Sacred Matters: What Science has to Teach Us about Spiritually Integrated Counseling

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Presentation to CASC/ACSS 50th Anniversary Conference
April 15, 2015
Hamilton, ON

My thanks to the John Templeton Foundation for their generous support
Why are We Whispering?
Overview

- Why spiritually integrated counseling is challenging
- Why spiritually integrated counseling makes good sense
Reasons for the Tensions between Spirituality and Counseling

- Scientific avoidance of religion and spirituality
Reasons for the Tensions between Spirituality and Counseling

- Scientific avoidance of religion and spirituality
- Scientific antagonism toward religion and spirituality
A History of Tension between Religion and Counseling

Religion works “by distorting the picture of the real world in delusional manner. . . by forcibly fixing [adherents] in a state of psychical infantilism and by drawing them into a mass delusion” (Freud, 1930, pp. 31-32, Civilization and Its Discontents).
Reasons for the Tension between Spirituality and Counseling

- Scientific avoidance of religion and spirituality
- Scientific antagonism toward religion and spirituality
- Mental Health professionals are “WEIRD”
  - Western
  - Educated
  - Industrialized
  - Rich
  - Democratic
Psychologists vs. General Population of U. S. (Shafranske & Cummings, 2013)

- Religion is very important or fairly important
  - 90% of general population
  - 23% of clinical psychologists

- I believe in God
  - 96% of general population
  - 24% of clinical psychologists

- I pray at least daily
  - 75% of general population
  - 19% of psychologists
Reasons for the Tension between Spirituality and Counseling

- Scientific avoidance of religion and spirituality
- Scientific antagonism toward religion and spirituality
- Mental health professionals are “WEIRD”
- Competing religions
Sources of Knowledge: Science vs. Spirituality

- Skepticism
- Observation
- Empiricism
- Pragmatism
- Replication

- Faith
- Revelation
- Intuition
- Religious authority
- Mystery
Hey everybody, look out! It's one of those... um... you know... uhh, with the fire and stuff...

Despite its name, the thesaurus was quite often at a loss for words.
Reasons for the Tension between Spirituality and Counseling

- Scientific avoidance of religion and spirituality
- Scientific antagonism toward religion and spirituality
- Mental health professionals are “WEIRD”
- Competing religions
- Lack of training and knowledge
  - Only 15% of Ph. D. training programs in clinical psychology in the United States and Canada offer a course in religion and spirituality
A Rationale for Integration of Spirituality and Counseling

- Religion and spirituality are embedded in Western culture
  - Over 147 million people belong to religious congregations in the U. S.
  - Over 335,000 congregations in the U. S. (Lindner, 2010)
Religious Landscape Survey - 2008

- 68% believe in angels and demons
- 59% believe in hell
- 58% pray daily
- 57% agree that it is necessary to believe in God to be moral and have good values
- 40% report attending religious services in past week
Religion in Canada
(Association for Canadian Studies, 2012; Pew Center, 2011)

- 71% women and 64% men believe in God
- 42% agree that “religion is an important part of my life”
- 27% identify as Protestant; 39% as Catholic; 11% as other; 24% as religiously unaffiliated
- Highest levels in Manitoba and Saskatchewan and lowest levels in British Columbia
Religion and Spirituality are Cultural Facts

- Many people see the world through a sacred lens
- Many people speak the language of religion and spirituality
- Many people pursue religious goals in life
- Many people traverse religious pathways
A Rationale for Integration of Spirituality and Counseling

- Religion and spirituality are embedded in western culture
- Spirituality is a resource to many people
“The plane was moving more erratically. I knew it wasn’t good by the increase in activity of the stewardesses. . . The guy next to me at minus four minutes said, ‘We ain’t going to make it’. . . I noticed the nun across from me had been praying on her rosary. I remembered I had a cross in my pocket. I pulled it out and held it in my hand for the rest of the ride.”

“I’d done a lot of Buddhist meditation in my life, and this trained me to become one pointed in my awareness. I was totally focused on the brace position.”
Coping with 9/11

- Schuster et al. (2001)
- 90% of national sample of Americans sought solace and support from religion
God Help Me

- Under stress, many people seek and find help from religion in coping (Pargament, 1997)
  - Soldiers
  - Divorcees
  - Physically abused spouses
  - Parents of children with disabilities
  - Medically ill
  - Victims of natural disasters
Spirituality among People with Serious Mental Illness

- Tepper et al. (2001)
- Surveyed over 400 people with serious mental illness
- 80% cope with their symptoms and daily problems through religion
- 65% found religious coping helpful
- 30% say religion was most important resource
- More religious coping over time tied to less frustration, less depression and hostility, and fewer hospitalizations
Family Caregivers of Patients with Schizophrenia (Rammohan et al., 2002)

- 90% coped by praying to God
- 50% reported that religion was a source of solace, strength, and guidance
Correlates of Religious Involvement
Koenig, King, & Carson (2012)

- Well-being, happiness and life satisfaction
- Lower rates of depression and faster recovery
- Lower rates of suicide
- Less anxiety
- Less psychosis
- Lower rates of alcohol and drug use
- Less delinquency and criminal activity
- Greater marital stability and satisfaction
Positive Spiritual Coping: Benevolent Spiritual Appraisals

“I was told by the swamis early in my study of Vedanta that disability was present in my life so that I could grow in new ways and progress along the path to God consciousness. . . This life is riddled with physical frustrations but wealthy with opportunities for spiritual growth” (Nosek, 1995, Hindu woman disabled with neuromuscular disorder)
Positive Spiritual Coping: Spiritual Support

“I’m speaking to my higher power, my God. And I give thanks to that power. It has been a source of strength. You know, it’s like tapping in to some sort of power source that I can recharge my batteries” (Siegel & Scrimshaw, 2002).
Positive Spiritual Coping: Active Spiritual Surrender

“I pray a lot. I gave it to God because I couldn’t deal with it, it was too stressful for me. It was like a load had been lifted off of me. I didn’t have to worry about that because I knew it was in God’s hands. . . Before I thought I was running everything, but I realized that it’s God that’s in charge of everything about me (Siegel & Scrimshaw, 2002).
Positive Spiritual Coping: Seeking Support from Religion

“The pastor there, he doesn’t look down on a person because of HIV. . . And when the congregation prays, they pray for all different kinds of things without saying anyone in particular and they also pray for people what are HIV positive and who have AIDS. So that’s my support group really, is my church” (55-year old Puerto Rican Baptist woman, Siegel & Scrimshaw, 2002).
Positive Spiritual Coping: Spiritual Purification

“In the beginning when I was first diagnosed and everything, I was angry at myself. . . Through the spiritual part of my life, I’ve gotten to be understanding that I have to forgive myself and I have to forgive him (the man that infected her), and God forgives both of us.” (Siegel & Scrimshaw, 2002).
Positive Spiritual Coping: Transformation

My motivations and my whole sense of direction have changed. My values changed. What I thought was important changed. I just completely shifted gears. It’s given me a sense of purpose and direction I never had before, and I’ve been searching different avenues but never found exactly what I was supposed to be doing. I’ve tried a lot of different things, a lot of different jobs, traveled a lot, had lots of experiences in my life. Yet always there was that kind of restless searching, searching. Now I feel like I know exactly what I’m supposed to do. (Miller & C’dé Baca, p. 130)
## Ano and Vasconcelles Meta-Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Religious Coping</th>
<th>Number of Studies</th>
<th>Cumulative Effect Size</th>
<th>Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>with Positive Health Outcomes</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>.33*</td>
<td>.30 to .35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive Religious Coping</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>with Negative Health Outcomes</td>
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</table>
“So you go to church and I belong to the Kiwani’s. What’s the difference?”
Religion and Spirituality as Distinctive Resources

- Empirical studies have not been able to “explain away” the effects of religion and spirituality.
- Religious congregations have distinctive access to minority, marginalized, and disenfranchised groups.
What Makes Religion and Spirituality Special?

- An ultimate, overarching, organization vision for life
- Tools for coming to terms with human limitations and finitude
  - “The events through which we live are forever outrunning the power of ordinary, everyday moral, emotional and intellectual concepts to construct them, leaving us, as a Javanese image has it, like a water buffalo listening to an orchestra” (Geertz, 1968, p. 101).
- The language of spirituality: suffering, surrender, transcendence, transformation, love, compassion, forgiveness
Religion, Spirituality, and Human Limitedness

- Religious and spiritual resources are particularly helpful to people:
  - With limited resources – minorities, elderly, impoverished
  - In situations that point to the limits of human control – major illness, death, accidents, natural disasters
A Rationale for Integration of Spirituality and Counseling

- Religion and spirituality are embedded in American culture
- Spirituality is a resource to many people
- Religion and spirituality can be a source of problems
The “Seamy Side” of Religion

- Extremism
- Prejudice
- Hypocrisy
- Crippling guilt
- Passivity
- Denial
Spiritual Struggles

- Divine struggles
- Interpersonal spiritual struggles
- Intrapsychic spiritual struggles
Divine Struggles

“I’m suffering, really suffering. My illness is tearing me down, and I’m angry at God for not rescuing me, I mean really setting me free from my mental bondage. I have been dealing with these issues for ten years now and I am only 24 years old. I don’t understand why he keeps lifting me up, just to let me come crashing down again” (undergraduate dealing with bipolar illness).
Intrapersonal R/S Struggles
Ultimate Meaning

“Imagine a happy group of morons who are engaged in work. They are carrying bricks in an open field. As soon as they have stacked all the bricks at one end of the field, they proceed to transport them to the opposite end. This continues without stop and everyday of every year. One day one of the morons stops long enough to ask himself what he is doing. He wonders what purpose there is in carrying the bricks. And from that instance on he is not quite as content with his occupation as he had been before. I am the moron who wonders why he is carrying the bricks” (in Yalom, 1980, p. 419, suicide note).
Interpersonal Spiritual Struggles

- Negative interactions among congregation members:
  - Gossiping
  - Cliquishness
  - Hypocrisy
  - Disagreements with doctrine

- “They get off in a corner and talk about you and you’re the one that’s there on Saturday working with their children and washing the dishes on Sunday afternoon. They don’t have the Christian spirit” (Krause et al., 2000).
Spiritual Struggles Are Not Uncommon

- One out of five individuals reported moderate or high levels of religious struggles in a study of three groups of medical patients (Fitchett et al., 2001)
- 65% of adult sample reported religious conflicts, largely interpersonal in nature (Nielsen, 1998)
Spiritual Struggles are Not Uncommon (Balboni et al., 2013)

- 69 advanced cancer patients
- 58% endorsed a spiritual struggle
- 30% wondering why God allowed this to happen
- 29% wondering whether abandoned by God
- 25% angry at God
- 25% questioning God’s love for them
- 22% feeling cancer is punishment from God
Correlates of Spiritual Struggles

- Anxiety
- Depression
- PTSD
- Poorer physical health
- Declines in immune status
- Risk of mortality
Spiritual Struggles among Patients with Multiple Myeloma
(Sherman et al., 2005)

- 213 multiple myeloma patients
- Negative religious coping associated with greater fatigue, pain, clinician and self-rated depression, and distress
- Other measures of religiousness were unrelated to indices of health
Measures
(Pargament, Koenig et al. 2004)

- Number of Active Diagnoses
- Subjective Health
- Severity of Illness Scale (ASA)
- Activities of Daily Living (ADL)
- Mini-Mental State Exam (MSE)
- Depressed Mood
- Quality of Life
- Positive Religious Coping and Religious Struggle
- Global Religious Measures (Church Attendance, Private Religiousness, Religious Importance)
- Demographics
Consequences of Spiritual Struggles

- Study of medically ill elderly patients over two years (Pargament, Koenig, Tarakeshwar, & Hahn, 2004)
- Struggles with the divine predicted increases in depressed mood, declines in physical functional status, declines in quality of life after controls
- Struggles with the divine predicted 22-33% greater risk of mortality after controls
- Struggles also predict stress-related growth
Specific Spiritual Struggle
Predictors of Mortality

- “Wondered whether God had abandoned me” (RR = 1.28)
- “Questioned God’s love for me” (R = 1.22)
- “Decided the devil made this happen” (R = 1.19)
Spiritual Struggles among Caregivers of Patients with Terminal Cancer (Pearce et al., 2006)

- 162 informal caregivers
- Spiritual struggles tied to more caregiver burden, poorer quality of life, less satisfaction, and greater risk of major depression and anxiety disorders
## Ano and Vasconcelles Meta-Analysis


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<tr>
<td>Spiritual Struggles with Negative Health</td>
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<td>.22*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Correlates of Spiritual Struggles among Muslims

(Abu-Raiya and Pargament, 2006)

- Depression  \( r = .35 \)
- Purpose in Life  \( r = -.41 \)
- Angry Feelings  \( r = .32 \)
- Positive Relationships  \( r = -.44 \)
- Alcohol Use  \( r = .62 \)
- Poorer Physical Health  \( r = .35 \)
Correlates of Spiritual Struggles among Hindus (Tarakeshwar et al., 2003)

- Depression $r = .40$
- Life Satisfaction $r = -.40$
- Marital Satisfaction $r = -.27$
Correlates of Spiritual Struggles among Jews (Rosmarin, 2008)

- Depression $r = .34$
- Anxiety $r = .27$
- Worry $r = .15$
“Things die in the winter time; they come back in the spring. They bloom, they regenerate. People go through issues with their spiritual journeys where they reach a point where they feel that nothing else is happening. They can learn no more, they can do no more, and they just feel like they’re at a point where they’re burned out and they’re dead. . . And then all of a sudden there’s a new spark of life and a new passion – a new goal to achieve” (Rockenbach et al., 2012, p. 68).
A Rationale for Integration of Spirituality and Counseling

- Religion are embedded in western culture
- Spirituality is a resource to many people
- Religion and spirituality can be a source of problems
- People generally prefer spiritually integrated approaches to care
Rose et al (2001)  
Journal of Counseling Psychology

- 74 patients surveyed from 9 diverse counseling centers
- Only 18% say they prefer not to discuss religious or spiritual issues in counseling
Unmet Spiritual Needs of the Medically Ill

- 72% of patients with advanced cancer felt minimally or not at all spiritually supported by the medical system; 47% felt similarly about their religious communities (Balboni et al., 2007)

- Unmet spiritual needs tied to more aggressive medical care at EOL, and higher EOL costs ($6533 vs. 2276 among minority patients) (Balboni et al., 2011)
A Rationale for Integration of Spirituality and Counseling

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- Religion and spirituality can be a source of problems
- People generally prefer spiritually integrated approaches to health care

- Spiritually integrated interventions have shown promising results
The Work of Kelly Avants and Arthur Margolin

- Spiritual Self-Schema Therapy (3-S)
- Work with treatment resistant cocaine and opioid dependent clients
- De-activate addict self-schema and activate spiritual self-schema
- Significant increases in spiritual self-schema
- Significant reductions in cocaine and heroin use
The Work of P. Scott Richards

- Women with eating disorders in an inpatient setting
- Spiritual group vs. CBT vs. emotional support
- All three groups showed positive change
- Spiritual group manifested more improvement in: eating attitudes, symptom distress, social role conflict, and spiritual well-being
Spiritual Meditation among Patients with Vascular Headaches
(Wachholtz & Pargament, 2005)

- 83 college students with vascular headaches according to criteria of the International Headache Society (1988)
- Random assignment to four groups
  - Spiritual Meditation (e.g., “God is peace,” “God is joy”)
  - Internally Focused Secular Meditation (“I am content,” “I am joyful”)
  - Externally Focused Secular Meditation (“Grass is green,” “Sand is soft”)
  - Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Practice technique 20 minutes per day for four weeks
- Assess changes in headache frequency, pain tolerance, affect, headache control efficacy
Headache Occurrence Prior to and during the Intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Meditation</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Secular</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Meditation</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxation</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
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Diary Analyses of Headache Occurrence by Group and Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Headaches</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 26-30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 21-25</td>
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<td>Day 16-20</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 11-15</td>
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<td>Day 6-10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 1-5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GROUP
- Spiritual Meditation
- Internal Secular
- External Meditation
- Relaxation
Pain Tolerance by Group and Time

TIME

Pain Tolerance (seconds)

GROUP
Spiritual Meditation
Internal Secular
External Meditation
Relaxation
Negative Affect by Group and Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP</th>
<th>Time 1</th>
<th>Time 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Meditation</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Secular</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Meditation</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxation</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Effectiveness of Health Care Chaplaincy (Iler et al., 2001)

- 50 COPD inpatients
- Half receive daily chaplain visits; the other half do not
- Patients receiving chaplain visits:
  - Less anxiety
  - Greater satisfaction with care
  - Shorter length of stay
Spiritually Sensitive Care: An Ethical Mandate

- American Psychological Association (2002)
- American Psychiatric Association (1989)
- American Association of Marital and Family Therapists (2012)
- American Counseling Association (2009)
- American Nursing Association (2001)
A Rationale for Integration of Spirituality and Counseling

- Religion are embedded in American culture
- Spirituality is a resource to many people
- Religion and spirituality can be a source of problems
- Patients generally prefer spiritually integrated approaches to care
- Spiritually integrated interventions have shown promising results
- Spiritually sensitive care is ethically mandated
- Spirituality cannot be fully removed from counseling
A Forgiveness Intervention

- Rye and Pargament (2002)
- College students hurt in romantic relationship
- Religious forgiveness intervention
- Secular forgiveness intervention
- Both groups facilitate forgiveness and well-being
- No group differences in efficacy
Strategies for Forgiveness

- Two of top three strategies for secular forgiveness group
  - “I asked God for help and/or support as I was trying to forgive.”
  - “I prayed for the person who wronged me as I was trying to forgive.”
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The key question is not why should we integrate spirituality into counseling but rather what’s taking us so long.