

Applying Sociocultural Theory to Explain Cognitive Development of the Queer Mediums in Southeast Asia

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the intersection of Neo–Animism ontology, sociocultural theory, and cognitive development in the trance rituals of gender–diverse spirit mediums in Southeast Asia. The United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has faced scrutiny for its anthropocentric focus on economic growth, which often overlooks gender diversity and the ontological interconnectedness between human and non–human entities. Key Findings include 1) Cultural Tools for Cognitive Restructuring: Spirit mediumship functions as a sophisticated “cultural tool,” facilitating a shift in social identity from marginalized status to sacred agency. 2) Neuro–Protective Scaffolding: The practice mitigates spiritual cognitive dissonance and provides a “neural buffer” for the prefrontal cortex and amygdala. This process counteracts chronic minority stress by regulating cortisol levels and bolstering executive functions. 3) Cognitive Re–alignment: Results indicate a profound restructuring of self–perception, transitioning from alienation to “interconnectedness.” 4) Digital Democratization: The study identifies the rise of “Digital More Knowledgeable Others” (MKOs) on social media, which democratizes access to esoteric knowledge. In conclusion, this research challenges Western–centric secularization paradigms by asserting that sustainable development in Southeast Asia must transcend purely human–centric models. It argues that indigenous spiritual systems are not merely coping mechanisms but vital cognitive scaffolds that foster psychological resilience and redistribute

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social agency. These findings offer a critical framework for utilizing culture as a driver for inclusive, gender-sensitive, sustainable development.

Keywords: Neo-Animism, Gender-Diverse Mediums, Socio-Cultural Neuroscience, Cognitive Development

การประยุกต์ใช้ทฤษฎีสังคมวัฒนธรรมเพื่ออธิบาย พัฒนาการทางพุทธิปัญญาของคนทรงเพศหลากหลาย ในเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้

พัชรินทร์ ลีรสุนทร²

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยฉบับนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์หลักเพื่อศึกษาจุดตัดระหว่างการเกิดขึ้นของทฤษฎีการสรรพลึงล้วนมีวิญญานยุคใหม่ ทฤษฎีสังคมวัฒนธรรมและพัฒนาการทางพุทธิปัญญาในกลุ่มคนทรงเพศหลากหลายในพิธีกรรมเข้าทรงของภูมิภาคเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ ท่ามกลางการวิพากษ์วิจารณ์วาระการพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืน ค.ศ.2030 ขององค์การสหประชาชาติที่มุ่งเน้นมนุษย์เป็นศูนย์กลางและการเติบโตทางเศรษฐกิจ จนอาจจะเลยความหลากหลายทางเพศและความสัมพันธ์เชิงกาววิยาระหว่างมนุษย์และสิ่งที่ไม่ใช่มนุษย์ การศึกษานี้บูรณาการทฤษฎีสังคมวัฒนธรรมของไวทอดสกีเข้ากับประสาทวิทยาศาสตร์เชิงสังคมวัฒนธรรมร่วมสมัยเพื่อวิเคราะห์พื้นที่พิธีกรรมการเข้าทรงในฐานะ “พื้นที่รอยต่อแห่งพัฒนาการ” ที่เอื้อต่อการสร้างเสริมศักยภาพทางพุทธิปัญญาในกลุ่มคนหลากหลายทางเพศ โดยใช้ระเบียบวิธีวิจัยแบบทฤษฎีฐานรากเชิงสร้างสรรค์ ผ่านกรณีศึกษาจากประเทศไทย เวียดนาม อินโดนีเซีย และเมียนมา ผลการวิจัยพบว่า 1) การเป็นร่างทรงทำหน้าที่เป็นเครื่องมือทางวัฒนธรรมที่ซับซ้อนซึ่งช่วยปรับโครงสร้างพุทธิปัญญาปรับเปลี่ยนอัตลักษณ์ทางสังคมจากกลุ่มคนชายขอบสู่การเป็นผู้มีอำนาจศักดิ์สิทธิ์ 2) การปฏิบัติพิธีกรรมช่วยลดความขัดแย้งทางพุทธิปัญหาด้านจิตวิญญาณและสร้างกลไกป้องกันทางประสาทให้แก่สมองส่วนหน้าและต่อมอะมิกดาลา ซึ่งช่วยลดความเครียดสะสมในคนกลุ่มน้อยในสังคม โดยการควบคุมระดับคอร์ติซอลและเสริมสร้างหน้าที่การบริหารจัดการของสมอง 3) ผลการวิจัยชี้ให้เห็นถึงการปรับโครงสร้างการรับรู้ตนเองอย่างลึกซึ้ง โดยการเปลี่ยนผ่านจากความรู้สึก

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แปลกแยกไปสู่ “ความรู้สึกเชื่อมโยงผูกพัน” 4) ผลการศึกษาพบการเกิดขึ้นของ “ผู้มีความรู้มากกว่าในรูปแบบดิจิทัล (Digital More Knowledgeable Others: DMKO)” บนสื่อออนไลน์ ซึ่งช่วยให้การเข้าถึงทางจิตวิญญาณเฉพาะทางเป็นไปได้ไปอย่างแพร่หลายมากขึ้น โดยสรุป การศึกษานี้ท้าทายกระบวนทัศน์การแยกโลกทางธรรมออกจากทางโลกตามแบบตะวันตก โดยยืนยันว่าการพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืนในเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ต้องก้าวข้ามแบบจำลองที่ยึดมนุษย์เป็นศูนย์กลาง ระบบความเชื่อท้องถิ่นไม่ใช่เพียงกลไกการปรับตัว แต่เป็นโครงสร้างค้ำจุนทางพุทธิปัญญาที่สำคัญในการสร้างความยืดหยุ่นทางจิตวิญญาณและการกระจายอำนาจทางสังคม ข้อค้นพบนี้เป็นแนวคิดสำคัญในการใช้ต้นทุนทางวัฒนธรรมเป็นแรงขับเคลื่อนการพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืนที่ครอบคลุมและคำนึงถึงความละเอียดอ่อนทางเพศสภาพ

คำสำคัญ: แนวคิดสรรพสิ่งมีชีวิตวิญญาณยุคใหม่ คนทรงเพศหลากหลาย ประสาทวิทยาศาสตร์เชิงสังคมวัฒนธรรม การพัฒนาพุทธิปัญญา

Introduction

Since the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda was announced in 2016, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have become the most widely discussed framework among social development planners. The SDGs suggest that ending poverty requires a focus on economic growth alongside human-centric development ontologies (Kemper & Ballantine, 2019). However, drawing on dominant marketing ontologies and feminism, several studies have criticized the SDGs for focusing solely on human producers, customers, or consumers, and on economic stakeholders (Helkkula & Arnould, 2022).

The author initiates a discussion on two key issues. First, she notes the neglect of gender diversity, particularly given the evidence of the popularity of queer mediums in Southeast Asia. This popularity is demonstrated by their increasing social roles: as key performers in *séance* processes, as sources of opportunity for self-development, and as figures who influence the way of life for people in the region (Spiro, 1967, p. 48, pp. 113–119). Second, she addresses the SDGs' lack of acknowledgment regarding the profound interconnection between human and non-human entities, which is essential for establishing a new form of development. By applying Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and multidisciplinary analysis, the intersection of spiritual beliefs, social neurobiology, and cognitive development in queer mediums can be revealed. This initiation underlies cultural beliefs, ritual practices, and specific types of co-creative communication among social actors. This analytical approach suggests that these practices offer an affordable and culturally embedded solution for the cognitive development of queer mediums.

In Southeast Asia, the *séance* ceremony represents one of the most complex social activities. Deeply rooted in animism and matriarchal structures, the ceremony is recognized as one of the most powerful social mechanisms influencing people's lives. The ceremony essentially integrates the material and spiritual worlds, conceptualizing a sacred union. It is predicated on the belief that every entity possesses a distinct spiritual essence. The *séance* process

comprises complicated rituals, delicate offerings, aesthetic performances, a variety of social activities involving multiple social actors, and intricate interconnection activities between human and non-human entities (Bénédicte & Jackson, 2022; Jackson & Baumann, 2021a, b).

Historically, women in Southeast Asia held the primary power positions as the sole mediums in séance ceremonies. Female mediums used rituals, sacrifices, and worshipping objects as social tools to gain power and achieve higher social status and respect from the bio-community for centuries (Guthrie, 2004). Although the beginning of the gradual change from women to a mixed sexual identity remains unclear, currently, the more recognized genders of mediums—characterized by queer mediums or representations of the agent—are less likely to reflect the original “woman agent” tradition.

Chauvet (2012) and Endres (2011) supported understanding the relationship between spirit possession cults, the roles of social actors, and forms of supernatural performances that could reveal a diverse sociocultural stratum across classes and social systems. Sennett (2012, p. 17) proposed that ceremonies enable the expressive cooperation of religion, the workplace, politics, and the lives of the people. Adler and Pouliot (2011) supported the idea that rituals were more than routines or competent performances; they were social activities empowering and connecting participants. Kertzer (1988) highlighted the importance of rituals in re-ordering or dis-ordering society. Instead of focusing on transcendent forms of human beings and supernatural power, Descola (2013) and Sprenger (2021) suggested that the animist axiom—which circulates all types of resources, including information, power, and materials—is the key factor to development.

Considering the sociocultural changes that have impacted the séance process and the social status of mediums, this study is significant as it may reveal psycho-social-cultural factors that could lead to proposals for developing the potential of queer mediums.

Neo-Animistic Ontologies and the Seance Ceremony

Traditionally, studies of animism focused on principles of animation regarding the attribution of sentience to ghosts, spirits, and animistic places. The fundamental belief was that everything, including phenomena and a wide range of beings existing between the spiritual and physical worlds, possessed agency. Ethnographic studies often focused on (1) describing various types of spirits and souls and (2) the study of animism involving the attribution of personhood (Swancutt, 2019). The arrival of socio-anthropological scholars of animism allowed ethnographic studies to be more grounded in philosophy, modern science, and various theoretical concepts. Tylor (1977, p. 426) suggested that a wider sociocultural perspective through anthropological conceptualization opened a broader perspective for animist studies.

Neo-Animistic Ontologies (N-AO) highlight different gender perspectives and acknowledge scientific approaches for a better understanding of communication. Descola (2014, p. 275) defined N-AO as a world characterized by souls and the discontinuity of physical bodies of both humans and non-humans, including technological items, the environment, and other objects. For N-AO animists, life involves the circulation of resources, information, power, and materials. Using scientific approaches, N-AO offers a deeper understanding of resource integration and the exchange of social services among social beings in the bio-community (Sprenger, 2021).

Neo-animists believe that all social beings have “selves” that can exist in different forms. The concept of a social being extends beyond the human realm, positing a community where agency, personhood, and the capacity for social relationships are extended to non-human entities, including animals, plants, spirits, and features of the landscape (Harvey, 2017). This perspective defines social beings not by biological classification but by their capacity for relationality and exchange, recognizing any entity that possesses interiority, intention, and the ability to engage in reciprocal communication within a vast, interconnected network (Jackson & Baumann, 2021a, 2021b). By rejecting the Western anthropocentric nature-culture dichotomy, Neo-Animism views the world as

a complex, non-hierarchical social field where all intentional participants are considered equally deserving of social recognition and ethical consideration.

The principles of N-AO offer a transformative framework for social policy studies by challenging the prevailing anthropocentric model of governance and sustainability (Arnould, 2022). N-AO fundamentally posits that personhood and agency are not exclusive to humans but are extended to non-human entities (such as nature, spirits, and animals), thereby creating a wider “community of persons” based on relationality (Harvey, 2017). This shift necessitates policy changes by: (1) redefining sustainability as an “eco-economy of persons” focused on reciprocal exchange and the well-being of the entire biotic community, rather than purely human self-interest (Arnould, 2022); and (2) expanding the scope of ethics and law to potentially grant legal personhood and rights to non-human entities, fundamentally altering public administration frameworks concerning resource management and environmental protection (Jackson & Baumann, 2021a).

A combination of multidisciplinary approaches, psycho-anthropological studies, and the effective circulation of resources provided broader theoretical concepts in social development studies. N-AO did not ascribe transcendent forms to social beings but accepted differentiation. The dominant perspective of N-AO was the “flattened distinctions of all beings” (Descola, 2013, p. 352).

Sociocultural Theory and Cognitive Development

Lev Vygotsky provided sociocultural theory for the study of cognitive development (McLeod, 2025). By focusing on sociocultural factors, Vygotsky outlined the relationship between social interaction, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), culturally specific tools, and cognitive development. According to Vygotsky (1978, 1987), culture is a vital source for human cognitive development. It provides tools for intellectual adaptation, which are key processes in higher-order mental development and the learning capacity. To be accepted as a member of the community, social interactions provide opportunities for humans to engage in social challenges and meaningful activities. Rogoff (1990)

supported Vygotsky's ideology in a study on learning methods among Micronesian Islanders. By highlighting linguistic diversity as a part of culture, Rogoff suggested that adult learning varies and that "cultural-specific tools" play a crucial role. Shaffer (1996) also supported this through an experimental study on using jigsaw puzzles through collaborative dialogue and cooperative work.

By considering the meanings attached to objects, events, and experiences, humans have opportunities to learn how to think, develop cultural-specific tools, and increase their problem-solving capacity. Social interaction enlarged human accessibility to quantitative information and developed higher-order mental functions, logical thinking, and higher mental abilities regardless of experience. Nonetheless, culturally specific tools require a skillful tutor, verbal instructions, performance, and model behaviors to generate effective collaborative dialogue (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky (1962) stated that thought and language are the fundamental sources for producing self-directed or inner speech. Thus, language is not merely a tool for communication but a tool for intellectual adaptation. It is inner dialogue, or the internalization of language, that helps humans plan and carry out social activities. Vygotsky disagreed with Piaget's theory (1959) regarding the sequence of cognitive development. To establish intellectual adaptation, social dialogue increases reasoning, logical thinking, and formal mental abilities. Two types of social dialogue include (1) intersubjectivity, where people with different understandings share ideas and adjust perspectives with other members of the bio-community, and (2) scaffolding, where private speech can be developed.

Vygotsky (1987) offered two major principles: the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) and the ZPD. To achieve active adult learning, encouragement and opportunities for dialogue between humans and the MKO in the ZPD are crucial. The MKO can be someone or something with a higher ability level concerning events, concepts, or problems. While the ZPD offers learning space, the MKO fosters collaborative learning through various forms of sociocultural dialogue.

Recent scholars have coined the term “Socio–Cultural Neuroscience” to bridge Vygotsky’s theory with neuroscientific evidence. They argue that the unit of analysis for development is not just the individual brain but the interacting brain–to–brain system. Kidd & Jackman (2024) bridge the gap between neuroscience and the sociology of religion for Transgender and Gender Diverse (TGD) populations. Their work identifies three primary areas where affirming spirituality impacts the brain. First, spirituality acts as a neuroprotective mechanism, serving as a “neural shield” for the prefrontal cortex (responsible for executive function) and the amygdala (responsible for fear processing), mitigating damage caused by chronic minority stress.

Second, cognitive meaning–making through spiritual systems allows queer mediums to restructure their self–concept from “alienated” to “connected.” By perceiving themselves as part of a larger cosmic design, there is a measurable reduction in brain activity associated with the distress of social exclusion. Third, a positive identity–affirming belief system enhances executive function, providing the internal psychological resources necessary to regulate stress hormones, specifically maintaining a balance of cortisol when confronted with external stigmatization.

Theoretical Method

A systematic literature review was conducted to critique dominant sociological paradigms of religion. Macro–level Classical Sociological Paradigms, including Functionalism (Durkheim, 1995) and Conflict Theory (Tucker, 1978), are criticized for presenting a monolithic view of religion that neglects internal diversity, individual agency, and fluid belief systems (Furseth & Repstad, 2017). Their major limitation is an inherent Western–centric bias derived from Judeo–Christian studies, which restricts their capacity to analyze non–Western forms, syncretism, and the global public resurgence of faith. Both Functionalism and Conflict Theory often treat religion as a static institution, viewing it either as a mechanism for social cohesion or as a tool for class oppression.

Although contemporary sociological understandings attempt to bridge this gap, the inability to reconcile global empirical evidence leads to a strong Western-centric bias (Furseth & Repstad, 2017). The Secularization Paradigm, for example, posits that modernization inevitably leads to the decline and privatization of religion (Chaves 1999). While this may describe trends in Western Europe, it fails to explain the high religious vitality in the United States or the widespread influence of religion in Southeast Asia.

Therefore, this study adopts the Multiple Modernities Paradigm for analyzing the intersection of psycho-social-cultural factors. It rejects the linear, universal path of secular modernization, validating the persistence of unique social structures and spiritual beliefs in non-Western contexts (Tiryakian, 2017). This study views the roles of queer mediums in Southeast Asian séance ceremonies not as obstacles to development, but as legitimate, powerful engines of social change, resource distribution, and the articulation of gender diversity (Jackson & Baumann, 2021a, 2021b). The paradigm provides the foundation to integrate non-anthropocentric views, arguing that sustainable development must incorporate local ontologies, like the interconnectedness of “social beings.”

A literature search was conducted in social science databases, including ASSIA, AnthroSource, and Sociological Abstracts. Materials included academic literature, research reports, songs, folk dramas, movies, and video clips. Following these assumptions, this research adopted Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) as proposed by Kathy Charmaz (2014). First, the study proceeded with documentary research focusing on four case studies: the Mod Meng ghost dancing in Thailand, the worship of mother goddesses in Vietnam, the Bissu rituals in Indonesia, and Nat worship in Myanmar. Second, coding utilized a scientific approach including “cultural-specific tools,” social interaction, the MKO, ZPD, Cognitive Development, and Positive Psychology. Finally, the use of methods of agreement and multidisciplinary analysis identified the interconnection between spiritual beliefs, psycho-social-cultural factors, and cognitive development.

Findings

An examination of the four case studies indicated the influence of psycho-social-cultural factors on the cognitive development of queer mediums. However, the author challenges Vygotsky and critiques how the sociology of religion struggles with the complexity of queer mediums.

Séance Ceremonies and Influences of Psycho-social-cultural Factors

The Neo-Animist Ontology (N-AO) provides a robust framework for interpreting queer mediums. The séance ceremony displays a fundamental act of reciprocal social exchange between the human community and non-human entities (spirits/deities). When a gender-diverse individual is possessed, they gain immense ritual authority, transforming their gender non-conformity from a potential social stigma into a sacralized role necessary for the ritual process. The human actors playing significant roles were “agents,” including queer mediums, medium-assistants, musicians, announcers, and appellants.

The spirits and deities in the case studies are active, powerful, and intentional subjects capable of social relationships. This psycho-social-cultural interaction is restructured by the differentiated social status of each deity. Superior standing is due to vast power, while ancestors and other spirits maintain localized ranks. The séance re-establishes moral and social order through the authoritative pronouncements of higher-status spirit entities. The Nat ceremony in Myanmar, for instance, drew tens of thousands of elites, government officials, residents, tourists, and LGBTQ+ participants. The practical roles of Faun Phii in Thailand were not merely for social protection but also a political strategy to prevent external threats since ancient times.

Grounded in N-AO, this study posits that the séance ceremony functions as a complex economy where value is highly differentiated. The medium, as the primary human agent, accrues the highest value in enhanced social authority, legitimacy, and direct economic capital. Conversely, mid-status clients receive instrumental value through problem-solving efficacy, while lower-status clients receive communal and existential value.

While N–AO effectively critiques the Western nature/culture binary, this study reveals the risk that its broad scope may inadvertently abstract away from specific sociocultural contexts. Spiritual hierarchies are often direct reflections of human social stratification. Furthermore, N–AO risks romanticizing indigenous ontologies by understating the influence of political economy, such as colonial pressures. Therefore, a robust N–AO analysis requires explicit contextualization, treating non–human agent status as a dynamic element negotiated within a broader socio–political field.

The séance process comprised offerings, material worship, transcendence, dancing, singing, and blessing. The surrounding environment included food fairs, storytelling, gambling, and markets. The ceremony began with assistants informing participants, followed by the medium communicating with “agents” through the physical body. Musicians played non–stop traditional music. The burning of natural incense provided aromatic pleasure and healing power. Dress codes and characteristics varied by “agents” and context. During recesses, mediums shared information and values to foster trust and dialogue.

Differentiations were found across ceremonies in terms of ritualization and blessings. Individual blessings included longevity, wealth, and talent; community blessings included rainfall and peace; national blessings included success against enemies. Since 2016, the Vietnamese government has registered the worship of Thờ Mẫu as Intangible Cultural Heritage. In Indonesia, the Bissu ceremony became a symbol of gender equality, representing the Bugis’s open mind about five gender differentiations: Makkunrai (female), Oroané (male), Bissu (intersex), Calabai (male–to–female), and Calalai (female–to–male). Acting as the agent’s representative, the Bissu received a powerful and higher social status since the early Bugis settlement. (Davies, 2002; 2007; Thamrin, 2015).

Spiritual Cognitive Dissonance (SCD)

This study reveals a crucial psycho–social–cultural cognitive function for queer mediumship. For gender–diverse individuals, assuming the high–status medium role serves as a mechanism for identity integration. This role resolves potential Spiritual Cognitive Dissonance (SCD), mitigating social stigma by translating

a marginalized identity into cognitive and social power within a culturally sanctioned framework.

Social Interaction and Cognitive Outcomes

The cognitive and professional development of queer mediums has shifted from hereditary lineage to a sophisticated apprenticeship model. Utilizing the MKO framework, inexperienced mediums engage in “reciprocal teaching” and scaffolding. This process often begins in late childhood through ritual assistance. Recently, this transmission of knowledge has been revolutionized by social media platforms like TikTok and YouTube. These platforms function as digital MKOs, providing borderless access to ritualization.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

The cognitive development of queer mediumship represents a specialized form of social apprenticeship. In ceremonies, the “spirit” is repositioned as an expert social partner that, alongside senior mentors, provides scaffolding. This internalization resolves SCD, restructuring the practitioner’s self-concept from marginalized to sacred. As mentioned by Ooy Miet Kay, a young Nat Kadaw in Myanmar (ThaiPBS, 2023): “Becoming Nat Kadaw has changed my life...I am now respected... The ceremony is my territory.” The séance process created four elements of apprenticeship within the ZPD based on (1) mediums’ needs, (2) adult learning, (3) manageability of interaction, and (4) the establishment of socialization structures.

Cognitive Reframing and Meaning-Making

This study posits that spirituality is a sophisticated cognitive tool. By employing spiritual beliefs, individuals engage in meaning-making to establish new rationales for existence. This aligns with work found by Lefevor et al. (2021), who found that compassion-based belief systems improve cognitive coping mechanisms.

Modes of Communication (MOC) and Cognitive Outcomes

Major modes of communication included speaking ancient languages, praying, chanting, and singing. Symbolic modes included colors, makeup, and costumes. These forms of communication offered opportunities for mediums

to develop social speech. Language became a tool for intellectual adaptation. Physical interactions reflected collaborative learning, increasing competencies.

Culture-specific Tools and Cognitive Outcomes

Ghost dancing, Nat, and Mother Goddess rituals provide codified cultural tools to mediate the relationship between self and spirit. This helps develop specialized cognitive mechanisms such as non-pathological dissociation and dual consciousness. The case of Long Nguyen, a 25-year-old queer medium with a master's degree in international marketing, supports this. He transformed from an entrepreneur to a professional medium, increasing basic mental functions and strategic problem-solving (VN Express, 2016).

Conclusion and Discussion

The four séance ceremonies revealed a significant intersection of spiritual beliefs and psycho-social-cultural factors on the cognitive development of queer mediums. This finding supports Descola's Neo-Animist Ontologies (2014) by including non-human beings as parts of "social beings." The ceremonies transformed abstract beliefs into practical social activities, providing positive visualization and hope.

Applying Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, this study found a strong interconnection between the séance and the emergence of the ZPD, which helped mediums develop intentional communication and shared spaces. Cultural tools created new learning platforms where trust and dialogue were available. Scaffolding opened new forms of MKO, including human mentors and non-humans such as social media. The researcher argues that the séance is a form of social space where queer mediums foster cognitive development.

However, the cognitive development of queer mediums cannot be fully captured by traditional sociocultural theories alone. Vygotsky's framework must be expanded to include biological and political realities. Spirit possession acts as a mechanism for cognitive reframing, shifting the schema from "marginalized victim" to "divinely chosen agent." The adoption of an affirming spiritual ide and dampening amygdala hyperactivation.

This study supports a new framework for the sociology of religion, focusing on how religion adapts rather than disappears. Contemporary frameworks confront critiques; for instance, post-Secular Cosmopolitanization remains Eurocentric. The Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion 2024 outlines a “visible paradox” where religion is visible but institutional belonging collapses in the West. Although Existential Security Theory (Norris & Inglehart, 2011) provides a quantitative perspective, it is criticized for reductionism, failing to describe “elite religiosity.”

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to track how shifting to a spiritually affirmed identity alters brain structure (neuroplasticity) and executive function over time. Researchers should move beyond Western-centric models to explore how local spiritual practices provide unique cognitive “scaffolding” for TGD individuals. Mental health practitioners working with transgender clients should be trained to recognize the difference between healthy spiritual meaning-making and harmful spiritual bypassing to better support long-term cognitive development.

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