

# Book Review

Cunningham, M., & De Saussure, J. (2019). *Dancing the labyrinth: Spirituality in the lives of women*. Oxford University Press.

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Maddy Cunningham DSW, MSW, professor emeritus in the graduate school of social work at Fordham University, has also authored *Integrating Spirituality in Clinical Social Work Practice: Walking the Labyrinth*, which centers on the insertion of spiritual issues in clinical social work practice.

Jade De Saussure, Ph.D. candidate, MSW, is an ordained ministerial counselor who incorporates spirituality in her social work practice. She also serves as chair of the Spirituality Committee for the National Association of Social Workers New York City Chapter.

The authors engage the reader by “dancing the labyrinth” to discover the fullness of women’s spiritual and psychological development. Exploring the sacred anecdotes of a diverse group of women, they examine spiritual changes through the adult life course and in relation to self, others, and the Divine.

The book is organized into 13 chapters; each leads the reader through thematic pathways that amalgamate women’s spiritual and psychological development as compared to men. The authors incorporate clinical treatment approaches and techniques in accessible, relational language.

The opening pages give voice to the spiritual lives of women and set the tone in answering the following questions in the book: “What does it mean to be a spiritual woman? How do women connect their spirits and their life’s purpose?” (p. 2). The reader is led to understand that we live our lives engaged in the creation and interpretation of narratives.

Chapters Two and Three describe women’s spiritual and psychological development, integrating Fowler’s Faith Development Model and metaphors (i.e., The Dance, The Web, The Quilt, and The Labyrinth) to demonstrate their growth. The metaphor used in this book is the labyrinth, which leads the reader into a circular and uninterrupted but powerful walk into the woman’s life as she engages in her daily activities. The labyrinth walk leads women into relational exchanges that intensify their psychosocial development and faith toward the Divine. Ultimately, these relational exchanges increase women’s spiritual growth.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six examine the connection between women and the Divine, spiritual changes, and trauma. The images of God held by women are empowering, as this embodies the meaning and purpose of life. Women’s understanding of God as they age and embrace the fullness of life is a central theme of these chapters. The authors describe spirituality and the aging process as entering undefined pathways while releasing the familiar to welcome the unfamiliar. As women welcome the unfamiliar, they may also experience trauma caused by clergy or others. These traumatic events move women to question “Where is God?” as they try to understand the reason behind their pain. In doing so, they achieve a new perspective into their relationships and walk with the Divine.

Chapters Seven, Eight, and Nine focus on how women nurture their spirituality through a plethora of modes (e.g., mainstream spirituality, feminism,

mysticism, New Age, Earth-based spirituality) while underscoring the sameness of ideas and practices within these pathways. Through these traditional and alternative pathways, women are empowered to learn effective ways to articulate their anger and regain power as they take control of their own lives.

In Chapters Ten, Eleven, Twelve, and Thirteen, the authors offer clinical treatment models and techniques, special topics related to spirituality and trauma, as well as self-care as practitioners work with women's spiritual issues. Cunningham and De Saussure conclude the book by offering the reader with the story protocol and description of the women who courageously shared their spiritual journeys, the questions used during interviews, a definition of spirituality, references and an index.

The authors' integration of anecdotes and professional theories related to spirituality and development are practical, organized, and well-focused. The spiritual or religious assertions within this book are linked to

social work ethics and values. Religion is rooted in the notable social work origins (i.e., the Church). Among the book's strengths are the use of multiple theories of women's psychological development, spirituality, connectedness to their environments as they age or during traumatic events, as well as with self, others, and the Divine. It also offers clinicians treatment techniques and self-care tips as they engage women with spiritual issues. The book would benefit from additional quotes from women who were interviewed. Letting the women's voices speak even more would lend additional credibility and illuminate the connection between the reader and the interview subjects.

The book can be used as supplemental and supportive material for social work education as well as practicing social workers and other professionals to enhance their understanding of women's spirituality and psychological development across the adult life course.