva* possesses three qualities of freedom or primordial wisdom: being free from (a) emotional veils (e.g., freedom of obscuration arising from craving and afflictive emotions); (b) cognitive veils (e.g., freedom of obscuration that are an impediment to knowledge); and (c) meditative absorption, including to be free from selfishness and an inferior attitude.

¹⁹ The term *spirituality* has emerged as a competitor to *religion* with various definitions. Spirituality is conceived as broader and less dogmatic than religion, but the term has been attributed with contradictory meaning. While some associate spirituality with a theistic worldview, others associate it with a non-theistic worldview; similarly, some understand spirituality as lived religion, while for others it connotes an opposition to religion (Streib & Klein, 2016). Gregerson (2008) defined spirituality as the inner experience of the sacred—God—and transcending consciousness, while Schneider (1986) defined spirituality as the experience of striving to integrate one’s self-transcendent life toward the perceived ultimate value. Clamar (2008) views spirituality as a very personal, individual experience that mediates between the self, soul, and body, inspiring the life force. According to Rayburn and Richmond (1996), spirituality is more concerned with caring for others, searching for the good and true, and recognizing the guidance of forces outside oneself that influence one’s life path, while religiousness is regarded as doctrinal and usually involving organized community. Religion has been described as “any set of established stories, ritual performances, mind disciplines, bodily practices, and social institutions that have been built up over time around extreme encounters with some anomalous

presence, energy, hidden order, or power that is experienced as radically Other or More” (Kripal, 2014, p. 94). In this paper I adopt Ferrer’s (2017) participatory account term *spiritual* (discussed below). According to Ferrer, spiritual knowing is a participatory activity that is not neutral, objective, or merely cognitive. This kind of knowing engages individuals in a participatory, connected, and often passionate activity that may involve the body, vital subtle energies, the heart, and consciousness. Spiritual knowing is participatory knowing; it involves cocreative participation and communion in the mystery, rather than possession, appropriation, or passive representation of knowledge.

²⁰ *Thealogy* is a neologism in feminist literature and was derived from Greek *thea* (Goddess) and *logos* (meaning; see Christ, 1997).

²¹ *Nougamy* is “a fuzzy, liminal and multivocal semantic-existential space” beyond the mono–poly binary relationship system (Ferrer, 2018, p. 3).

²² P. C. Johnson (2016) discerned between hybridity and syncretism in the realm of religion. Hybridity is an intentional (conscious) or unconscious mixture (in contrast to purity of religion, languages, cultures, ethnicity, or others), while syncretism underwent different shifts in interpretation—some positive, some negative—ranging from an early alliance between Hellenistic and Christian ideas and practices, or Protestantism and Catholicism; later, syncretism was consistently used as an accusation against the practice of illegitimate forms of Christianity. In a positive vein, syncretism was invoked to signal cosmopolitanism and ecumenical religious exchange. The term *hybridization* is synonymous with *syncretism* and *creolization* in its expression of the intermixing of cultures (or other), but with less historical baggage and negative connotations than colonization, Americanization, deculturalization, denaturing, inequality of power, fragmentation, abuse, and subsumption of the weaker (Stewart, 1999).

²³ The *Madonna-Whore complex* is a psychospiritual contradiction that has greatly impacted women’s self-image and life choices due to feelings of inferiority and brokenness. The *whore* conjures negative and degrading images of women prostitutes and the *virgin Madonna* is one who has never had sex, which is considered sinful and dirty (Teish, 2005).

²⁴ The *anima* was considered the image of the feminine in the male psyche, whereas the *animus* was considered the image of the masculine in the female psyche. C. G. Jung’s assertion that the animus (“spirit”) is dominant in men who tend to lack Eros (relatedness or “soul”), while the anima is dominant in women who tend to lack Logos (i.e., access to “spirit,” intellect) are overgeneralizations (Stein, 2004).

²⁵ Feminine-spiritual and spiritual-feminine hybridizations bring forth hybrids with the first word (e.g., feminine) indicating the primary and the second word (e.g., spiritual) denoting the secondary entities involved in the hybridization process to form the hybrid (e.g., feminine-spiritual).