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Addressing religious/spiritual concerns in psychotherapy

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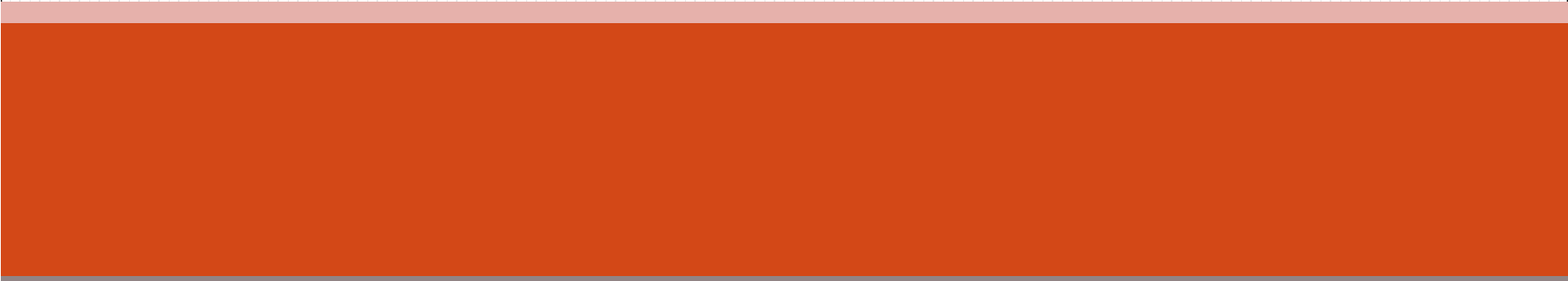
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Addressing Spiritual/Religious Concerns in Psychotherapy

Rodger K. Bufford

Overview

- Worldviews
- Diversity of religious/spiritual views
- Self-exploration
- Informed consent/spiritual assessment
- Religion/spirituality: Asset or Challenge?
- Religious and spiritual probes and invitations
- Religious/spiritual outcomes
- Resources

Worldviews

- Everyone has a worldview
- Worldviews differ



Worldviews

- Worldviews address several important concerns:
 - What exists - *metaphysics*
 - How we know - *epistemology*
 - How things work - *cosmology*
 - Good and evil, right and wrong – *philosophical ethics*
 - Who we are – *philosophical anthropology*

Worldviews

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 - What exists — *metaphysics*
 - How we know — *epistemology*
 - How things work — *cosmology*
 - Good and evil, right and wrong — *philosophical ethics*
 - Who we are — *philosophical anthropology*
- **Religion/spirituality and worldviews are closely related**
- *What examples can you think of for each domain?*

Worldviews

- Worldviews address several important concerns:
 - What exists – *metaphysics*: God, angels, demons etc.
 - How we know – *epistemology*: Holy Writ
 - How things work – *cosmology*: prayer, rituals (magic, etc.)
 - Good and evil, right and wrong – *philosophical ethics*; treatment of animals, ecological concerns
 - Who we are – *philosophical anthropology*: Image of God, just complex animals
- **Religion/spirituality and worldviews are closely related**

Worldviews

- Worldviews have important implications for counseling and psychotherapy
 - What we consider a problem
 - How we solve problems (means)
 - Goals (ends) or treatment objectives
 - Our intentions (motives)
 - Religion/spirituality and worldviews are closely related
- *Give examples of problems you have encountered in each area*

Worldviews

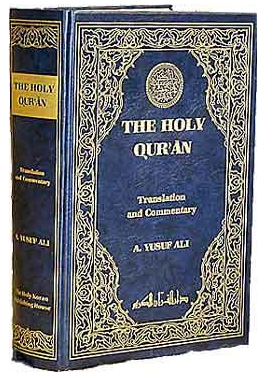
- *Give examples of problems you have encountered in each area*
 - What we consider a problem—[charismatic service]
 - How we solve problems (means)—[cold day in hell]
 - Goals (ends)—[become more independent and assertive/collectivist culture; perfectionism]
 - Our intentions (motives)—[mercenary?]

Religion and Spirituality



Photo courtesy of the
Smithsonian Institution.

- No consensual definition
- Sometimes religion is used to refer to formal religious institutional involvement
- Here religion and spirituality will be considered two sides of the same coin
 - **Religion** is public, communal, social-behavioral
 - **Spirituality** is personal, private, experiential
 - Nothing could be more silly than to believe that my most deeply held beliefs and value have nothing to do with how I live my life



Religion/Spirituality and Worldviews

- There are many different religious systems and quasi-religious systems
 - Theistic
 - Non-theistic
 - Other
- Each has its own distinctive answers to worldview question that shape adherents' approaches to mental health

Religion/Spirituality and Worldviews

- There are many different religious systems and quasi-religious systems
 - Theistic
 - Jewish
 - Christian
 - Muslim
 - Spiritist
 - Non-theistic
 - Other

Religion/Spirituality and Worldviews

- There are many different religious systems and quasi-religious systems
 - Theistic
 - Non-theistic
 - Hindu
 - Confucian
 - Shinto
 - Other



Religion/Spirituality and Worldviews

- There are many different religious systems and quasi-religious systems
 - Theistic
 - Non-theistic
 - Other
 - “He was a self-made man and proud of his maker”
 - “He worshipped the ground she walked on.”
 - “He’s a Laker’s fan.”
 - ”She’s a ‘tree hugger.’”
 - [Motorcycle repair episode]



Religion/Spirituality and Worldviews

- There are many different religious systems and quasi-religious systems
 - Other
 - “Observed commonalities between religion and psychology have prompted some commentators to ascribe to certain forms of psychology the character of a religious movement . . . sacred texts . . . objects of sacrifice . . . sacred places . . . various rites . . . (and) creeds. . . . More generally and profoundly, beneath these obvious forms lies a faith that adherence to the teachings of the tradition will in time bring salvation, whether it be in the form of a personal career, the wealth of a patient, or the transformation of society.” (Wulff, 1997; p. 12)

Religion/Spirituality In the US

- Gallup polls show about 90-95% of US citizens report belief in God--hence theistic
- About 40-45% are affiliated with traditional religious organizations:
 - Protestant
 - Catholic
 - Jewish
- Enormous variability in beliefs, behaviors, engagement, etc. even within groups

Personal religious/spiritual experiences

- Describe your childhood religious/spiritual experiences and family involvement
- Describe your current religious/spiritual involvement
- Identify significant events in any religious/spiritual changes you have undergone
- Give two examples of religious/spiritual encounters you have had with clients

Informed Consent/Non-Consent

- Ethics codes
 - **APA code**
- **PRINCIPLE E: RESPECT FOR PEOPLE'S RIGHTS AND DIGNITY**
- Psychologists respect the dignity and worth of all people, and the rights of individuals to privacy, confidentiality, and self-determination. Psychologists are aware that special safeguards may be necessary to protect the rights and welfare of persons or communities whose vulnerabilities impair autonomous decision making. Psychologists are aware of and respect cultural, individual, and role differences, including those based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, **religion**, sexual orientation, disability, language, and socioeconomic status and consider these factors when working with members of such groups. Psychologists try to eliminate the effect on their work of biases based on those factors, and they do not knowingly participate in or condone activities of others based upon such prejudices.

APA Guidelines on Diversity - 2002

- **Guideline # 5: Psychologists strive to apply culturally appropriate skills in clinical and other applied psychological practices.**
 - “ . . . These include language, gender, biracial/multiracial heritage, **spiritual/religious orientations**, sexual orientation, age, disability, socioeconomic situation, and historical life experience; e.g., immigration and refugee status

Informed Consent/Non-Consent

- Ethics codes
 - Social Work code
- 1.05 Cultural Competence and Social Diversity
- (a) Social workers should understand culture and its function in human behavior and society, recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures.
- (b) Social workers should have a knowledge base of their clients' cultures and be able to demonstrate competence in the provision of services that are sensitive to clients' cultures and to differences among people and cultural groups.
- (c) Social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, **religion**, immigration status, and mental or physical disability.

Informed Consent/Non-Consent

- Ethics codes
 - Nursing ethics code
- “. . . and **religious beliefs** should be considered in health care planning for each patient.”
- http://nursingworld.org/ethics/code/protected_nwcoe813.htm
- <http://kspope.com/ethcodes/index.php>

Informed Consent/Non-Consent

- Ethics codes
 - LMFT ethics code

Principle I Responsibility to Clients

Marriage and family therapists advance the welfare of families and individuals. They respect the rights of those persons seeking their assistance, and make reasonable efforts to ensure that their services are used appropriately.

1.1. Marriage and family therapists provide professional assistance to persons without discrimination on the basis of race, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, gender, health status, **religion**, national origin, or sexual orientation.

Informed Consent/Non-Consent

- Ethics codes
 - APA code
 - Other codes
- Consent Processes
 - Address at the outset
 - Negotiate
 - Revisit [“I’ve decided to go back to church.”]

Know Yourself

- We began this process earlier

What do you need to know about yourself?

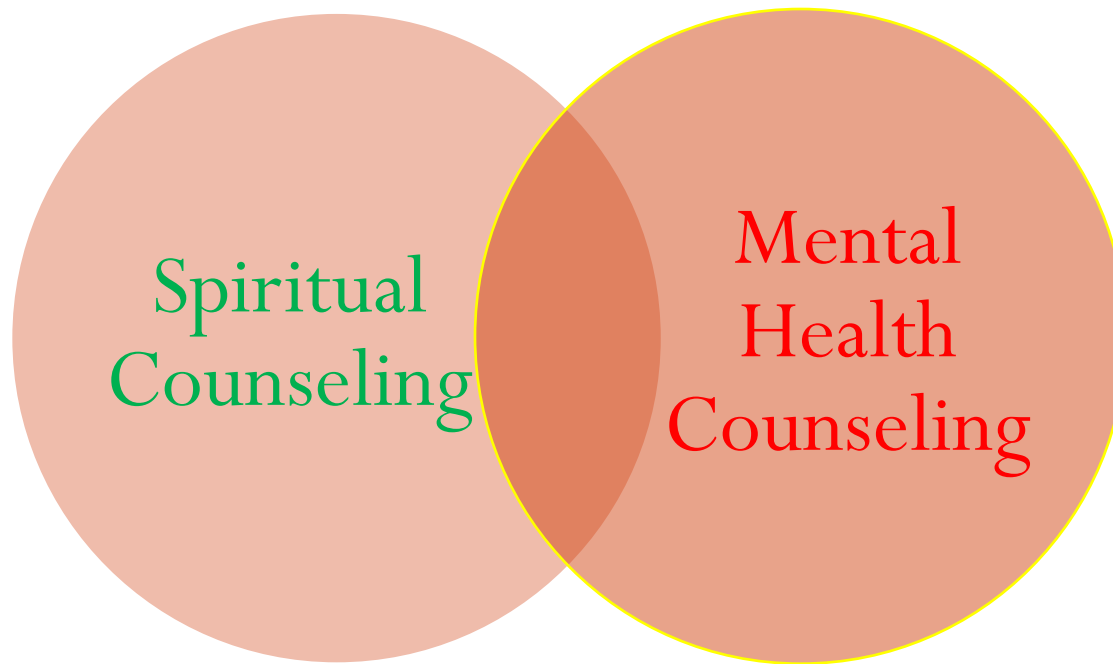
Know Yourself

- We began this process earlier
- Knowing myself includes
 - What I do well
 - What I do not do well
- Knowing myself includes my “hot buttons”
 - Enthusiasms and preferences
 - Dislikes/antipathies
 - Painful topics
 - Significant & formative personal experiences
 - Degree of openness to other views, values, beliefs, etc.

Know Your Client

- Informed consent or informed non-consent.
- APA and other codes re consent, autonomy

Mental Health & Religious/Spiritual Counseling: Overlapping but distinct



Religious/Spiritual Assessment

- Religion/spirituality can be helpful
 - Meaning and purpose in life
 - Social support/service
 - Spiritual well-being
- Spirituality/religion can be harmful
 - Remember Jonesboro
 - Abuse in the Catholic or other churches, etc.
 - Other forms of harm: rejection, insensitivity, etc.

Inviting Religion/Spirituality

- *What strategies have you used or encountered for inviting religion / spirituality?*

Spiritual & Religious Assessment: Information Gathering

- Give examples of how you might approach inquiring about a client's religious/spiritual attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and concerns.

Spiritual & Religious Assessment: Information Gathering

- Informed consent and information gathering lead to appropriate interventions.
 - They may invite the client to explore spiritual/religious issues in session, creating a climate of openness.
 - Remember, clients have stories. It is important to invite and listen to their stories.

Spiritual & Religious Assessment: Information Gathering

- Informed consent and information gathering lead to appropriate interventions.
- Example (McMinn, 1996; p. 240)
 - “I will use a form of cognitive therapy.
 - “We will carefully examine your personal history and current circumstances in order to find and revise faulty thinking patterns and beliefs that contribute to your symptoms.
 - “Both your personal values and mine will affect the ways your beliefs are evaluated. Thus it is important that you know something about my values and that you are free to question me about my value assumptions at any time.
 - “I believe many biological, psychosocial and emotional factors contribute to psychological problems.”

Spiritual & Religious Assessment: Informational Forms

1. How important are spiritual matters to you?

☐ Not at all ☐ Little ☐ Somewhat ☐ Very much

2. Are you affiliated with a spiritual or religious group?

☐ No ☐ Yes

If yes, please describe: _____

3. Would you like your spiritual/religious beliefs incorporated into the counseling?

☐ No ☐ Yes

[From Western Psychological & Counseling Services intake form]

Religious/Spiritual Assessment

Give examples you have encountered:

- Religion/spirituality can be helpful
- Spirituality/religion can be harmful



Religious/Spiritual Assessment

Give examples you have encountered:

- Religion/spirituality can be helpful
- Spirituality/religion can be harmful

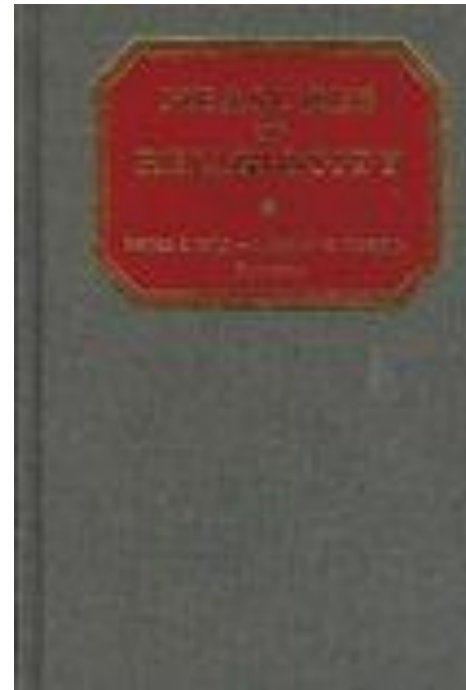


Both values and judgment are involved in these assessments

Religious/Spiritual Assessment

More formal assessment is possible; there are a large variety of religious/spiritual measures that one can use.

Hill, P. C., & Hood, R. W., Jr.
(1999). *Measures of Religiosity*. Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press. [0-89135-1060-X]



Religious/Spiritual Assessment: examples of measures

- Forgiveness
- Gratitude
- Quest religious orientation
- R-Cope – religious coping
- ROS: Intrinsic and Extrinsic religious orientation
- Spiritual Well-Being

Planning Treatment to Include Religion/Spirituality

Other Considerations:

- ☐ Assets and strengths
- ☐ Challenges and liabilities
- ☐ **Religion and Spirituality**
- ☐ Evidence & Ethical concerns

Planning Treatment to Include Religion/Spirituality

Other Considerations:

Religion and Spirituality – A

- ☐ Explore for possible social support from the church community
- ☐ Examine religious self-talk/encourage use of supportive religious self-talk

Religion and Spirituality - B

As a pastor, religious and spiritual concerns are central. We could explore:

- ☐ Where does God fit in?
- ☐ Is this something he can/does pray about?
- ☐ The quality/characteristics of his relationship with God, etc.

Sample Leads for Exploring Religious Issues in Therapy

General

- For many people, religion or spirituality plays an important role in their lives. What is your experience in this area?
- Tell me about your religious/spiritual beliefs.
- How does religion/spirituality fit into your life?
- Tell me about your religious background.
- Tell me about your experience with religion.
- Tell me about your religious upbringing.
- Tell me about the religion of your parents.
- How does religion fit into your life today?
- How do you take care of yourself?
- What is your support system? (What kind of support system do you have?)
- When you think about the meaning and purpose of life, what comes to mind?

Shared Religious/Spiritual backgrounds

□ Benefits

□ Dangers

What benefits and dangers do you see when therapist and client / patient share religious background?

Shared Religious/Spiritual backgrounds

☐ Benefits

- ☐ Positive transference and countertransference
- ☐ Trust & credibility
- ☐ Shared beliefs and values
- ☐ Breadth and depth of understanding

☐ Dangers

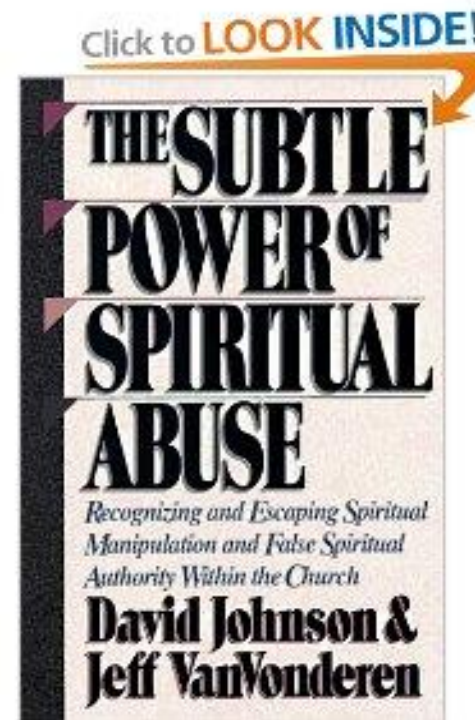
- ☐ Misunderstandings of subtle differences
- ☐ Upset by questioning
- ☐ Dual relationships are more likely

Religion/Spirituality as an Asset

- Meaning and purpose
- Social support/service
- Spiritual well-being

Religion/Spirituality as a Liability

- Dysfunctional religion/spirituality
- Religious/spiritual abuse



Religious/Spiritual Interventions

- Religious/spiritual involvement often shapes a person's
 - Views of his/her problems
 - Preferred interventions
 - Disliked interventions

Religious/Spiritual Wants and Taboos

- Some interventions are unacceptable to certain religious/spiritual groups.
- Some interventions are preferred or wanted
- *What examples of this have you encountered?*
- *How did you discover them?*

Rank, Mean, and Standard Deviation of Reported Use of Christian Counseling Techniques Among CAPS Practitioners (Adams, 1993; Stratton, 1993)

<u>Technique</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
Forgiveness	1	3.60	1.17
Fellowship	2	3.56	1.20
Rest	3	3.42	1.18
Journal Keeping	4	3.38	1.20
Intercessory Prayer	5	3.16	1.28
Confession/Repentance	6	3.12	1.27
Scripture: Counselor Pro-Active	7	3.07	1.22
Discernment	8	2.85	1.51
Celebration	9	2.84	1.30
Service	10	2.79	1.15
Worship	11	2.78	1.25
Obedience	12	2.74	1.26

Table Continues

Technique	Rank	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Spiritual History	13	2.71	1.36
Scripture: Client Proactive	14	2.60	1.12
Solitude/Silence	15	2.53	1.10
Concrete Meditation	16	2.51	1.51
Abstract Meditation	17	2.39	1.14
Contemplative Prayer	18	2.31	1.18
Listening Prayer	18	2.31	1.21
Simplicity	18	2.31	1.16
Abstinence/Fasting	21	1.80	0.97
Healing	22	1.61	0.98
Deliverance	23	1.60	0.81
Praying in the Spirit	24	1.44	0.83

Religious/Spiritual Referrals

- As psychologists we often invite referrals from clergy or representatives of religious/spiritual groups.
- To what extent do we:
 - Refer to such individuals/groups?
 - Consult with such individuals/groups?
 - Seek consultation from such individuals/groups?

‘What experiences have you had in this area?’

Religious/Spiritual Referrals

- As psychologists we often invite referrals from clergy or representatives of religious/spiritual groups.
- To what extent do we:
 - Refer to such individuals/groups?
 - Consult with such individuals/groups?
 - Seek consultation from such individuals/groups?

‘What experiences have you had in this area?’

- Hospital case example —
- Demons case example —

Religious/Spiritual Consultations

- Psychologists may both give and receive consultations to/from clergy and members of religious/spiritual groups

What experiences have you had in this area?

Religious/Spiritual Consultations

- Psychologists may both give and receive consultations to/from clergy and members of religious/spiritual groups

What experiences have you had in this area?

- ☐ Clergy evaluations
- ☐ Missionary evaluations
- ☐ Conflict resolution in churches
- ☐ Church disciplinary consultations
- ☐ Discussion of beliefs on various topics
- ☐ Discussion of normative behavior

Spiritual Outcomes of Counseling

- Worthington (1993) proposed that “religious therapy may have more positive outcomes at strengthening clients’ spiritual resources than does secular therapy” (p. 124).

Spiritual Outcomes of Counseling

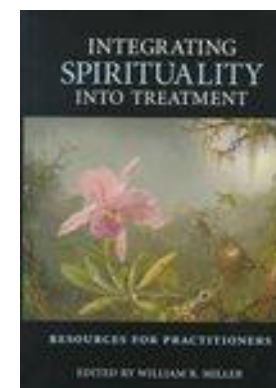
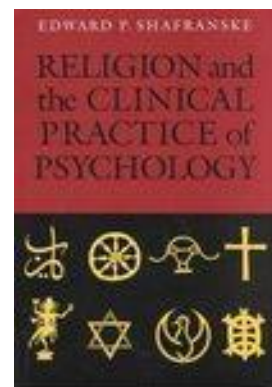
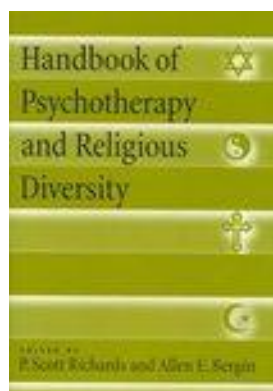
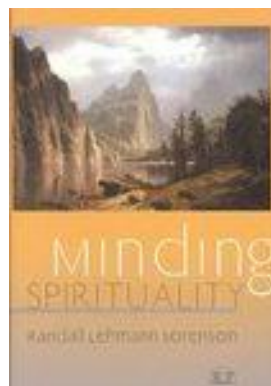
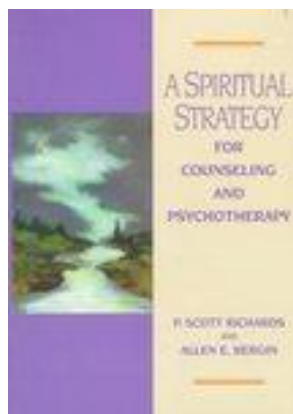
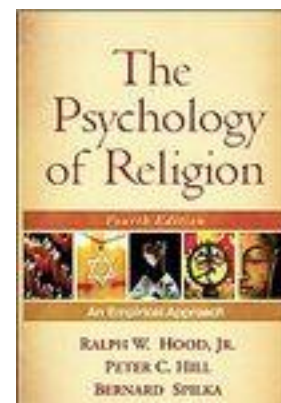
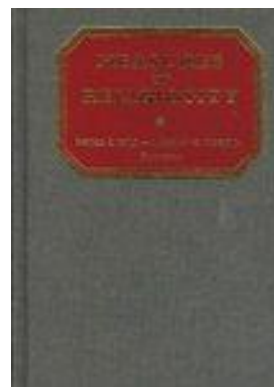
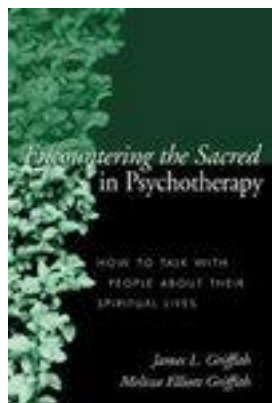
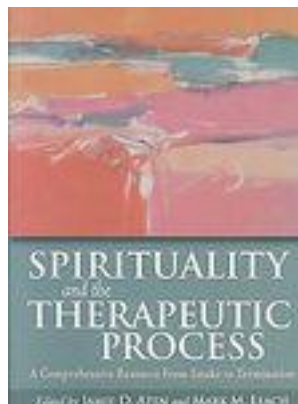
Very little research

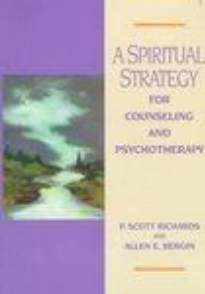
- Johnson and Ridley (1992) found only five reported studies that compared the effectiveness of Christian counseling with established models of treatment
 - Found to be similarly effective
 - One study found non-Christian therapists more effective with Christian counseling (Propst et al., 1992)
- Several studies have shown spiritual well-being is enhanced by psychotherapy (Bufford, Renfroe, & Howard, 1995; Garzon, Garver, Kleinschuster, Tan, & Hill, 2001; Howard, 1995; Renfroe, 1990; Toh, Tan, Osburn, & Faber, 1994; Toh & Tan, 1998)
- Marital-enrichment studies have had some success (Combs et al., 2000; Koeneman, 2008; Noval et al., 1996)

Spiritual Outcomes of Counseling

- Research studies (Bufford, Renfroe, & Howard, 1995; Garzon, Garver, Kleinschuster, Tan, & Hill, 2001; Howard, 1995; Renfroe, 1990; Toh, Tan, Osburn, & Faber, 1994; Toh & Tan, 1998) show that counseling/psychotherapy can enhance religious and existential well-being.
 - Whether or not the client identifies as Christian
 - Regardless of religious commitment of the counselor
 - Whether or not explicit spiritual interventions are included

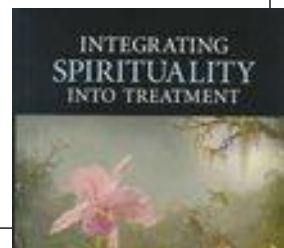
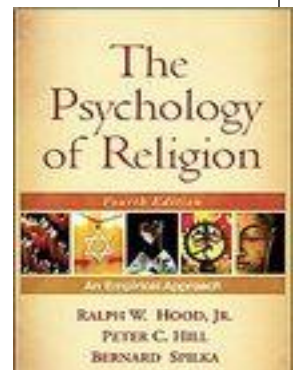
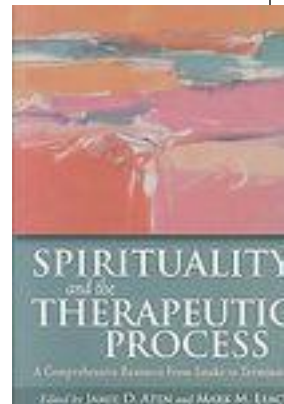
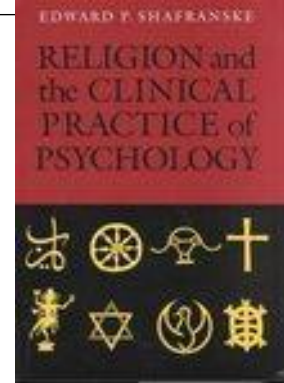
What do you make of this?





Religious/Spiritual Resources

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- Shafranske, E. (Ed.). (1996). *Religion and the clinical practice of psychology*. Washington DC: American Psychological Association.
- Sorenson, R. L. (2004). *Minding spirituality*. Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press.



Religious/Spiritual Resources

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Planning Treatment

- Edits--Add:
 - Video clip, e.g., from McMinn's APA CD
 - Treatment plan illustrating conceptualization, intervention, outcome, issues and ethics