

Article

Spirituality, Gender, and Expressive Selfhood

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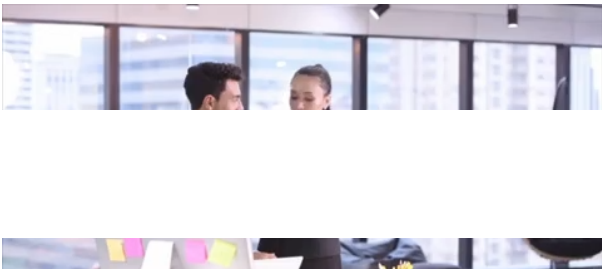
Abstract

This article discusses contemporary spiritualities, focusing in particular on the recent growth of practices attending to “mind, body, and spirit” and centered on the goal of “holistic well-being.” We argue that the growing popularity of such “holistic spirituality” since the 1980s can be greatly illuminated by reference to Charles Taylor’s account of the expressive mode of modern selfhood. Taylor’s account is limited, however, by its inability to explain why women are disproportionately active within the sphere of holistic spirituality. By paying closer attention to gender, we seek to refine Taylor’s approach and to advance our understanding of contemporary spirituality. Drawing on findings from two qualitative studies of holistic spirituality and health carried out in the United Kingdom, this article offers an analysis of what the “subjective turn” may mean for women. We argue that holistic spiritualities align with traditional spheres and representations of femininity, while simultaneously supporting and encouraging a move away from selfless to expressive selfhood. By endorsing and sanctioning “living life for others” and “living life for oneself,” holistic spiritualities offer a way of negotiating dilemmas of selfhood that face many women — and some men—in late modern contexts.


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
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