

4-1-2010

Religious identity, spiritual practices, and burnout

Rodger K. Bufford

George Fox University, rbufford@georgefox.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/gscp_fac



Part of the [Clinical Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bufford, Rodger K., "Religious identity, spiritual practices, and burnout" (2010). *Faculty Publications - Graduate School of Clinical Psychology*. Paper 21.

http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/gscp_fac/21

This Conference Proceeding is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School of Clinical Psychology at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications - Graduate School of Clinical Psychology by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University.

Abstract

Preliminary work by Sanderson (2008; Bufford & Sanderson, 2009) examining data on burnout among staff members in an adolescent residential treatment program found that spiritual practices distinguished Buddhist and Christian participants and were related to burnout. They suggested that spiritual practices may prove useful in further understanding religiosity. However, some of their findings were puzzling. Sanderson (2009) found high burnout and low spiritual well-being, but unexpectedly spiritual well-being was not related to religious orientation. In an effort to further understand these findings, the present study performed a cluster analysis on Sanderson's data and identified two clusters of participants. Cluster One consisted of all Buddhists and over half the Christian participants; Cluster Two contained the remaining Christian participants. Participants in Cluster One scored higher on burnout and lower on spiritual well-being than those in Cluster Two. These results suggest that spiritual practices may at times be better predictors than self-reported religious identity and may aid in clarifying the often-inconsistent findings in the empirical psychology of religion. Those who describe themselves as Buddhist in this sample appear to engage in syncretistic practices rather than traditional Buddhism; results may not generalize well. Study of spiritual practices appears promising.

Introduction

Many aspects of cognitive and experiential religiosity have been investigated during the past century (Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003). Yet spiritual practices seem strangely neglected except in clinical practice. Spilka, et al pointed out that researchers have found all categories of religious thought, experience and behavior to be strongly related. This may reflect the fact that the psychology of religion has largely focused on Christian religion (Wulff, 2003) and thus Christian practices are implicitly assumed to be common. Bufford et al (2004) developed a measure to explore a variety of spiritual practices, but limited research has been conducted with their instrument.

In a study of adolescent residential staff members, Sanderson (2008) found high burnout and low spiritual well-being. Religious affiliation was predominantly Christian or Buddhist. Sanderson included Bufford et al's spiritual practices measure in her study. Bufford, Sanderson, & Peterson, (2009) compared staff members who described themselves as Buddhist and Christian. Significant differences were found for many of the spiritual practices; for example, Buddhists were more likely to practice yoga, use a mantra, and create a shrine. However, results showed no differences in Religious or Existential Well-Being between participants who identified themselves as Christian and Buddhist, an unexpected outcome since the Spiritual Well-Being Scale includes items with distinctively Christian content such as a reference to God. Thus the present study explored for differences in individual spiritual practices for Buddhist and Christian staff.

Research Questions:

- Can meaningful clusters of individuals be formed based on common spiritual practices.
- If such clusters could be formed, how would the clusters compare on spiritual well-being and burnout.

Methods

Archival data from Sanderson (2008) were used. Data gathered by Sanderson (2008) included a demographic questionnaire, the Maslach Burnout Inventory, the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWB), and a Spiritual Practices scale. Participants were a convenience sample of 45 staff members at a residential adolescent care facility in the Pacific Northwest who volunteered to participate in a study of the relationship between burnout and spiritual beliefs and practices. Participants described themselves as Christian ($n = 29$; 64%), Buddhist ($n = 12$, 27%), Atheist ($n = 2$, 4%), Agnostic ($n = 1$; 2%), and other ($n = 1$; 2%). For purposes of this study only Christian and Buddhist participants were included; Christians comprised 71% and Buddhists 29%. Participants included 34 Caucasian (76%), 6 African Americans (13%), and 5 Hispanics (11%).

A cluster analysis was performed on SP-21, seeking a shaman, SP-36, using peyote, SP-55 use of a mantra, SP-42 contentment, Religious Well-Being, and Personal Accomplishment as these appeared to most strongly reflect the differences between those who described themselves as Christian and Buddhist in the sample. All variables were first transformed into Z-scores to standardize units. The cluster analysis was limited to six variables due to the small sample size.

Results

Results indicated two clusters. Cluster 1 included all participants who said they were Buddhist and 17 participants who professed to be Christian. Cluster 2 contained the remaining twelve Christian participants. The clusters differed significantly at $p \leq .001$ for all variables used in clustering; the two clusters had no overlap in their 95% confidence intervals for mean scores on any of these six variables.

Multivariate analysis of variance was used to test for differences between Cluster One and Cluster Two. Covariance was used as a statistical control for use of restraints, personal mental health treatment, social support outside work and religious settings, and a shift load index intended to reflect the stressfulness of the work schedule of participants. The two clusters did not differ significantly on Emotional Exhaustion, but differed significantly on Existential Well-Being, Religious Well-Being, Spiritual Well-Being, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment. Participants in Cluster 2 show higher Religious and Existential Well-Being and less burnout on each of these indices (see Table 3).

Discussion

- Cluster One included all 12 Buddhist participants and 17 of the Christian participants. Cluster Two contained the remaining 12 participants who reported they were Christian.
- Cluster One participants reported that they practiced yoga, used peyote, use a mantra, and were discontented; these participants reported lower religious and existential well-being, greater depersonalization, and lower personal accomplishment compared to Cluster Two. Effects were moderate to large for all variables except depersonalization.
- Cluster Two participants reported that they rarely or never practiced yoga, used peyote, or used a mantra; these participants were more likely to practice a day of rest, cultivate contentment, seek a spiritual advisor, share their beliefs, and celebrate religious holidays. They reported higher religious and existential well-being, less tendency to depersonalize others, and a greater sense of personal accomplishment.
- Seven of these differences account for over half the variance in the measure, for example on Existential Well-Being and Personal Accomplishment
- Results may not generalize well. Differences in variability for many of the spiritual practice items in this sample suggest that members of one or both religious groups may be undergoing a transition in their practices at the present time and that their patterns of practice may be different in the future. However, we cannot determine from these data whether members of one group are influencing members of the other or in which directions individuals may be moving in their spiritual practices.
- The spiritual practices of Group 1 are not traditional Buddhist practices, thus may tell us little about Buddhism, *per se*. They may represent an example of *sacred syncretism* as described by MacDonald and Webb (2006).
- These data suggest the items of the Spiritual Practices Scale make an important contribution.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Tests of Significance for Frequencies of Spiritual Practices for Cluster 1 and Cluster 2 with Religious Attendance, Income, Mental Health Treatment and Social Support Outside Work and Religious Settings Controlled*

Item	Cluster 1 / Cluster 2	Mean	SD	df	F	Sig.	R ²
Spiritual Practices#							
Cluster 1 Practices							
SP-10 Sweat Lodge	3.28/5.33	1.28/1.61	5, 35	3.90	.006	.266	
SP-11 Spinning	2.62/5.17	1.50/1.64	5, 35	5.41	.001	.436	
SP-12 Practice Yoga	3.00/4.83	1.23/1.19	5, 35	4.01	.006	.364	
SP-21 Seek Shaman	2.62/6.00	1.18/0.00*	5, 35	20.21	.001	.744	
SP-24 Religious order	3.07/6.00	1.49/0.00*	5, 35	9.01	.001	.563	
SP-29 Animal Sacrifice	3.48/5.58	1.41/1.00	5, 35	5.44	.001	.264	
SP-32 Pray Five Times	3.31/4.33	1.42/2.19	5, 35	2.52	.048	.437	
SP-33 Created Shrine	4.21/4.83	2.13/1.80*	5, 35	2.63	.040	.264	
SP-36 Use Peyote	3.83/6.00	2.17/0.00*	5, 35	9.20	.045	.273	
SP-38 Avoid meat	3.45/5.58	1.66/1.00	5, 35	9.15	.006	.361	
SP-41 Fast	3.93/5.00	1.22/1.28	5, 35	3.57	.041	.273	
SP-44 Prayer Wheels	2.76/5.58	1.60/1.00	5, 35	16.10	.001	.573	
SP-55 Use Mantra	2.69/5.75	1.42/0.45*	5, 35	11.26	.001	.617	
Cluster 2 Practices							
SP-28 Rest Day	3.72/2.67	1.49/1.73	5, 35	2.51	.048	.264	
SP-42 Content	3.69/1.92	1.44/0.90	5, 35	4.41	.003	.386	
SP-47 Spiritual Advisor	3.86/1.67	1.43/0.99	5, 35	4.79	.002	.406	
SP-48 Share beliefs	3.83/2.58	1.97/1.38	5, 35	9.30	.013	.327	
SP-52 Religious Holidays	3.10/2.17	1.90/1.75	5, 35	7.63	.044	.269	
SP-57 Religious Mission	3.55/3.50	1.84/2.20	5, 35	2.44	.054	.258	
Spiritual Well-Being							
Existential Well-Being	33.31/48.42	5.96/10.61	4, 36	12.52	.001	.582	
Religious Well-Being	36.07/46.08	3.99/11.49*	4, 36	7.12	.001	.442	
Spiritual Well-Being	69.38/94.50	9.05/19.32	4, 36	11.51	.001	.561	
Maslach Burnout Inventory							
Emotional Exhaustion	28.72/23.00	8.10/7.42	4, 36	2.01	.114		
Depersonalization	11.83/5.83	5.03/4.00	4, 36	4.91	.003	.353	
Personal Accomplishment	20.93/37.33	3.99/9.88	4, 36	12.64	.001	.584	

* Cluster 1 included 12 participants identified as Buddhist and 17 identified as Christian; Cluster 2 included 12 participants identified as Christian.

Lower scores indicate more frequent use of a given practice (Strongly Agree).

* Significant differences in variance (Levene's test $p \leq .05$).

Contact Information: Rodger K Bufford
414 N Meridian V104
Newberg, OR 97132
Phone: 503 554-2374
Fax: 503 554-2371
E-Mail: rbufford@georgefox.edu