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Article 99

Exploring the Spiritual Domain: Tools for Integrating Spirituality and Religion in Counseling

Paper based on a program presented at the 2011 American Counseling Association Conference, New Orleans, LA, March 23 -27, 2011.

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Integrating spirituality in counseling, when appropriate, can be an effective strategy for facilitating insight, hope, and change (Bowen-Reid & Harrell, 2002). Furthermore, client involvement in spiritual and/or religious practices has repeatedly been found to be positively related to health and inversely related to physical and mental disorders (Gallup, 2007; Young, Wiggins-Frame, & Cashwell, 2007). Moreover, with some clients, integrating a spiritual perspective in counseling may be an effective and necessary approach to ensure culturally sensitive and ethical counseling practice (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2005; Carone & Barone, 2001).

Maintaining awareness and sensitivity regarding spiritual and religious beliefs is not only an integral part of a multicultural approach to counseling, but also mandated by the American Counseling Association's *Code of Ethics* (ACA, 2005; Robertson, 2010). The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) further substantiated ACA's position by recommending standards for social and cultural diversity curriculum that include spiritual orientation and religious values (CACREP, 2009; Willow, Tobin, & Toner, 2009). Although many counselors understand *why* integrating spirituality into counseling is important, many are unsure of *how* to do so (Hagedorn & Gutierrez, 2009).

In an effort to bridge the gap between theoretical models of spirituality and counseling practice, the Association for Spiritual, Ethical and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) developed *Competencies for Addressing Spiritual and Religious Issues in Counseling* (2009), which have been endorsed by the American Counseling Association. The framework provided by the ASERVIC Spiritual Competencies allows practitioners the freedom to choose from a myriad of techniques for the purposes of: assessing spirituality, promoting client insight and awareness, setting goals, fostering spiritual growth, and evaluating progress. The purpose of this article is to promote spiritual competence by providing the reader with specific tools to appropriately and ethically integrate spirituality and/or religion into counseling.

Models of Spirituality and Related Formal Assessments

While the initial marriage of spirituality and counseling may be attributed to William James and Alfred Adler, formal assessments of religion originated more recently in the 1960s. Glock and Stark (1966) proposed a formal assessment inventory, *Dimensions of Religious Commitment*, of their 5D model of religion. Since that time, the need for quantitative assessments of religion and spirituality has been widely acknowledged. In the following sections, four models and associated assessments are highlighted. Chosen based on practicality as well as the efficiency with which they can be integrated into counseling practice, these techniques are presented according to the date of publication to provide the reader with a sense of how spiritual models have evolved over the past 20 years.

Spiritual Well-Being

Ellison (1983) defined spiritual well-being as a continuous, dynamic reflection of one's spiritual health and maturity. Positive spiritual well-being is indicated by a set of beliefs and values that result in inner hopefulness regarding the ultimate meaning and purpose in life and a connection with others and the universe (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982). Further, Ellison proposed that spirituality is comprised of both religious and spiritual domains, each a distinct construct from the other. To measure these dimensions of spiritual well-being, Ellison developed the *Spiritual Well-Being Scale* (SWBS) to assess religious and existential well-being. Results obtained from using this assessment indicated a positive relationship between self-esteem and spiritual well-being, and negative relationships between spiritual well-being and individualism, success, and personal freedom. Additionally, Ellison found that individuals who reported consistent

relationships between spiritual well-being and internalized and intimate relationships with God had both higher religious and spiritual well-being.

The *Spiritual Well-Being Scale* (SWBS) is designed to focus primarily on the client's belief system and is especially helpful when the client is struggling in the area of spiritual beliefs or the counselor has difficulty recognizing the client's belief system (Harper & Gill, 2005). This instrument contains 20 items with a Likert-type scale that ranges from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. Consistent with Ellison's conceptualization of spiritual well-being, the SWBS subscales reflect a two-part belief that spiritual well-being results from religious well-being and existential well-being (Frame, 2003). The SWBS has a correlation coefficient of .93 for the overall scale and .96 and .86 for the religious well-being and existential well-being subscales (Stanard, Sandhu, & Painter, 2000).

Westgate's Model of Spirituality

Westgate (1996) introduced a model of spirituality for counselors, composed of the following dimensions: continuously searching for meaning and purpose in life, espousing intrinsic values that inform one's understanding of the world, maintaining a transcendent perspective of oneself in relation to another, and, belonging to a supportive spiritual community that has a shared belief system. Westgate applied these principles to holistically conceptualizing and treating depression. She even argued that, as an ethical imperative to provide competent services to clients, counselors should help clients integrate spirituality with clinical issues to promote well-being.

The *Howden Spirituality and Assessment Scale* (SAS; Howden, 1992) was developed as a way of assessing spiritual wellness factors consistent with Westgate's model, specifically to measure unifying interconnectedness, purpose and meaning in life, and innerness, and transcendence (Harper & Gill, 2005). The SAS contains universal language and is based on a well-conceptualized model, theory, and factor analysis (Stanard et al., 2000). Because the subscales can be scored and used individually as well as collectively, a counselor can work with the client to gain insight into each of these attributes or spiritual wellness as a holistic concept. The information gained can be useful when attempting to understand the spiritual orientation of the client and for treatment planning/intervention purposes. The assessment would be applicable to clients of both Eastern and Western spiritual orientations.

Statistically, the SAS consists of 28 questions comprising four factors (i.e., subscales) mentioned previously (Howden, 1992). A six-point Likert-type scale is used and responses can range from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Scores range from 28 to 168, with scores in the 140-160 range representing evidence of strong, positive spirituality, 84-112 representing fair or mixed spirituality, and 28-56 indicating spiritual distress. Item-to-total correlations varied from .3 to .7, and the internal consistency reliability alpha was .93 for the total scale with subscales yielding coefficient alpha reliabilities of .82 (purpose and meaning in life), .72 (transcendence), .82 (unifying interconnectedness), and .88 (inner resources). Validity was established through Pearson Product Moment correlations, which resulted in no statistically significant relationship between the factors of spirituality and reports of religiousness and attendance at religious events. As a result, this instrument distinguishes between religiosity and spirituality as discrete constructs.

Daily Spiritual Experiences (DSE)

The third model of spirituality, proposed by Underwood and Teresi (2002), can be used to examine individuals' perceptions of, and interactions with, the divine in daily life in relation to potential health benefits. Using the 16-item *Daily Spiritual Experience Scale* (DSES), Underwood and Teresi observed that daily spiritual experiences (DSE): enrich and contribute to supportive relationships with others, which correspond to better health; buffer stress, anxiety, depression, and the use of alcohol in relation to coping with stress; correspond to an improved quality of life; and may be utilized to enhance resilience and cope with illness. This focus upon DSE differs from the other models of spirituality that have primarily focused upon religious preference, internal and external religious practices, particular religious traditions, or existential perspectives of meaning and values. The DSES, which does not focus on a particular religious paradigm, belief or behavior, examines daily spiritual experiences, not peripheral spiritual events or religious coping in stressful situations. Additionally, Ellison and Fan (2008) used the DSES with a national representative sample of adults in the United States and noted a strong positive relationship between DSE and psychological well-being.

The DSES is comprised of 16 items and has been found to demonstrate positive psychometric properties to measure daily spiritual experiences. The first 15 items of the DSES are responses to the occurrence of spiritual and religious experiences and are based upon a modified six-point Likert-type scale, which includes responses ranging from *many times a day* to *almost never*. The final item is related to a respondent's perceived closeness to God, and the four response categories range from *not close at all* to *as close as possible*. The assessment has demonstrated a .88 internal consistency and .92 test-retest reliability among four different samples. Additionally, the interrater reliability has been found to range between .64 and .78.

The Indivisible Self

Sweeney and Witmer (1991) proposed a model of wellness for counselors based on Adler's five life tasks. This model was termed the Wheel of Wellness (see Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000) model, and it placed spirituality at the core of well-being. Furthermore, Myers, Sweeney, and Witmer (2000) defined wellness as "a way of life oriented toward optimal health and well-being in which body, mind, and spirit are integrated by the individual to live more fully within the human and natural community" (p. 643), thus conceptualizing spirituality as a portion of holistic wellness. In keeping with evidence-based practice, this original model of wellness was modified based on factor analysis. The resulting model, Indivisible Self, is comprised of five factors: Essential Self, Creative Self, Coping Self, Social Self, and, Physical Self. Spirituality is a component of the Essential Self factor and includes an existential sense of meaning for life and one's purpose. A unique characteristic of this model is the interconnectedness of all of the dimensions of self with one another. In other words, a change in one dimension affects functioning in other dimensions. Even though spirituality is a third order factor of the Individual Self Model, it is still a fundamental element of wellness since all of factors are indivisible.

The *Five-Factor Wellness Evaluation of Lifestyle Inventory* (5F-WEL) was developed to measure wellness consistent with the Indivisible Self model of wellness (Myers & Sweeney, 2005). The 5F-WEL is used to measure 19 dimensions of wellness

and consists of 73 items scored on the five second-order factors previously listed as well as 19 additional items that are distracters, experimental items, or items assessing contextual variables. This instrument contains 1- to 4-point Likert-type responses, with a total score for overall wellness ranging from 25 to 100. Scores are also presented for 17 third order factors, which include spirituality, gender identity, cultural identity, self-care, friendship, love, thinking, emotions, control, work, positive humor, exercise, nutrition, leisure, stress management, self-worth, and realistic beliefs. Higher scores indicate higher levels of wellness.

Evidence of reliability for the 5F-WEL has been established through alpha coefficients ranging from .91 to .94 for the five factors. The alpha coefficient has been consistently above .94 for the composite Total Wellness (Myers, Luecht, & Sweeney, 2004). Confirmatory factor analysis resulted in an adjusted goodness-of-fit statistic of .90 and a goodness-of-fit index of .92 (Hattie, Myers, & Sweeney, 2004). Each factor made a unique contribution to overall wellness, as demonstrated by the correlations between the subscales ranging from .29 to .88. Evidence for convergent and divergent validity was established by comparing subscale scores on the 5-F WEL to similar scales on instruments such as the *Testwell* (National Wellness Institute, 1983).

Informal Assessments

In contrast to the formal assessments described in the previous sections, qualitative assessments have the advantage of being flexible and allowing for a greater amount of interpersonal exploration. Using informal tools, the counselor is able to use the client's language, make observations, ask additional questions, and follow the client's pace, direction, and emphasis (Harper & Gill, 2005). Because of these advantages, qualitative assessments also can serve as interventions that assist with increasing client insight.

Sentence Completion Tests

Spiritual based sentence completion tests contain the beginning of a sentence (i.e., a stem), which clients are asked to complete. Unlike formal inventories, sentence stems allow for varied responses that may incite deep reflection and provide the counselor with considerable insight into the client's spiritual domain. Two commonly used sentence completion exercises are the *Oshodi Sentence Completion Index* (OSCI; Oshodi, 1999) and the *Spiritual Quest Form* (SQF; Niño, 1997). The OSCI is composed of 20 stems, six that directly address spiritual and/or religious issues. Originally designed to assess the need for achievement in people of African descent, many questions found in the OSCI provide counselors with a framework to assess spirituality in such a way that respects African influences on spirituality.

The *Spiritual Quest Form* (SQF) includes 10 sentence stems designed to explore attitudes of the client related to spiritual development (Niño, 1997). The SQF contains stems such as "I think the spiritual ...," "My relation to God ...," and "A meaningful life ..." (Niño, 1997, p. 207). Providing an atmosphere of empathy and safety is essential when administering these inventories (Harper & Gill, 2005). Additionally, counselors should continue to assist the client in identifying additional spiritual beliefs, meanings, and value systems that arise out of this narrative. Sentence stems are an excellent tool for

counselors in the assessment of therapeutic issues related to the client's spiritual domain but, if warranted, further exploration through other strategies such as spiritual histories, autobiographies, or timelines may be needed.

Spiritual Timelines

Timelines have been used in history and business to chart progress and change over a period of time. In much the same way, clients can create spiritual timelines that demonstrate the most salient moments (from their own unique perspectives) that have shaped their spiritual development, beliefs, and practices. The benefits of such timelines include assisting counselors in assessing change, crises, and development, as well as encouraging clients to gain insight and awareness of their own spiritual histories (Curry & Simpson, in press). To use this technique a counselor needs to thoroughly understand the technique (see Curry, 2009) and should have training in addressing spiritual issues in counseling. The counselor can procure various materials for the client to create the spiritual timeline (i.e., markers, construction paper, magazines, pictures, scissors, and more). The counselor should gain the client's permission to use this or other expressive arts techniques by thoroughly explaining the technique and how the counselor will use the timeline to gain insight into the meanings the client has assigned to his or her own spiritual milestones. Once the client has agreed, the counselor should give the client a verbal prompt such as, "I would like for you to create a timeline of the events that have shaped your current spiritual beliefs and practices. You may include as many or as few defining moments as you wish."

After the timeline is completed, the counselor and client should discuss the different events as they have shaped the client's current perspective (Curry, 2009). Most critically, when processing the spiritual timeline with the client, the counselor should listen for themes to follow up on such as kinship and other relationships, resurrection of self, freedom, survivorship, use of language or pictures as symbols, notions of power, grief and loss, forgiveness, spiritual gifts, and the divergence of individual spiritual beliefs from religious affiliation or family of origin (Bassard, 1999; Curry & Simpson, 2011). These themes may help the counselor assess the client's spiritual development, spiritual issues of importance to the client, spiritual-related goals, and progress toward reaching counseling goals.

Spiritual Genogram

Counselors who believe a systemic family view of the client's spiritual domain would be beneficial should consider using a spiritual genogram. The spiritual genogram provides the counselor and the client with a pictorial representation of the spiritual domain in a family system and helps provide a clearer understanding of family relationships. A genogram can be developed during intake with information added throughout the counseling process. The spiritual genogram can be as simple or as complex as needed but typically contains a description of the two generations preceding the client, the client's generation, and any following generations (McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985). The extent to which the counselor and client explore the client's family history depends on how relevant these issues are to counseling and whether distinguishable changes or patterns in the client's belief system, values and/or practices may contribute to therapeutic issues (Gill, Harper, & Dailey, in press). Similar to the use of any counseling

technique, to effectively use this tool counselors need to thoroughly understand it (see Frame, 2000) and should have training in addressing spiritual issues in counseling. More specific components of the genogram, such as the use of squares, circles, and various styles of lines, are illustrated in the next section, Spiritual Ecomaps.

Spiritual Ecomaps

Counselors can use spiritual ecomaps to graphically describe the spiritual domains of individuals and families (Gill, Harper, & Dailey, in press; Hodge, 2000, 2005). While taking a spiritual history or discussing the client's current spiritual and religious resources, the counselor may find it useful to document the client's spiritual domain for discussion clarity and so that the client can see how elements of this domain may influence the client's issues or be resources in resolving these issues.

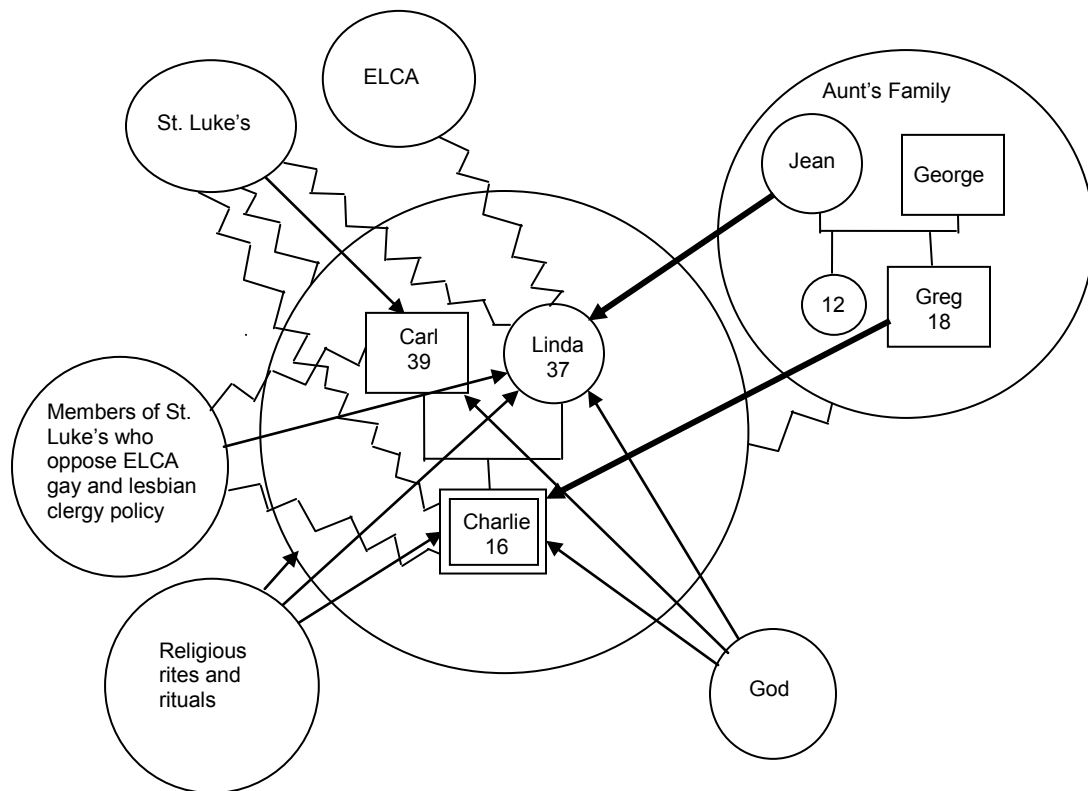
At the center of the ecomap is a genogram style representation of the client's immediate family (Hodge, 2000, 2005). *Figure 1* illustrates an ecomap for Charlie, a 16-year-old only child of an intact married couple. Charlie's family in *Figure 1* is enclosed in a circle. The circle allows the client to represent relationships at the family level, and the family genogram allows the counselor and client to note different personal relationships for each family member. As in a traditional genogram, varied style lines depict different types of relationships, with heavy solid lines indicating close relationships, lighter lines indicating weaker relationships, broken lines indicating disconnected relationships, and jagged lines indicating strained or conflicted relationships (McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985). Hodge (2000, 2005) suggested that counselors place outside the family circle representations of systems relevant to the family's spiritual domain. The counselor then explores these spiritual systems with the client and has the client add relational lines between the family and each spiritual system and between pertinent family members and each spiritual system.

Case Example of using a Spiritual Ecomap in Counseling

The counselor chose to create the spiritual ecomap in *Figure 1* with Charlie because after talking with Charlie, the counselor believed that Charlie's school performance, decreased participation in church and social activities, and changed attitude ("sulky and distant," according to his parents) were related to policy changes at Charlie's church and family conflict concerning these policy changes. Charlie's family and close relatives attend St. Luke's Lutheran Church. Charlie told his counselor that he does not feel comfortable at St. Luke's since the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) started allowing gays and lesbians to be clergy members. Charlie described conflict within the church and among members of his family concerning sexuality and said that even his Aunt Jean has threatened to go to a different church if St. Luke's does not split from the ELCA. Charlie said this is especially painful to hear from his aunt because her son, Greg, is gay but not out. Charlie said that he is close to Greg and cannot stand hearing people say bad things about gays. The counselor chose to create a spiritual ecomap with Charlie to understand better how Charlie and various members of his family relate to the ELCA, St. Luke's, different factions within St. Luke's, God, and religious and spiritual rituals.

The counselor found that everyone in Charlie's immediate family has a comfortable personal relationship with God, but the family members have varied relationships with other spiritual systems. Only Charlie's father still has a strong and comfortable relationship with St. Luke's. He likes this faith community and does not want to change churches. The family as a whole, Charlie, and Charlie's mother experience conflict in their relationships with St. Luke's. Charlie's mother is conflicted with St. Luke's because she is close to Aunt Jean and sides with Aunt Jean against gay and lesbian clergy members.

Figure 1 Spiritual ecomap of an adolescent's family in a church undergoing conflict.



Charlie is conflicted with St. Luke's because he is close to Greg and does not like being in any environment where people speak out against gays and lesbians. Only Charlie's mother has a relationship with the ELCA. This is a conflicted relationship because she does not agree with the new policy, but she always has considered herself a faithful member of the ELCA. Both Charlie and his father lack relationship with the ELCA. They view their religious relationship as being with St. Luke's, and not with the denomination with which St. Luke's is affiliated. Charlie and his father experience discomfort in their relationships with members of St. Luke's who want to split from the ELCA, but Charlie's mother remains supportive of these people. Charlie, his mother, and the family as a whole remain connected with religious rites and rituals. Charlie's father participates in church and family spiritual rituals, but Charlie said that if left to himself, his father probably

would not pray at meals or even attend church regularly. Creating this ecomap with Charlie helped the counselor gain a clearer picture of Charlie's spiritual domain and helped Charlie recognize that he is more similar to his father than to his mother in his religious values (personal relationship with God is important, and local church community is more important than the denomination) and personal beliefs concerning gays and lesbians.

Conclusion

This article is meant to introduce the reader to spiritual and religious assessment instruments and techniques in the counseling process. This article is neither intended to be a comprehensive nor exhaustive review of any one assessment or tool, rather, it is hoped that the reader will further explore the assessments and practices reviewed here. Counselors wishing to learn more are encouraged to begin by reviewing the *Spiritual Competencies* (2009) published by ASERVIC (www.aservic.org). Upon completing a review of the competencies, counselors may wish to more thoroughly explore the assessments and tools described in this article by accessing the resources noted throughout and by attending professional development workshops on spiritual integration in counseling. As previously mentioned, addressing client spiritual and religious concerns may assist clients in finding greater meaning, remaining hopeful, and determining what type of life changes would define personal success. This article has illuminated multiple strategies for exploring these issues in counseling.

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