



Spirituality, Religion, and Social Work Practice

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Today's Outline

- Introduction
- The Relationship between Religion, Spirituality, and Social Work
- My Research on Faith-based Homeless Shelters
- Spiritual Assessments and Spiritual Competence
- Breakout Sessions (15 minutes)
- Coming Together, Brief Report from Groups
- Time for Q & A

Introduction

- Background and Interest in the Topic: Interest in Religion and Spirituality in general, Religious Conversion
- Sociology, Social Work, and Religion

Religion, Spirituality, and Social Work

- Complex, multidimensional, and at times controversial relationship between social work, spirituality, and religion (e.g., Holloway & Moss, 2010; Sheridan et al., 1994).
- Social work has its roots in religion, specifically in the Christian tradition and its values
- But the discipline then established itself by being almost “exclusively secular in color and context” (Holloway & Moss, 2010, p. 8; Sheridan et al., 1994).
- “There is evidence that the pendulum is beginning to swing back” in favor of considering spirituality and religion (Holloway and Moss, 2010, p. 13; Sheridan et al., 1994; see also Jindra & Jindra, in press).

Religion, Spirituality, and Social Work

- Presently, a stronger interest exists in spirituality and religion as important components of social work practice, education, and/or research (e.g., Crisp, 2020; Furness & Gilligan, 2010; Hodge, 2018; 2005; Holloway and Moss, 2010).
- Recognition of the power of religion and spirituality in recent decades, for well-being, “self-forgiveness,” and a sense of identity (e.g., Furness & Gilligan, 2010; Krause, 2012; Schieman et al., 2017).
- Religion and Spirituality now prevalent themes in various areas of social work research (mental health, practice with individuals and families, also macro-practice) (e.g., Hodge, 2011; Sheridan, Sheridan, 2012).

Research on Faith-based Homeless Shelters

- **Background:** The importance religion and spirituality among faith-based non-profits.
- **Research Question:** How do three homeless shelters - which are *faith-based* to various degrees (Sider & Unruh 2004)- support people in taking initial steps out of homelessness? What are the similarities and differences between them?
- **Methods:** Case study research of organizations (interviews with staff and participant observation in some cases, websites) and 38 narrative biographical interviews with residents

The Three Shelters – Description

- **Grace Ministries**

- A residential shelter for 100 single men and women, and families in a Midwestern U.S. City
- Faith-permeated organization*: Takes religious content very seriously and integrates it into the daily life of the organization
- Strong focus on *community participation* and *daily program structure*

- **House of Hope**

- A smaller shelter, about 6 families at one time, in the U.S. Northeast
- Faith-affiliated organization*: Faith can be important, but in an indirect way
- Different structure: Residents move from church to church on a weekly basis
- Strong focus on *daily program structure* and self-sufficiency, some focus on *community*

- **Respite Center**

- A larger shelter, for 200 single men, women, and families, also in the Midwest
- Faith-background organization*: Largely secular, other than having volunteer ties with a Catholic college. “No explicit religious content”
- Not much focus on *community participation* or *daily program structure*

Take Away from the Study

- The more residents or participants involve themselves in any of the three programs, the more they were starting to grasp their biographical trajectories.
- The more encompassing a program is in terms of religion and spirituality, focus on community, and daily structure, the more it helps most residents to improve their lives. (Grace Ministries vs. Respite Center)
- Religion and spirituality have an added benefit (Grace Ministries)

Spiritual Assessments and Spiritual Competence

- The need to develop instruments for **assessing religious and spiritual needs** in practice (e.g., Hodge 2018; 2004)
- Guidelines on **spiritual competence** for social workers (e.g., Hodge, 2018; 2011; 2005)

Spiritual Assessments

- **Example of an Initial Spiritual Assessment** (Hodge, 2004):
- I was wondering if you consider spirituality or religion to be a personal strength?
- 2. In what ways does your spirituality help you cope with the difficulties you encounter?
- 3. Are there certain spiritual beliefs and practices that you find particularly helpful in dealing with problems?
- 4. I was also wondering if you attend a church or some other type of spiritual community?
- 5. Do resources exist in your church community that might be helpful to you?
- 6. Are there any spiritual needs I can help you address?

Additional Spiritual Assessments (Hodge 2004)

- Spiritual History: Verbal account of spiritual life history (Hodge 2001a)
- Spiritual Genograms: Mapping the “flow of spirituality” over the course of several generations (Hodge 2004; Hodge 2001b)
- Spiritual Ecomaps: map a “client’s present relationships with key spiritual variables in their environment” (Hodge 2004, 2000)

Spiritual Competence

- What is **spiritual competence**? (Hodge 2004, Hodge 2018)
 - a) an awareness of one's personal value-informed worldview along with its associated assumptions, limitations, and biases
 - b) an empathic, strengths-based understanding of the client's spiritual worldview
 - c) the ability to design and implement intervention strategies that are appropriate, relevant, and sensitive to the client's spiritual worldview

Breakout Sessions (15 min)

- **Please discuss (some of) the following questions in your breakout group. You can discuss the questions in any order.**
- Please describe your religious or spiritual background to each other briefly.
- Please describe your current spirituality and/or religiosity to each other
- Do you work with clients who are religious and/or spiritual? Or: Do you know whether your clients are religious and/or spiritual?
- Have you found religion and spirituality to be a source of strength and inspiration or oppression for your clients, or both? In what ways?
- Do you incorporate religion and spirituality into your practice? If so, how, with whom, and when?

Coming Back Together and Time for Q & A

- Please share briefly a couple of the take-away points discussed in your groups
- Q & A: Questions, comments?

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