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Incorporating Spiritual Analysis: A Review of Jing Li, Rebecca Oxford and Tom Culham's Toward a Spiritual Research Paradigm

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Abstract

Toward a Spiritual Research Paradigm is one of those books that forces readers to push the boundaries beyond the "traditional paradigms" and then push a little bit further. I found this book spoke to me on a primal level helping to bridge connections between what I have been taught so far, my personal experiences and what is in my spiritual life. Throughout reading the book, I noticed my perspectives expanded beyond what I expected and I found myself thinking of applications for my current and possibly even future studies.

Keywords

Research, Evaluation, Research and Evaluation, Research Project Guide, Guide

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Incorporating Spiritual Analysis: A Review of Jing Li, Rebecca Oxford and Tom Culham's *Toward a Spiritual Research Paradigm*

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Toward a Spiritual Research Paradigm is one of those books that forces readers to push the boundaries beyond the “traditional paradigms” and then push a little bit further. I found this book spoke to me on a primal level helping to bridge connections between what I have been taught so far, my personal experiences and what is in my spiritual life. Throughout reading the book, I noticed my perspectives expanded beyond what I expected, and I found myself thinking of applications for my current and possibly even future studies. **Keywords:** Research, Evaluation, Research and Evaluation, Research Project Guide, Guide

Our world is incredibly complex and many of us live or balance between our many parts; for me, I live perched between firm statistical quantitative catholic upbringing and, my other side, where I cherish my yoga and Ayurvedic beliefs and practices. *Toward a Spiritual Research Paradigm* spoke to my soul and encouraged me in connections beyond one paradigm or way of thinking. In my very first qualitative analysis course, I remember feeling overwhelmed by the paradigms, applications and ways to work with or let your data speak to you. In all honesty, it scared me, but that unknowingness was exciting and had doors yet to be explored. This book was the same way; I wanted to keep reading to see where the next thought to spark potential future interest would come from.

Toward a Spiritual Research Paradigm, at first look seems like your regular, standard book for research paradigms, but the editors have hidden amazing “Easter eggs” that caused me to question my thoughts and beliefs on the topics. I found myself, in many of the chapter’s, thinking about how I could use this or that paradigm. While I am still in the infancy stages of my academic research career, some of the topics and chapters in the book caused me to pause and reread (some more than once). I appreciated the author’s attempts to explain each paradigm, possible applications, personal reflections and areas of unknown. I am a visual person and find charts helpful for me to understand differences and similarities, as well as to grasp the boundaries of a concept. There were several charts throughout the book that really helped to make some of these connections, especially for some of the spiritual paradigms that were foreign to me. I wish that there were more charts, but I recognize not everything can be put into rows and columns or graphics. With my limited research experience, I know that experience and following my data’s voice are essential. Some of the chapters really made me feel as if I understood how the author was using the paradigm. While I wish that there were more examples, I am grateful for the ones that were provided in very personal and informal conversation throughout the book; this made me almost feel as if I was actually with the author listening to him or her tell the story.

The book is a compilation of various paradigms that apply under a spiritual research paradigm. Different authors write most chapters. Each chapter can stand alone, but together, they weave a fabric of applications that deepen the understanding of the spiritual research paradigm for the reader.

Knowing the Unknown, opens the book and chapter 1 with looking at methods and approaches that move beyond the “normal” but that stays unrefined as a paradigm continuing to cross boundaries (east/west, science/spirituality, etc.) and challenge the researcher and

paradigms. Throughout the book, this message with the theme of transcendence is reinforced. In chapter 2, I was surprised to see the example of thermodynamics to help explain the paradigm, but this example proves the chapter's conversation that connections and boundary-less exploration using the paradigm(s) is encouraged. A chart concludes the chapter comparing major philosophical approaches under the paradigm. It becomes increasingly obvious to the reader how personal and introspective the application of a spiritual paradigm is. As one continues to read the chapters and delve deeper into the spiritual conversation addressing spiritual faiths and perspectives, to include eastern (Confucian, Daoist, Hinduism), Western (Judeo-Christian), as well as Native American spirituality, Creation spirituality. Some of these topics were new to me and really pushed the envelope of my understanding and comprehension. Furthermore, the encouragement to continue cultivating the connections between whatever the researcher's world and life have as part of their being, provides the bridge opportunity to engage what are often very different and opposed worlds. I found this encouragement and openness from the authors refreshing and comforting.

As a person learning about the paradigms in spiritual research, some of the topics required significant effort to read and work to comprehend. For me, this is where the charts and diagrams, as well as the examples of current applications by the authors, helped to better understand. I found the connections back to topics that are common knowledge in our culture very helpful. For example, in chapter 3, Lamb talks us through how a Franciscan friar searching for understanding created what we know today to be modern scientific thinking and how the term experiment came to be. Through this example we learn to see how the division of spirituality and science that we know today was not the intent; but instead that "science and spirituality, knowledge and morality, should all go hand in hand" (p. 59). Miller, in chapter 6, further reinforces this need for connections and more personal reflection by quoting Morris Berman: "'[W]e do not have methodologies of feeling, only of analyzing' and he calls for 'a visceral approach to history,' which would 'create bodily and emotional echoes in the person who reads historical studies'" (p. 127). There is a conscious call in this chapter to use meditation and self-reflection as a way to research deeper. As a religious person, a math-based STEM focused person, and one who values and is learning more about Eastern philosophies (Ayurveda, yoga, meditation), these examples helped to not only make these connections but to also reinforce the personal nature and exploratory journey that is spiritual research.

This book, or individual chapters, would be useful for anyone looking to learn more about spiritual paradigms and begin the journey. Given that the topics are intended to expand beyond the traditional envelope of research paradigms, I would think that someone who had already been exposed to these topics would be better prepared to handle the conversation.

Reference

Lin, J., Oxford, R., & Culham, T. (Eds.). (2016). *Towards a spiritual research paradigm: Exploring new ways of knowing, researching, and being*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Author Note

Stephanie Fitzsimmons is a PhD candidate at the University of South Florida. Her research interests include self-efficacy, gender differences in self-efficacy, STEM and self-efficacy. Stephanie has degrees and certificates in business, math, education and six sigma. She is the STEM Education Manager for a global security company. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: fitzsimmonss@mail.usf.edu.

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