

Concepts, Mechanisms, and Research on Spiritual Approaches to Psychotherapy, Counseling, and Pastoral Care

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Presentation to Conference
Spirituality in Psychotherapy, Counseling and Pastoral
Care – What Makes the Effect and How?

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It Takes SPiRiT



PSYC INFO citation search with “keyword”

Decade	“Religion”	“Spirituality”
1960s	1,051	5
1970s	2,290	22
1980s	4,206	543
1990s	5,501	2,680
2000s	11,629	7,294



Three Waves

- ❖ Wave 1: Demonstrating the connectedness of r/s and health and well-being.





Correlates of Religious and Spiritual Involvement Koenig, King, & Carson (2012)

- ❖ Well-being, happiness and life satisfaction
- ❖ Lower rates of depression and faster recovery
- ❖ Lower rates of suicide
- ❖ Less anxiety
- ❖ Less psychosis
- ❖ Lower rates of alcohol and drug use
- ❖ Less delinquency and criminal activity
- ❖ Greater marital stability and satisfaction
- ❖ Longer life expectancy



A Problem with Wave 1 Study

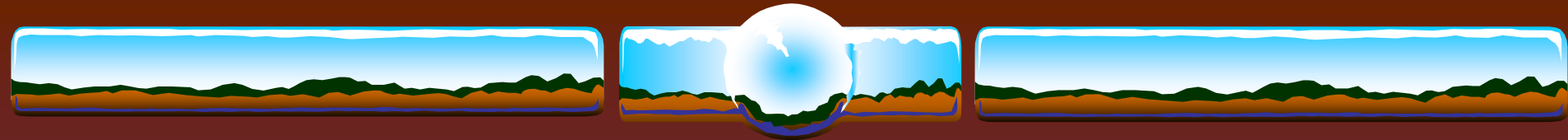
- ❖ Reliance on general measures of r/s
 - ❖ Denomination/affiliation
 - ❖ Self-rated r/s
 - ❖ Frequency of congregational attendance
 - ❖ Frequency of prayer
 - ❖ Religious commitment
- ❖ What is it about r/s that explains the r/s and health connection?



Three Waves

- ❖ Wave 1: Demonstrating the connectedness of r/s and health and well-being
- ❖ Wave 2: Identifying what it is about r/s that affects health and well-being

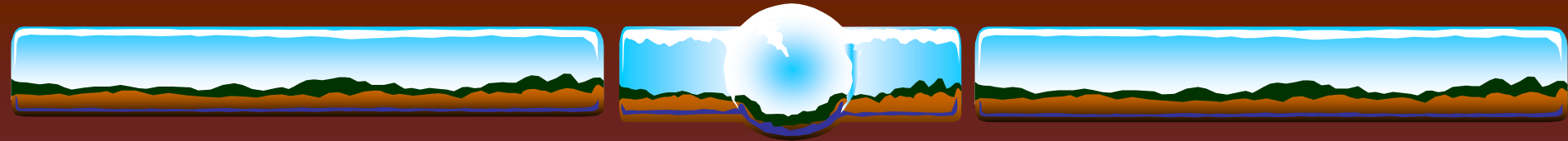




Wave 2:

Specific Measures of Religion and Spirituality

- ❖ Attachment to God
- ❖ Life after death
- ❖ R/s support
- ❖ Religious ritual
- ❖ Conversion
- ❖ Mystical experiences
- ❖ R/s coping
- ❖ R/s struggles



Wave 2: Mediators of R/S – Health Connection

- ❖ Emotional comfort
- ❖ Social support
- ❖ Meaning
- ❖ Self control
- ❖ Coping resources
- ❖ Emotional control
- ❖ Health practices
- ❖ Virtues (e.g., forgiveness, humility, gratitude, hope)
- ❖ Sense of transcendence



Three Waves

- ❖ Wave 1: Demonstrating the connectedness of r/s and health
- ❖ Wave 2: Identifying what it is about r/s that affect health
- ❖ **Wave 3: Extending research to practice**



R/S as Multidimensional





Spirituality as Double-Sided

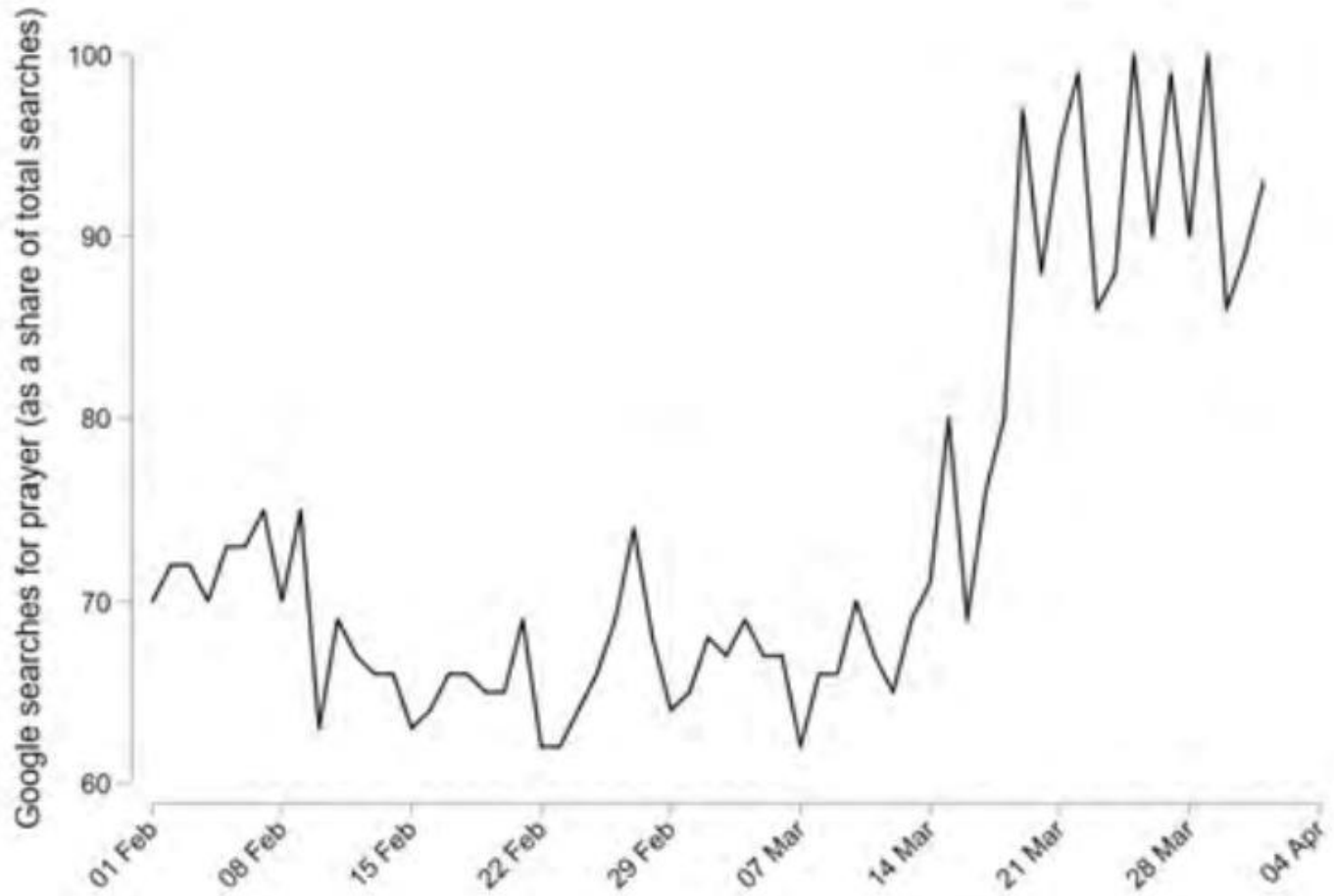




Plan of This Talk

- ❖ Understanding and addressing spiritual resources in counseling
- ❖ Understanding and addressing spiritual struggles in counseling

(b) Feb 1 - Apr 1 2020





God Help Me

- ❖ Under stress, many people seek and find help from religion in coping (Pargament, 1997, 2013)
 - ❖ Medically ill
 - ❖ Soldiers
 - ❖ Divorcees
 - ❖ Physically abused spouses
 - ❖ Parents of children with disabilities
 - ❖ Victims of natural disasters
 - ❖ Families forced to migrate





Brief RCOPE:

Positive Religious Coping Subscale

- *Looked for a stronger connection with God.
- *Sought God's love and care.
- *Sought help from God in letting go of my anger.
- *Tried to put my plans into action together with God.
- *Tried to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation.
- *Asked forgiveness for my sins.
- *Focused on religion to stop worrying about my problems



Positive Religious Coping Predicts Positive Outcomes in U. S.

- ❖ Park et al. (2017) Longitudinal study of African American adults. PRC at baseline predicted greater well-being (positive affect, meaning, and self-esteem) 2.5 years later, even after controlling for NRC.
- ❖ Henslee et al. (2015) Study of residents in Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina. PRC tied to less risk of PTSD, depression, poorer quality of life, and alcohol use.
- ❖ Ironson et al. (2016) Study of HIV patients in mid-stage of disease. After controlling for medical variables and demographics at baseline, positive spiritual coping predicted higher rates of survival over 17 years.



PRC Predicts Positive Outcomes Outside U. S.

- ❖ Stroppa et al. (2013) study of bipolar Brazilian outpatients. PRC associated with higher psychological and environment quality of life.
- ❖ Mohr (2011) Study of 113 mental health outpatients in Switzerland. PRC predictive of less symptomatology, and better social adaptation and quality of life three years later.
- ❖ Kataria et al. (2016) Study of Indians (70% Hindu) hospitalized for depression and treated with anti-depressants. PRC discriminated between responders and nonresponders to treatment.
- ❖ Abu-Raiya et al. (2008). International sample of Muslims. 7-item PRC scale associated with greater purpose in life, life satisfaction, general Islamic well-being, and lower levels of distress (anger, physical symptoms, alcohol use)



Distinctive Spiritual Resources

❖ Encouraging Acceptance and Letting Go





A Case of Intractable Depression





Spiritual Care at End-of-Life

(Balboni et al., 2007, 2012, 2013)

- ❖ Patients who receive spiritual care by medical team at end-of-life show:
 - ❖ Greater quality of life
 - ❖ Greater likelihood of receiving hospice care
 - ❖ Less likelihood of receiving aggressive medical care





Serenity Prayer

God grant me
the serenity
to accept the things
I cannot change —
the courage
to change the things
I can —
And the wisdom to know
the difference —



Distinctive Spiritual Resources

- ❖ Encouraging Acceptance and Letting Go
- ❖ Fostering Spiritual Connectedness





Story of Alice





“Fireflies” by Alice

Remember when you were a child in the summertime at night. There were tiny little yellow lights going off and on continuously. I always thought they were flies carrying little lanterns so they could see their way in the darkness. Sometimes the fireflies blend in with the stars.

Remember when you feel in the darkness. Look around, there’s always a flicker of light to give you a glimmer of hope.

Think back when you were a child and remember the fly carried his lantern. He found his way. You will too.”



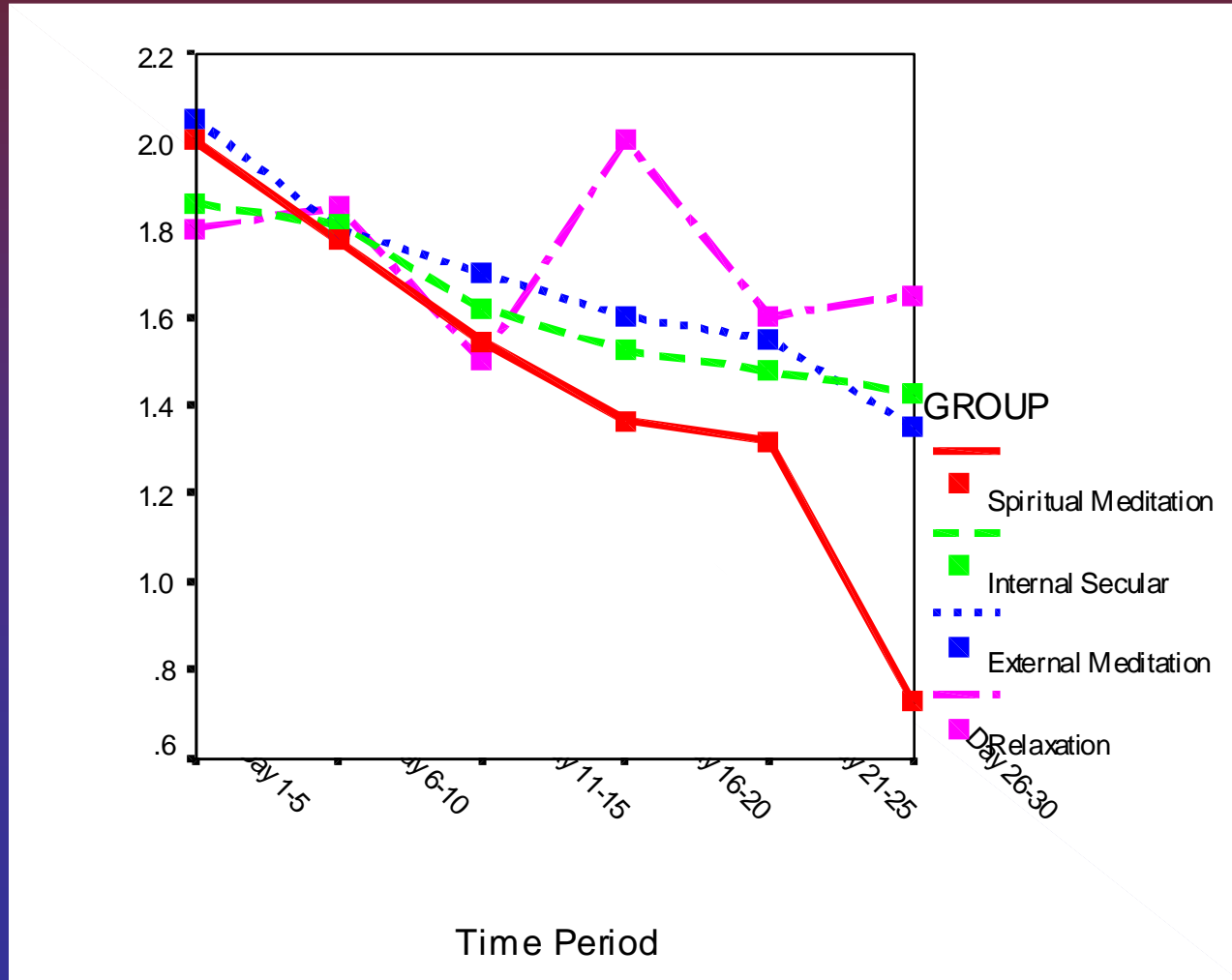


Spiritual Meditation among Patients with Vascular Headaches

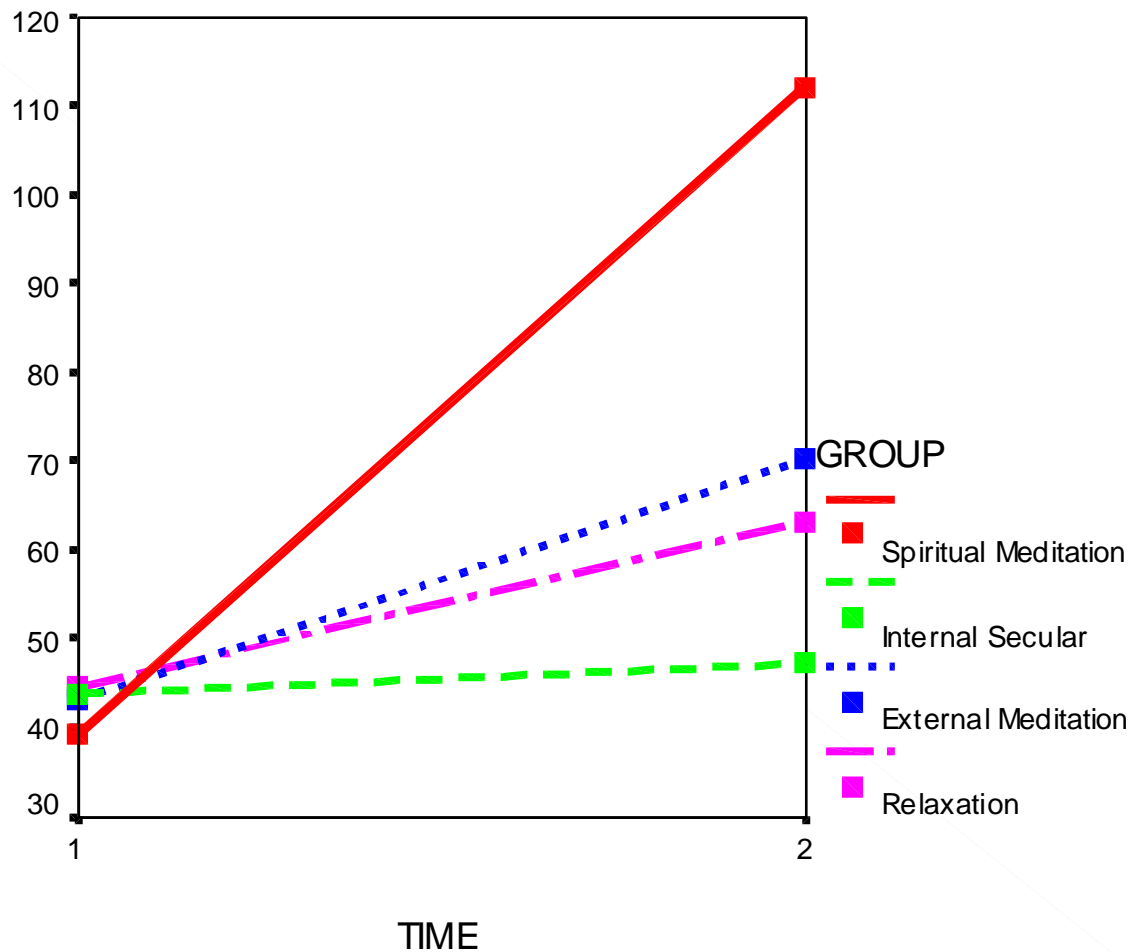
(Wachholtz & Pargament, 2005)

- ❖ 83 college students with vascular headaches according to criteria of the International Headache Society (1988)
- ❖ Random assignment to four groups
 - ❖ Spiritual Meditation (e.g., “God is peace,” “God is joy”)
 - ❖ Internally Focused Secular Meditation (“I am content,” “I am joyful”)
 - ❖ Externally Focused Secular Meditation (“Grass is green,” “Sand is soft”)
 - ❖ Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- ❖ Practice technique 20 minutes per day for four weeks
- ❖ Assess changes in headache frequency, pain tolerance, affect, headache control efficacy

Diary Analyses of Headache Occurrence by Group and Time



Pain Tolerance by Group and Time

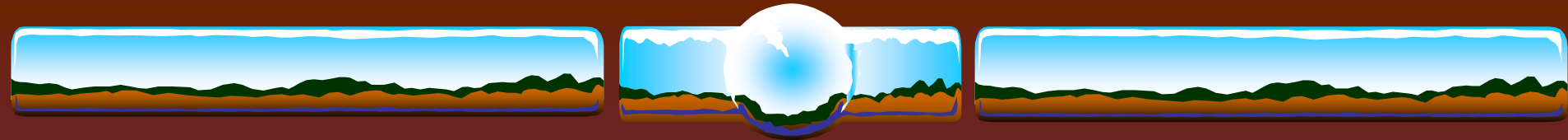




Distinctive Spiritual Resources

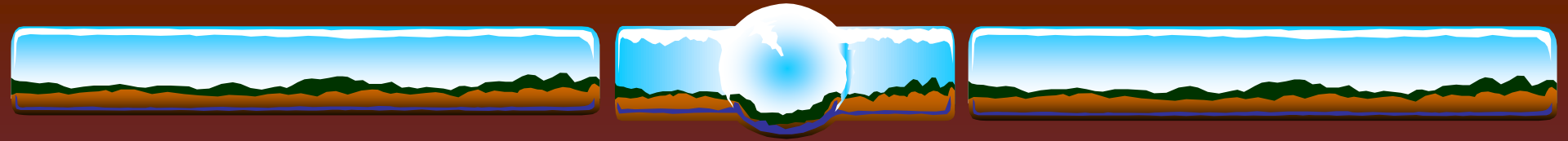
- ❖ Encouraging Acceptance and Letting Go
- ❖ Fostering Spiritual Connectedness
- ❖ Seeing through a Sacred Lens





Chief Seattle of the Squamish Tribe

“Every part of this soil is sacred in the estimation of my people. Every hillside, every valley, every plain and grove, has been hallowed by some sad or happy event in days long vanished. Even the rocks, which seem to be dumb and dead as they swelter in the sun along the silent shore, thrill with memories of stirring events connected with the lives of my people.”



Kintsugi: Creating Wholeness through Brokenness





Seeing the Self through a Sacred Lens

- ❖ Spiritual Self-Schema Therapy (3-S) helps treatment resistant heroin users de-activate addict self-schema and activate spiritual self-schema (Margolin et al., 2007).
- ❖ Controlled trials show 3-S leads to significant increases in spiritual self-schema and significant, sustained reductions in drug use





Practical Implications

- ❖ Assessment questions
 - ❖ Has your religion or spirituality been involved in the ways you've coped with your concerns?
 - ❖ Where do you feel most connected to something larger than yourself?
 - ❖ What brings you peace in your life?
- ❖ Help people access spiritual resources
- ❖ Supporting spiritual dimension to clients' lives



Affirming a Sacred Moment

(Lomax 2011)

- Patient: I have never told anyone about this until now. Those moments will always be special to me.
- *Therapist: They should be. It's a very beautiful love story.*
- Patient: It's also surprising to me. Does this routinely happen?
- *Therapist: The sort of love that you had with your mentor is hardly routine.*
- Patient: But do other people have experiences like this with people who have died?
- *Therapist: Only if they are extremely lucky (p. 2)*



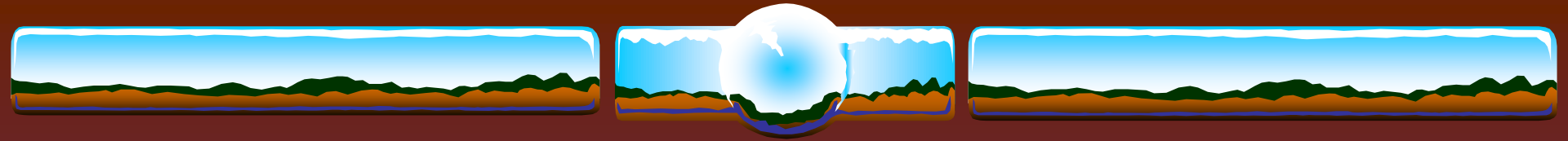
Conclusions

- ❖ Religion and spirituality add a vital dimension to counseling.
- ❖ Religion and spirituality complement traditional counseling and healthcare through resources that help people come to terms with frailty and finitude.



The Story of George





Working with
Spiritual Struggles
in Psychotherapy

FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Kenneth I. Pargament
Julie J. Exline





A Definition of Spiritual Struggles

- ❖ Spiritual struggles refer to experiences of tension, strain, and conflict about sacred matters within oneself, with others, and with the divine (Exline, 2013; Pargament et al., 2005).



A Definition of Spiritual Struggles

- ❖ Spiritual struggles refer to experiences of tension, strain, and conflict about sacred matters with the supernatural, within oneself, and with others.





Three Types of Spiritual Struggle

❖ Supernatural





Divine Struggles

- ❖ “I’m suffering, really suffering. My illness is tearing me down, and I’m angry at God for not rescuing me, I mean really setting me free from my mental bondage. I have been dealing with these issues for ten years now and I am only 24 years old. I don’t understand why he keeps lifting me up, just to let me come crashing down again” (undergraduate dealing with bipolar illness).



Divine Struggle Items (Exline et al., 2014)

Felt as though God had let me down

Felt angry at God

Felt as though God had abandoned me

Felt as though God was punishing me

Questioned God's love for me



Three Types of Spiritual Struggle

❖ Supernatural

❖ Intrapersonal





Intrapersonal Spiritual Struggles Moral Struggles of Peter Moen (1951)

“I must recognize with bitter and painful regret how inexpressibly badly I have lived. . .I have reduced to dust all moral and material values” (p. 26).





Moral Struggle Items (Exline et al., 2014)

Wrestled with attempts to follow my moral principles

Worried that my actions were morally or spiritually wrong

Felt torn between what I wanted and what I knew was morally right

Felt guilt for not living up to my moral standards



Three Types of Spiritual Struggle

- ❖ Supernatural
- ❖ Intrapersonal
- ❖ Interpersonal





Interpersonal Struggle Items (Exline et al., 2014)

Felt hurt, mistreated, or offended by religious/
spiritual people

Felt rejected or misunderstood by religious/spiritual
people

Felt as though others were looking down on me
because of my religious/spiritual beliefs

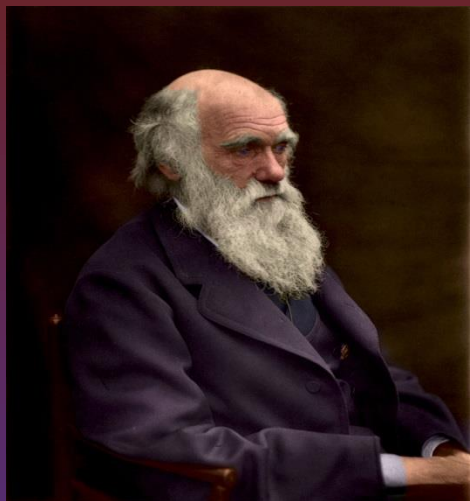
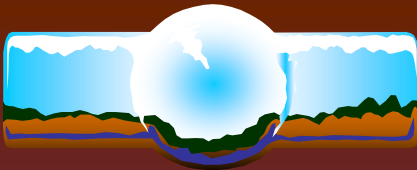
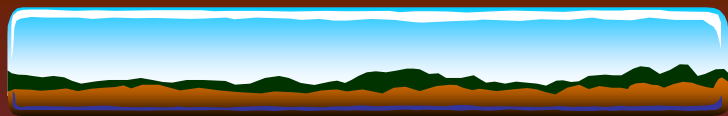
Had conflicts with other people about
religious/spiritual matters

Felt angry at organized religion



Some Points about Struggles

- ❖ Spiritual struggles are not uncommon





Spiritual Struggles are Not Uncommon (Winkelman et al., 2013)

- ❖ 69 advanced cancer patients
 - ❖ 58% endorsed a spiritual struggle
 - ❖ 30% wondering why God allowed this to happen
 - ❖ 29% wondering whether abandoned by God
 - ❖ 25% angry at God
 - ❖ 25% questioning God's love for them
 - ❖ 22% feeling cancer is punishment from God



Some Points about Struggles

- ❖ Spiritual struggles are not uncommon
- ❖ Spiritual struggles are a natural part of life but they are also painful and disorienting



Landmark Spirituality and Health Study (Abu Raiya et al., 2015)

- ❖ Representative national sample (N = 2200)
- ❖ All types of spiritual struggle tied to
 - ❖ Greater depression
 - ❖ Greater anxiety
 - ❖ Less life satisfaction
 - ❖ Less happiness
- ❖ Controls for religious commitment, neuroticism, and social isolation



Muslims Coping with COVID-19 (Yildirim et. al, 2021)

- ❖ Spiritual struggles associated with:
 - ❖ Stress
 - ❖ Depression
 - ❖ Anxiety





Can Struggles Lead to Illness?

Struggles

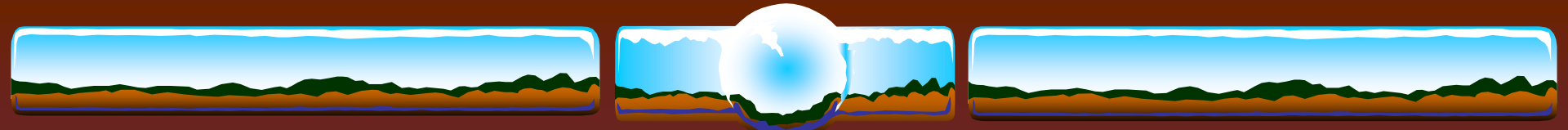


Illness



Support for Primary Struggles Model

- ❖ Pirutinsky et al. (2011) study of orthodox Jews over two points in time.
 - ❖ Compared primary and secondary struggles models.
 - ❖ The primary RSS model fit the data better with RSS predicting increases in depression over time.
 - ❖ The secondary model didn't fit the data as well with depression predicting changes in RSS over time.



Religious Coping among Medically Ill Elderly Patients: A Two-Year Longitudinal Study

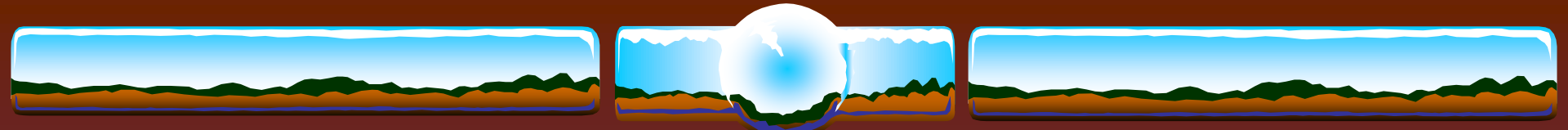
(Pargament, Koenig, Tarakeshwar, & Hahn, 2001, 2004)

- ❖ 596 hospitalized patients over 55
- ❖ Duke University Medical Center
- ❖ Durham VA Medical Center
- ❖ 1996-1997
- ❖ Two year follow-up
- ❖ 176 deceased



Consequences of Spiritual Struggles

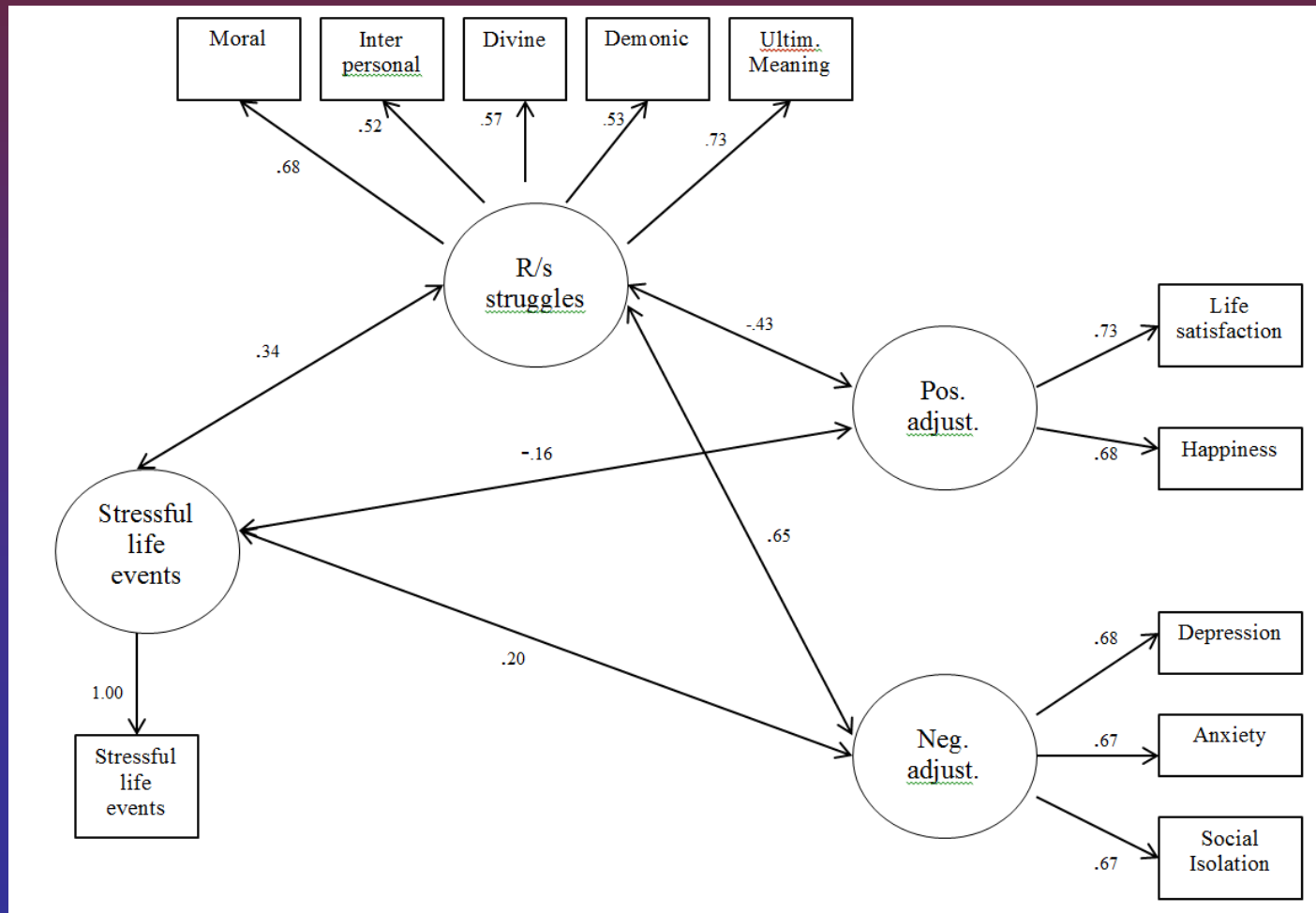
- ❖ Struggles with the divine predicted increases in depressed mood, declines in physical functional status, declines in quality of life after controls
- ❖ Struggles with the divine predicted 22-33% greater risk of mortality after controls



Specific Spiritual Struggle Predictors of Mortality

- ❖ “Wondered whether God had abandoned me”
(RR = 1.28)
- ❖ “Questioned God’s love for me” (R = 1.22)
- ❖ “Decided the devil made this happen” (R = 1.19)

Spiritual Struggles Mediate the Link between Stressful Life Events and Adjustment





Predictors of Positive Outcomes of Spiritual Struggles

❖ Finding support for the struggle





Predictors of Positive Outcomes of Spiritual Struggles

- ❖ Finding support for struggles
- ❖ Finding meaning in the struggle





Predictors of Positive Outcomes of Spiritual Struggles

- ❖ Finding support for the struggle
- ❖ Finding meaning in the struggle
- ❖ Finding a resolution to the struggle



Struggle at Two Times

- ❖ ***CHRONIC (High Struggle at Baseline and High Struggle at Follow Up)***
- ***ACUTE (Low Struggle at Baseline and High Struggle at Follow Up)***
- ***ACUTE (High Struggle at Baseline and Low Struggle at Follow Up)***
- ***NONE (Low Struggle at Baseline and Low Struggle at Follow Up)***

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Practical Implications

- ❖ Don't change the subject
- ❖ Don't assume you understand
- ❖ Don't judge
- ❖ Don't offer easy answers



Practical Implications

- ❖ Ask about Spiritual Struggles
 - ❖ Have your problems affected you religiously or spiritually? How?



Practical Implications

- ❖ Ask about Spiritual Struggles
- ❖ Listen to and Normalize Spiritual Struggles





Practical Implications

- ❖ Ask about Spiritual Struggles
- ❖ Listen to and Normalize Spiritual Struggles
- ❖ Collaborate with Other Disciplines





THANK YOU!!!

