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Integrating Religion and Spirituality into Counseling

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DESCRIPTIONS OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

The terms “spirituality” and “religion” are difficult to define and differentiate from one another as both concepts are broad, multidimensional, and dependent on social and historical perspectives (Hill et al., 2000). When defining these terms, Hill et al. recommended that various definitional criteria be used to differentiate them. As such, both religion and spirituality include a search for the sacred; however, religion also includes two additional criteria: (1) a possible (but not necessary) search for the non-sacred within a community that searches for the sacred, and (2) a set of prescribed search methods recognized by the group. For example, within the Christian religion, people may search for belonging in a community through participation in such Christian rituals as communion or worship. The relationship between religion and spirituality is highly individualized, with some individuals experiencing their spiritual life largely, if not exclusively, within the context of organized religion while others may find the experience and expression of spirituality outside of the context of organized religion.

SPIRITUALITY ASSESSMENT

- <http://www.search-institute.org/csd/measures/spirituality> provides detailed information on over 15 spirituality assessment instruments, including links to pdf versions of many of the instruments.
- According to Gill, Harper, and Dailey (2011), the use of religious/spiritual assessments can help counselors understand their clients’ worldviews, identify any contributing spiritual or religious issues, recognize underlying strengths and resources, plan interventions, and facilitate clients’ self-exploration. The authors outlined a number of religious/spiritual assessments including, but not limited to, religious/spiritual interviews, spiritual genograms, spiritual ecomaps, music interventions, sentence completion tests, scales, inventories, and hybrid assessments. For further descriptions of many of these assessments, see http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/vistas11/Article_99.pdf by Dailey, Curry, Harper, Moorhead, and Gill (2011)
- Monod et al. (2011) investigated the qualities and psychometric properties of spirituality instruments and then used this information to classify them into categories. They identified 35 instruments, which they classified into four conceptual categories (general spirituality, spiritual well-being, spiritual support or coping, and spiritual needs), and three functional categories (cognitive, behavioral, and affective). According to Monod et al., the *FACIT-Sp* <http://www.facit.org/FACITOrg/Questionnaires> and the *Spirituality Index of Well-Being* http://www.annfammed.org/content/suppl/2004/10/04/2.5.499.DC1/Daaleman_Appendix.pdf both measure clients’ current spiritual state and are well-validated instruments.

EVIDENCED-BASED SUPPORT FOR RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUALLY-ORIENTED COUNSELING

Smith, Bartz, and Richards (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of 31 research studies (1,845 clients) to determine the outcome effectiveness of using religious and spiritual interventions in psychotherapy and found moderately strong support in favor of religious and spiritual approaches. They also recommended that clients learn how to use their religious and spiritual beliefs to address their own mental health concerns. Likewise, Worthington Jr., Hook, Davis, and McDaniel (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 46 studies examining the outcomes of religious and spiritual therapies and found that those clients in religious/spiritual therapies improved more on psychological and spiritual measures compared to those clients who were not in treatment and compared to those who were in secular types of treatment. In addition, Hook et al. (2010) reviewed 24 randomized clinical trials examining the effectiveness of religious/spiritual therapies and found two to be efficacious: 12-step facilitation for alcoholism and Christian accommodative cognitive therapy for depression. Other treatments were considered possibly efficacious, but more research is needed. Richards and Worthington Jr. (2010) examined six outcome reviews of religious and spiritually-oriented therapies and found support for Christian and Muslim cognitive therapy for depression and anxiety. More specifically, counselors may seek to change clients' maladaptive cognitions by encouraging them to orient to positive messages in religious texts, where appropriate. For example, clients could be encouraged to focus on messages of forgiveness, gratitude, and compassion (See Vasegh, 2011 for more specific examples).

Walker, Gorsuch, and Tans (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of 26 studies (5,759 therapists) examining therapists' integration of spirituality and religion in their work with clients and found that the use of prayer and scripture were the most common types of interventions. McCullough (1999) and Post and Wade (2009) reviewed empirical research and reported that it is important that counselors be sensitive to clients' specific beliefs and associated counseling needs.

METHODS OF SPIRITUALITY INTEGRATION

There are many ways (both general and specific) that religion and spirituality can be integrated into psychotherapy and counseling. Johnson (2013) assumed a more general approach and captured the process in five steps (wordings exact): (a) "being open to client-defined spirituality", (b) "utilizing spirituality for resourcing", (c) "inviting spirituality to inform personal integrity", (d) "evaluating life structures", and (e) "remembering and committing to spiritual practice" (p. 101). In this way, counselors help their clients openly explore spirituality and what it means for them.

Specific approaches to integrating spirituality and religion into counseling have also been suggested. Lines (2006) recommended using techniques such as reading sacred text, seeking forgiveness for self and others, practicing mindfulness and meditation, and drawing upon sensory techniques such as yoga. Pargament (2007) recommended the use of: (a) spiritual practices such as rituals; (b) spiritual relationships with religious leaders, family members, or the counselor; (c) spiritual coping through comforting visualizations; and, (d) spiritual meaning making through reframing. Additionally, using sacred writings (Cook, Dixon, & Fukuyama, 2011) and spiritual journaling (Wiggins, 2011) may be helpful. Additional resources are listed below.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Specific Spiritual/Religious Intervention Approaches

- 12 Steps of Alcoholic Anonymous: <http://www.aa.org/?Media=PlayFlash>
- ASERVIC Teaching Modules: <http://www.aservic.org/resources/teaching-modules/>
- Center for Mindfulness: <http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/about/index.aspx>
- Creative spiritual/religious techniques: http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/vistas11/Article_101.pdf

Quick Web Resources

- Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC): <http://www.aservic.org/>
- ASERVIC Competencies: <http://www.aservic.org/resources/spiritual-competencies/>
- Association for Transpersonal Psychology: http://www.atpweb.org/?new_sess=1
- Belief Net: <http://www.beliefnet.com/>
- Patheos: <http://www.patheos.com/>
- Religious Tolerance links: http://www.religioustolerance.org/int_reli.htm
- Virginia State University's World Religions and Spirituality Project: <http://www.has.vcu.edu/wrs/index.html>

ACA Products

- Book: *Integrating Spirituality and Religion Into Counseling* (2nd ed.) edited by Craig S. Cashwell and J. Scott Young: http://isgweb.counseling.org/ISGweb/Purchase/ProductDetail.aspx?Product_code=72906
- DVD: *FACE SPIRIT: A New Model for Integrating Spirituality* presented by Radha Janis Horton-Parker and R. Charles Fawcett: http://isgweb.counseling.org/ISGweb/Purchase/ProductDetail.aspx?Product_code=79818

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