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The title, *Understanding Young Buddhists: Living Out Ethical Journeys,* draws attention to two things: (1) the current lack of research seeking to understand the lives of young Buddhists; and (2) the need to take seriously the perspectives and experiences of young Buddhists as actors who draw meaningfully upon Buddhist teachings to live ethically informed lives. Grounded in rich data derived from a range of research methods — questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and video diaries — the book delivers an insightful analysis of the religious lives of 44 young British Buddhists, aged 18 to 25. This mixed-methods approach enables the authors to address their research foci, while also allowing their participants to exercise agency in the research process, most notably, through the use of participant-controlled video diaries. This approach is consistent with the authors’ aim of understanding the lived experiences of their participants.

While this book does not focus solely on sexuality, it does emerge from a larger multi-faith study of sexuality amongst religious youth. It is thus a welcome addition in a time when debates over same-sex marriage have reached prominence in English-speaking, Western democracies, and some of the most strident opposition to same-sex marriage, gender queerness, and education about sexuality in schools has been expressed by conservative religious groups. By unpacking the ways young Buddhists in their study grounded their sex-positive views regarding polyamory, queerness, and sex before marriage in Buddhist teachings, Page and Yip present alternative ways to think about sexual ethics from a religious viewpoint beyond the dominant monotheistic approaches that emphasize abstinence, monogamy, and heterosexuality.

Beyond this, the book makes a number of useful contributions to both the sociology of religion and the sociology of youth, which center on unsettling a number of binaries. First, the authors critically engage with arguments about the primacy of the individual with regard to contemporary negotiations of religion, particularly with regard to youth, yet also crucially acknowledge structural (institutional and systemic) factors that shape the religious negotiations of the young Buddhists they studied. One way they do this is by drawing upon theories of individualization. Specifically, the authors note that while participants from their study emphasized personal choice and self-responsibility, they were not narcissistic or self-absorbed; rather, their practice of Buddhism was other-oriented and reflected many features of an ethically informed, “socially engaged Buddhism.” Buddhism, in this sense, was perceived to offer a
viable alternative to the top-down, institutionalized Christian environment in which many participants were brought up, encouraging self-responsibility and self-reflexivity in navigating one’s own spiritual path in a climate of risk and uncertainty. Another way participants do this is by adopting a “lived” or “everyday” religion approach. In this regard, the authors explore the ways Buddhism is experienced within the contexts of everyday life, which they note, is still “located within a power-infused structural framework” (p. 154). This intertwining of the individual and the institutional provides a useful conceptual grounding for the authors’ contention that highly personal aspects of life such as sexuality, ethics, and personal development are profoundly shaped by social forces, which include “dominant cultural narratives of sexuality, relationship, and consumerism” (p. 155).

The second binary the book unsettles is that of stasis and movement, through the authors’ use of Tweed’s (2006) “translocative” approach to religion, which emphasizes the notions of “crossing” and “dwelling.” In Understanding Young Buddhists, Page and Yip point out that while the young Buddhists in their study demonstrated a proclivity towards “dwelling” through their commitment to Buddhism, and the ways they negotiated their Buddhist identities in key places such as universities, they also emphasized the fluid and reflexive ways in which their engagement with Buddhism involved much “crossing,” or ongoing interpretation of Buddhist principles to meet the demands of contemporary living. This dual emphasis on both crossing and dwelling, and stasis and movement, serves to unsettle other binaries such as the ethnic/convert, traditionalist/modern, Eastern/Western, authentic/inauthentic dichotomies, which have garnered much debate in the field of contemporary Buddhist studies. If Buddhism both “crosses” and “dwell” in the lives of young British Buddhists, then the notion of leaving behind a “traditional, ethnic, Eastern” religion and embracing a “modern, Western, convert” religion makes little sense. As the authors demonstrate, both can and do exist concurrently.

Consistent with the authors’ emphasis on the ways individuals’ religious journeys are embedded in broader social patterns, the book also applies the concept of capital to interpret participants’ engagement with Buddhism. The authors note that Buddhism in the West is largely conceived in the literature as a religion that is predominantly practiced by the privileged Western, middle class, and that this pattern is consistent with their findings on young British Buddhists. They observe that Buddhism in the West is associated with high symbolic capital through its popularity compared to other religions, and that the reflexivity and individual life-planning agendas of their participants is further indicative of their high cultural, economic, and social capital. While this link between Buddhism and higher levels of capital is aptly demonstrated