16.1 Details and subtleties in religious contexts of kama muta

Like all good conceptualizations, Figure 16.1 simplifies. It doesn’t show any path to kama muta from doctrinal belief or cosmological explanations, because these are uncommon contexts for it. But they do exist. We will see in the following chapters that beautiful—especially melodic—recitation of holy texts may evoke kama muta, even when the listeners do not semantically understand the language. When doctrine is affirmed in ritual, kama muta may also occur. In the Anglican liturgy, for example, the congregation’s utterance of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed in unison might evoke kama muta if uttering the creed together “confers a sense of unity and identity” (Chapman 2005:216). Especially when uttered in unison, and with awareness that other Anglicans utter it—are uttering it all over right now and have uttered it for centuries—“The creed thus serve[s] not primarily as a digest of dogma but to unite all believers across space and time with the living God” (217). “The creed thus acts as a pledge, a sign of commitment, to a spiritual identity located in God, which in turn confers a new identity on the Christian. . . . It is a performance of religious affinity” (Chapman 2005:219; see also Huyser-Honig 2006). In such ways, the doctrinal and ritual practice strands of religion are twisted together so as to reinforce each other. However, doctrine as such does not often afford kama muta.

Nor do most cosmological narratives. While there must be moments when sudden appreciation of the cosmology of descent from a common deity or proto-human ancestor evokes kama muta, this does not seem to occur often. Likewise, awareness of a common fate could evoke kama muta, but rarely does. However, on occasion, belief that one will ultimately join a dying or dead loved one in heaven surely can generates a representation of a wonderful reunion that evokes kama muta. Likewise, meditation based on the Buddhist or Transcendental belief that the individual self is illusory, that each of us is ultimately one with the transcendent ultimate, must sometimes evoke kama muta. As mentioned in Chapter 13, loving-kindness meditations such as Maitri and Gtong Len may also evoke kama muta, and they certainly are grounded in Buddhist cosmology. Figure 16.1 simplifies by ignoring the kama muta that occurs in these strands relatively infrequently.

Figure 16.1 does not represent the mutual effects or dynamics of these aspects. As the preceding discussion makes clear, the analytically distinct aspects represented as separate boxes in the figure are often integrated in practice. For example, in religions whose focus is on emotional CS intimacy with a loving deity, mystical experiences often cement belief in the deity and in the deity’s love (e.g., Laski 1980:77). “In fact, anyone who has truly practiced a religion knows very well that it is the cult that stimulates the feelings of joy, inner peace, serenity, and enthusiasm that, for the faithful, stand as experimental proof of their beliefs (Durkheim 1915:420). More particularly, the worshipper thinks that the kama muta mote is a manifestation
of the deity’s love, hence the loving deity must exist. That is, kama muta motes validate doctrine, supplemented by the other emotions that Durkheim notes.

None of the five strands of religion are unique to religion. Laws and courts are concerned with assigning fault when someone suffers, dies, or certain other things go wrong. There are non-religious folk explanations and scientific theories for the world, society, humans, and their origins. There are innumerable sorts of doctrinal beliefs that have nothing to do with religion. There are political and other kinds of rituals and prohibitions. And even social relationships with immaterial beings are not distinctive to religion: I’m quite fond of Elmo, Horatio Hornblower, and Mike Doonesbury. Obviously kama muta occurs in rituals and in relationships with immaterial beings in many nonreligious contexts.

This analysis of the five foci of religions is not meant to imply that individual religions can be classified into distinct types. These are aspects of religiosity: of religious traditions, congregations, practices events, and persons. While often one of these five foci is central and salient, preferred and intended, legitimate or legislated, religiosity is typically an amalgam of these aspects. Indeed, if the concept of ‘religion’ is valid, it is because these five features tend to co-occur, and sometimes to supplant each other in the shifting emphases of individuals or institutions. Other aspects of religion, including sacrifice, offerings, fasting and abstinence, may sometimes be organized so as to evoke kama muta.
16.2 CS relationships with culturally constituted immaterial beings

Given that kama muta motes occur when people apperceive a sudden intensification of a CS relationship with a deity, the question arises, Why and how do people create social relationships with immaterial beings? What does it mean to posit that a person suddenly intensifies a CS relationship with a being that is not human, and that indeed has no biological or physical existence at all? Why devote and commit to CS relationships with deities, saints, deceased loved ones, and other immaterial beings? What’s the use of that? And why does the kama muta psype respond to purported intensifications of CS with psychoculturally constituted beings? Is the psype’s response to these a malfunction, or an adaptive extension that is functional in some other way?

As we observed in Chapter 2, people experience cuteness kama muta motes in response to kitten and babies—in person, in videos, in photographs, paintings, stuffed animals and other Kindchenschema artifacts. As we observed in Chapter 3 and 8, people feel third-person kama muta in response to oral, written, theatrical, audio and visual narratives, as well as other arts. In Chapter 7 and in Chapter 9 we looked at how places, structures, and mementos evoke nostalgic kama muta. Social relationships among humans are mediated by all sorts of signs, including language, writing, emojis, music, flowers, rings, and so forth. Just talking about, or perceiving any sign of a CS relationship, may evoke kama muta. A text is pretty good, and a picture is nice, too, but physical signs are not necessary at all. Memory, imagination, and anticipation are quite sufficient media unto themselves. There are many sources of memory, imagination, and anticipation—material evidence is only one of the ingredients baked into the mix. Moreover, as nostalgia indicates, humans do not need material, visual, or aural stimuli to evoke kama muta: memories do it. Immediate sensory perception, mnemonic recall, and imagination mobilize many of the same neurocognitive systems and processes (Kosslyn, Ganis, & Thompson 2001; Kosslyn Thompson, & Ganis 2006). The same episodic memory system operates when remembering actual personal experiences and when falsely but vividly ‘remembering’ sociopsychologically-suggested experiences or experiences previously perceived in narratives or media (Loftus 1980, 2015). Indeed, perception itself is shaped by experience, including cultural schemas: the construction of experience depends significantly on what the perceiver implicitly believes and feels about the world and the current circumstances (e.g., LeVine 1984). Memory is still further mediated by cultural schema, while reports of experiences are even more culturally mediated.

In short, a CS relationship, and its intensification in particular, does not depend on the partner(s) being materially co-present. A CS relationship with anyone exists just to the extent that the participants think and feel it. Imagined relationships and their intensification can be as vivid as ‘real’ ones—sometimes more vivid, because more perfect. The emotion is the same whether
the protagonists exist in the biophysical world or are only mental representations; people feel kama muta regardless of whether the person perceives the characters, events, and relationships to be ‘real’ or ‘fictional,’ and regardless of whether the CS partner is objectively biophysically material.

In this perspective, perception of sudden intensification of a CS relationships with religious beings is no more mysterious than perception of any other sudden intensification of CS. They are all culturally, schematically, semiotically, cognitively mediated. This is why people feel most engaged in relationships with the immaterial beings who are recognized by their particular culture, community, and reference groups. Sane people generally have relationships with immaterial beings when those relationships are oriented and informed by cultural prototypes, precedents, paradigms, practices, or precepts. Without such preos it usually doesn’t occur to people to relate to immaterial beings: in the absence of the constitutive signs of one of the conformation systems, ordinarily there is no sense of engagement in any relationship, no feeling of relating. Of course, immaterial beings do not directly perform acts of consubstantial assimilation, iconic physics, ostensive concrete operations, or arbitrary conventional symbolism—immaterial beings cannot perform the acts of the conformation systems that most naturally and powerfully constitute relationships (Fiske 2004). Humans do act on behalf of immaterial beings, sculpting images, building temples, ringing bells and playing pipe organs, offering substances transmuted into the body and blood of the deity, singing hymns or chanting together, and telling narratives of divine actions. These practices and artifacts inform peoples’ cultural imagination.

The worshipper is drawn by preos to construct an imagined relationship with the deity when that relationship crystalizes or imaginatively intensifies, the intensification evokes real kama muta. Compare this with the gosling who avidly, determinedly, follows Konrad Lorenz, a dog, or a box (Hess 1973). The gosling is driven by the same imprinting motives that would drive her to follow her parents if they were moving near her at the right moment. In fact, the ethologist can construct a super-normal releasing stimuli that activates this (or any another) fixed action pattern better than the natural stimulus (Tinbergen 1953). Religious preos can be just that sort of super-normal releasing stimuli. Likewise, interaction with a living partner can lead to orgasm, but so can perception of a photograph, and indeed the photograph may be super-optimal, a visually more perfect sex object than any real person.

The gist is that the input (the domain) of the psype function is a representation of the intensification of a representation of a CS relationship between represented relational partners. The psype doesn’t ‘know’ or ‘care’ about the source of the representations of the relational partners, the source of representations of the relationship, or the source of the representations of its intensifications. The representations, like all representations, are constructively generated though complex cultural-social-cognitive processes, but whatever their source, the psype simply takes them as input and responds to them when their features match its input criteria. Then the
psype maps this input onto a corresponding culturally informed kama muta mote in its range: it generates a culturally realized instantiation of the emotion.
16.3 The kama muta psype generates collective effervescence motes

Durkheim’s reasoning about ritual participants’ misattribution of the source of their collective effervescence is worth quoting:

Our entire study rests upon this postulate the unanimous sentiment of the believers of all times cannot be purely illusory. Together with a recent apologist of the faith (William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience) we admit that these religious beliefs rest upon a specific experience whose demonstrative value is, in one sense, not one bit inferior to that of scientific experiments, though different from them. We, too, think that “a tree is known by its fruits,” and that fertility is the best proof of what the roots are worth. But from the fact that a “religious experience,” if we choose to call it this, does exist and that it has a certain foundation—and, by the way, is there any experience which has none?—it does not follow that the reality which is its foundation conforms objectively to the idea which believers have of it. The very fact that the fashion in which it has been conceived has varied infinitely in different times is enough to prove that none of these conceptions express it adequately. If a scientist states it as an axiom that the sensations of heat and light which we feel correspond to some objective cause, he does not conclude that this is what it appears to the senses to be. Likewise, even if the impressions which the faithful feel are not imaginary, still they are in no way privileged intuitions; there is no reason for believing that they inform us better upon the nature of their object than do ordinary sensations upon the nature of bodies and their properties. In order to discover what this object consists of, we must submit them to an examination and elaboration analogous to that which has substituted for the sensuous idea of the world another which is scientific and conceptual.

This is precisely what I have tried to do, and we have seen that this reality—which mythologies have represented under so many different forms, but which is the universal and eternal objective cause of these sensations sui generis out of which religious experience is made—is society. We have shown what moral forces it develops and how it awakens this sentiment of a refuge, of a shield and of a guardian support which attaches the believer to his cult. Durkheim 1912:417-8
Following the above passage, Durkheim goes on to write that the essentially moral aspect of religious sentiments are directive, and disciplinary, leading to action. That accords with the fact that kama muta generates in the participant motives to devote himself and morally commit to the communal sharing relationship that constitutes the society as a society. When Durkheim writes that the transcendent entity in which ritual participants merge is “society,” though participants interpret it as a totem or deity, he references the CS unity evoked among the human participants. So kama muta has all of the crucial relational and motivational features of collective effervescence: it creates, invigorates, and renews CS relationships, generating devotion and moral commitment to those relationships. It leaves people feeling buoyant and re-energized, feeling their lives more vividly. Durkheim said that repeated experiences of collective effervescence are essential to the maintenance of social solidarity. Perhaps we can update his proposition to posit that repeated experiences of kama muta are essential, or at least catalytic, for social bonding—at every level, from the most intimate to the global.
16.4 The kama muta psype is the mechanism behind the social solidarity function of rituals

A core staple of anthropology is the ethnography of rituals of relationship creation and transformation, including birth, initiation and other life-stage transitions and role installations, marriage, and mortuary practices. All of these may be organized to express, evoke, and coordinate kama muta to greater or less degree in particular cultures. Likewise, we should look for kama muta in rites that create bonds such as blood-brotherhood, compadrazgo, membership in gangs and militias—as well as rituals of relationship restoration, reconciliation, and peace-making (see Claparède 1930). Whenever rituals suddenly create CS relationships, we predict that people generally experience kama muta motes. Indeed, the intention to experience these motes may be a primary conscious motive for people to seek, join, and perform such rituals.

Durkheim’s theory is functionalist; he explains religion with reference to its social solidarity enhancing consequences. Indeed, Durkheim simultaneously founded the functionalist and symbolic paradigms in anthropology (and was an important source of the structuralist paradigm). What functionalist accounts leave unexplained is the sources or causes of the institutions and practices whose solidarity-sustaining functions they explicate. It is illuminating to recognize that religious rituals sustain social solidarity—but how do religious rituals come about, what sustains them, and what gives them their characteristic features? Durkheim and his functionalist successors in anthropology had nothing to say about the sources of the practices and institutions that foster the crucial bonds that constitute social solidarity. Durkheim cogently argued that religious rituals contribute to social solidarity; but what causes people to engage in rituals? Functionalism explains the consequences of such rituals, but not their causes, origins, or maintenance. In Chapters 21-23 we will sketch an account of the cultural evolutionary processes that sustain and shape religious rites and other kama muta-evoking drivers. We will show how the solidarity enhancing functions of the drivers are crucial to their cultural selection, in conjunction with the biological evolution of the kama muta psype. In other words, we will deduce the complete causal, generative, reproductive cycle that encompasses Durkheim’s functional account, showing how the solidarity-enhancing consequences of religious rites makes them culturally survive and reproduce. We preview the theory here, to complete our analysis of the place of kama muta in religion.
16.5 Why a few religions spread around the world

Most practices, visions, and narratives that potentially could develop into religious prototypes, precedents, paradigms, or prescriptions actually do not survive. Most commonly, one or a few people engage in some activity, perceive themselves to be interacting with immaterial beings, or formulate stories about supernatural beings—and no one else pays them any attention. Typically the observers are perplexed, put off, offended, or condescendingly amused. Or no one remembers what the religious innovators said and did. Or people remember, but have little inclination to reproduce the activity, no desire to participate in those relationships with immaterial beings, or recite the narratives—it isn’t engaging, rewarding, or exciting to do so. Or people do all of this, but make no effort to engage others and bring them into the practices, supernatural relationships, or recitations; when the people so engaged die, their religion dies with them. So nearly all potential religions die in the first generation, peter out soon, or remain restricted to small communities. There are several thousand religions in the world today, with new ones arising daily and old ones disappearing. Then why have Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism endured for 60 to 150 or more generations and diffused to billions of participants? One reason may be that among the core constituents of these world religions are kama muta drivers that attract attention, are intrinsically rewarding, are memorable, and that motivate people to reproduce the drivers, while drawing new participants into them. Religions that incorporate powerful kama muta drivers attract and retain adherents who perpetuate them. This may be an important factor in the way underlying how a very few religions became and continue to be world religions with billions of followers, while myriad other religions faded away, or remain local and precarious.

For the last several thousand years, humans have increasingly lived in populations that include dense aggregations of people who do not (and cannot) personally know most of the people they encounter and with whom must cooperate in various ways. How is it possible for strangers to cooperate in innumerable one-time interactions? Norenzayan (2013) argues that a certain kind of religion may be crucial: religions in which powerful omniscient deities watch over humans and punish them for moral transgressions. Many religions, perhaps most, have no such “big gods” who are concerned about human morality, but, Norenzayan argues, the world religions which arose in association with dense agricultural societies were religions of big gods who supervise human interaction. Believers in such religions could trust each other because they all believed that their big gods would punish wrong-doers. Norenzayan theorizes that the cultural evolution of such religions is what made possible cooperation among masses of strangers. But there is another, complementary process that may also be important in enabling masses of strangers to trust each other and cooperate: the devotion and commitment born of kama muta. When people jointly participate in religious and secular institutions, practices, roles, narratives, arts and artifacts that evoke kama muta, they create, renew, repair, and sustain CS bonds. These
cultural drivers enable trusting cooperation because they make people care about each other: they evoke mutual identification, kindness, compassion, and moral commitment.

People commonly create, communicate, and commit to CS relationships though consubstantial assimilation: they make their bodies alike, make their bodies contiguous, or move them together in rhythmic synchrony (Fiske 2004, Fiske & L. Schubert 2012). Giving birth, nursing, feeding, eating and drinking commensally or sharing comestibles such as tobacco, grooming, caressing, cuddling, intimate sex, dancing and drilling, specific types of circumcision and excision, scarification, tattoos, coiffures, body painting, and ‘uniforms’ can afford the constitution of CS relationships. This is an indexical semiotic medium, using the corporeal body as a constitutive sign for the social person: bodies that are consubstantially assimilated are socially equivalent, motivated to care for each other as they care for their own bodily selves. Sudden consubstantial assimilation can evoke strong kama muta motes.

Consubstantial assimilation works best directly, body-to-body; hence it becomes more difficult the greater the number of people involved. Kama muta drivers that generate sentiments of union with whole categories of co-religionists can unite indefinitely large sets of people, making possible large-scale trusting cooperation. The kama muta drivers of the world religions create a measure of compassion, mutual support, and commitment to greater collectivities beyond face-to-face familiars.

But there is a challenge to the religious ritual explanation of social solidarity offered by Durkheim, to the accounts of the functionalists who followed him, and to our own ethnological and textual identification of the motives that emerge from kama muta. The challenge is that the evidence for emotional devotion and moral commitment to CS, while extremely broad and intuitively plausible, is quite indirect. Participants seem to become devoted and committed to their deities, congregations, communities, and the other CS groups to which the drivers orient them. Sometimes very devoted and committed, for a long time. So it is eminently plausible to infer that these drivers generate this CS devotion and commitment. But sources such as these provide inherently insufficient bases for strong inferences about the precise psychosocial causes of the motives. Actual attempts to measure changes in such motives are scarce, and validated measures are rare. Measurement is especially difficult because self-reports of motivation generally have limited validity and do not correlate with projective measures, which tend to have greater external validity (Roberts et al 2006; Köllner & Schultheiss 2014; Hagemeyer, Dufner, & Denissen 2016). We need multiple, convergent measures and observation of natural behavior that reveals the relevant motivation. Moreover, it is difficult to prove that participation in these drivers is the specific source of any augmentation of motives. We need well-designed field tests and carefully controlled lab experiments.