

The Forgotten Life Task: Spirituality

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Introduction

- **Counseling spiritual issues**

- Many counselors focus on personal spiritual growth over religious observance, but “followers of particular religions may perceive this as a threat to an individual’s ‘spiritual growth’ within the religion” (Onedera & Greenwalt, 2008, p. 5).
- The clients understanding of religious practices may differ “from the stated beliefs of the religion” (Onedera & Greenwalt, 2008, p. 7).
- Clients often refrain from discussing religion because they believe that many therapists are opposed to religion, that it would be a violation of separation of church and state, or the discussion will be dismissed or deflected (Worthington, Hook, Wade, Miller, & Sharp, 2008, p. 19).
- Subjective well-being is positively related to the frequency of prayer (Centore & Clinton, 2008, p. 190).
- 9 in 10 American adults pray to God at least occasionally (Onedera, Minatrea, & Kindsvatter, 2008, p. 246).
- About 1/2 of all Americans attend a place of religious observance at least once a week (Onedera et al., 2008, p. 246).

- “Spiritual beliefs typically provide the value systems by which [clients] view themselves, others, and the world” (Watts, 2000, p. 316).
- “The AP/Ipsos Poll (2005) reported that 84% of the American people consider religion important to their lives” (Onedera & Greenwalt, 2008, p. 10).
- **Counseling interfaith couples**
 - Religion may influence gender role expectations, forgiveness, communication, child discipline, and filial duty to parents (Sauerheber & Bitter, 2013, p. 308).
 - In 1989, there were more than 375,000 interfaith couples in the United States (Greenstein, Carlson, & Howell, 1993, p. 428).
 - Interreligious marriages “between the major religious categories” have higher divorce rates than homogamous marriages” (Greenstein et al., 1993, p. 429).
- **Spirituality is 1 of the 5 life tasks**
 - The Wheel of Wellness places spirituality at the center and it is the “most important characteristic of well-being,” yet religion is in the outer ring (Sweeney, 2009, p. 36).
 - The Indivisible Self – spirituality is in the essential self and religion is in institutional (policies & laws) context (Sweeney, 2009, p. 38).
 - Adler alluded to spirituality as the fifth life task and Mosak and Dreikurs more clearly defined it (Cheston, 2000, p. 301).

- **Developing area of interest & research**

A Variety of Faiths

- Christian
- Agnostic
- Atheist
- Satanist
- Eastern religions
- Etc.

Percent of mixed-religion marriages (Lara & Onedera, 2008, p. 215):

- Catholic: 23%
- Protestant: 33%
- Jewish: 27%
- Muslim: 21%

The Clinician

- **Limited training**

- 2016 CACREP Standards

- F.2.g. the impact of spiritual beliefs on clients' and counselors' worldviews (CACREP, 2015)
 - 2 mentions in addictions counseling, 1 mention in rehabilitation under i.e. after holistic (CACREP, 2015)

- Counselor Education Program Studies

- In 1994, 287 of 343 counselor education programs “had no course specifically addressing spiritual or religious issues” and 250 programs did not include religion or spirituality in any capacity (Onedera & Greenwalt, 2008, p. 10).
 - In 2002, 70% of the programs addressed spiritual or religious issues. Yet, only 22% of CACREP-accredited programs have a spiritual and religious issues course (Onedera, 2008, p. 263).

- **Discomfort among clinicians**

- No road map

- Counselors lack knowledge of various religions and have no definitive definition of spirituality (Onedera & Greenwalt, 2008, p. 3).
- Counselors own religious experience
 - In 2002, 62% of surveyed therapists self-reported as religious, but about half of them did not identify with organized religion (Worthington et al., 2008, p. 22).
 - Unresolved conflict
- Don't touch!
 - However, “one cannot divorce counseling from its moral, theological, and philosophical roots. All counseling and psychotherapy, even that which denies it, is deeply values-based. This makes it a given that counselors are incorporating *some sort* of theology or religion when they practice counseling” (Centore & Clinton, 2008, p. 185).

My Experiences

- **Grief**

- Young woman who was raised Church of Christ. Dated and lived with atheist boyfriend. Brother died of asphyxiation related to heroin use. She struggled with knowing her identity as a sister, daughter, worker, etc. after the loss of her brother. She cheated on her boyfriend with another man. She was angry with her boyfriend because he was not emotionally supportive. She felt guilty regarding her affair. She had not participated in church services in many years and was not sure about how she currently identified from a spiritual perspective. She struggled with wanting to believe that her brother was in heaven or an afterlife, but her boyfriend did not believe in an afterlife.

- **Relational**

- Divorce/separation

- Catholic individual divorced by wife. She cheated on him. He did not want to divorce. He harbored hatred for wife and said that he wanted her to suffer. He said that he wanted to forgive her and to move on, but he could not.

- Interfaith

- Peruvian Catholic and Kentucky Protestant (Southern Baptist)

- Non-practicing Christian and Agnostic (formerly Evangelical Christian).

How to Help

Adlerian Principles

- **“Courage to be imperfect”**

- Thinking about making a mistake breeds discouragement, which “is the best motivation for doing something wrong” (Terner & Pew, 1978, p. 288).
- We must have self-confidence and faith in ourselves to do something right (Terner & Pew, 1978, p. 288).
- “To be human does not mean to be right, does not mean to be perfect. To be human means to be useful, to make contributions – not for oneself, but for others – to take what there is and to make the best out of it” (Terner & Pew, 1978, p. 288).

“This requires the courage to be imperfect; requires the realization that ‘I am no angel, that I am no superhuman, that I make mistakes, that I have faults. But I am pretty good because I don’t *have* to be better than the others’ – which is a tremendous relief....If we learn to function – to do our best regardless of what it is – out of the enjoyment of the functioning, we can grow just as well, even better than if we drove ourselves to be perfect” (Terner & Pew, 1978, p. 289).

- “We should not be afraid of making mistakes. ... It is more important that we are human” (Turner & Pew, 1978, p. 243).
- **Social Interest**
 - Adlerian psychology has a “religious tone,” because Adler paralleled religions that place social interest at the height of the human endeavor (Watts, 2000, p. 317).
- **Superiority**
 - “Adler suggested that God was humanity’s idea of perfection and the highest image of greatness and superiority” (Cheston, 2000, p. 297).
 - Thus, it can be inferred that as we strive for superiority, we strive to become more God-like.

Adlerian Techniques

- **Early Recollections**

- “Early recollections reveal the purposeful, current movement toward the unconscious goals of the individual” (Sweeney, 2009, p. 103).
- It can be real or perceived (Sweeney, 2009, p. 103).
- “When the patient changes his concept of himself and his life, his early recollections change also” (Turner & Pew, 1978, p. 244).
- Helpful questions for the counselor to ask him/herself throughout early recollections:
 - “(a) What information did the individual learn about his or her religion or faith when he or she was very young? (b) How did he or she see religion being “played out” or practiced in the family? (c) How has religion or faith affected the individual’s convictions about himself or herself and affected his or her attitudes and approaches to others? (d) Were there any religious threads? (e) How does religion influence social interest?” (Sauerheber & Bitter, 2013, p. 313)

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