

Notes to accompany 'Spirituality and Clinical Research' power-point presentation
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Despite the growth of this literature and some consensus around definitions of spirituality and rationales for its inclusion, as a whole the field is emergent.

There is a dearth of empirical research that investigates intervention methods and their influence on client change.

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This overview reflects the state of development in this field and illustrates the nature of spiritual knowledge.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (2003). Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Context: Past, Present, and Future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10 (2). 144-156.

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This idea that spiritually-influenced practice is effective is a significant one both within the literature and in our own research. In fact, it seems to underpin many of the arguments for the inclusion of spirituality in practice and education. Participants described the more rapid progress of clients when they were encouraged to address issues on a spiritual level, and they described theory that ignored spirituality as culturally inappropriate, and not cognizant of important factors in people's lives (Coholic, 2001). More recently, in a study investigating student and educator viewpoints about including spirituality in social work pedagogy, we found that this belief drove the desire to include spirituality in education. Interestingly, even social work students with little experience or knowledge of this literature evidenced a belief in spirituality's helpfulness and usefulness (Coholic, 2003).

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While both quantitative and qualitative methods are utilized in practice-based research, qualitative methods such as grounded theory approaches are better suited for our study for several reasons.

First, grounded theory methods are inductive approaches that aim to generate theory. Our research is exploratory with the goal of discovering new knowledge, because this is a developing field.

Indeed, a widely accepted practice framework for spiritually-sensitive work has yet to be developed. At this stage, we need to better understand how spiritually-influenced practice actually transpires in the real world with real people and all the complexities they bring to the helping process.

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Second, practice professions such as social work and nursing have made considerable use of grounded theory methods in their quest to conduct research that is relevant for practice (Swigonski, 1994). Indeed, the demand for solid links between practice and research has consistently been a strong theme in social work (Gilgun, 1994). Grounded theory methods enable the discovery of knowledge from the world of practice, which in turn produces frameworks that are useful for practitioners and consumers.

Third, qualitative methodologies such as grounded theory also tend to be more compatible with Aboriginal values and beliefs because an effort is made to meaningfully involve participants in the research process.

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Fourth, we can improvise to meet participant needs (Gingerich, 2000; Seligman, 1995).

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Study of the effectiveness of how people fare under the actual conditions of treatment in the field, can yield useful and credible “empirical validation” of psychotherapy

And in fact, eclectic psychotherapy is not on the list of treatments empirically validated by efficacy studies but these modalities make up most of what is actually practiced.

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2 reported that the entire group experience felt spiritual to them.

If we remain uncomfortable with considering this, we may miss the chance to help clients construct a holistic narrative that best fits their experience.

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Although many practitioners feel unprepared to attend to their clients’ dreams, the usefulness of dream analysis is increasingly being considered across helping approaches and its connection with spirituality is evident in the literature. Krippner et al explained how dreams are intimately connected with major religious and spiritual traditions throughout the world. France made the point that since the beginning of time all cultures regarded dreams as having some special power that transcended the past, present and future, and that many cultures believed that dream messages are the vehicle through which God can speak. In group work, dream exploration can allow participants to go beyond the physical world into the spiritual realm.

Similarly, within the research literature, dream-work has been reported to be useful. Moss argued that dream-work can help people access deep unconscious feelings in order to facilitate a more complete mourning process. Barrett stated that dreams represent a powerful metaphor for irrational beliefs that might not otherwise be articulated. In group counseling, the analysis of dreams has been reported to help with understanding other group members, promoting group cohesiveness, and stimulating therapeutic group interactions.

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We began each session with meditation or they were integrated into the work of the group session. Can help to quiet the mind & open up possibility for stronger connection with feelings & unconscious processes. Self-awareness & insight arise from an ability to pay attention to and experience one’s anxieties, fear & other feelings (which often reside in the unconscious mind) – getting in touch with a feeling, or paying attention to the soul (Frattaroli).

Recently, mindfulness has been adopted as an approach in contemporary psychology for increasing awareness and responding skillfully to mental processes that contribute to emotional distress and maladaptive behaviour. Indeed, mindfulness practice is increasingly being studied in various fields with a myriad of client populations and problems, with research results indicating its effectiveness. For

example, researchers have found that mindfulness is effective in helping chronic pain patients deal with grief; in helping a broad range of individuals cope with problems; in fostering health benefits; in decreasing mood disturbance and stress; in treating negative body images; and it has been proposed as a core common factor in psychotherapy, to name just a few examples.

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Mindfulness is a good example of a helpful process that is rooted in spirituality but that can be learned by many people with both diverse spiritual beliefs or even no spiritual standpoints. Perhaps this accounts in part for the current interest in mindfulness across helping approaches and disciplines (also it can be fit into an efficacy model).

However, we should contemplate the complexities involved in divorcing mindfulness from its spiritual roots. As Kabat-Zinn argued, it is important that we recognize the unique qualities of mindfulness meditation practice so that it is not “simply seized upon as the next promising cognitive behavioral technique or exercise, decontextualized, and plugged into a behaviorist paradigm with the aim of driving desirable change, or of fixing what is broken” (69, p.145).

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For example, feminist social workers have discussed the process of helping clients foster connections with community, in groups, and with their feelings as spiritually-influenced practice. They have also described the spiritual connections they sometimes form with clients. Ballou argued that feminist spirituality is grounded in community, connection and relationship, while Kimmel and Kazanis described the deep spiritual connections that can occur in counseling groups. These “deep connections” can be conceptualized as spirit-spirit connections.

Articulating experiences that are based in feeling and experience, and that feel spiritual can be difficult - we lack the language to fully describe and capture these processes. However, based on these and other experiences reported to us by the group participants, it would seem that a spiritual connectedness amongst the participants accounted, in part, for the group’s camaraderie and respect for one other, which was evidenced throughout all of the group sessions.

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Examples – quotes on the next page/slide...

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When we make the room for these discussions, then clients have the choice to bring their spiritual viewpoints to the process. For these participants, this was very important (making-meaning).

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