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Abstract

The investigation examined the understanding of spirituality as related to the sense of self. Self-reports from semi-structured interviews of participants with a stated value for spirituality are analyzed inductively. Using a Rogerian understanding of self, the analysis identified six themes related to how participants understand spirituality as related to their sense of self. The themes demonstrate that spirituality is a key dimension to self understanding and is part of relationships, social engagement, an understanding of meaning and purpose in life, and an overall sense of happiness and joy.

Keywords

Spirituality, Self, Inductive Analysis

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Spirituality and the Sense of Self: An Inductive Analysis

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The investigation examined the understanding of spirituality as related to the sense of self. Self-reports from semi-structured interviews of participants with a stated value for spirituality are analyzed inductively. Using a Rogerian understanding of self, the analysis identified six themes related to how participants understand spirituality as related to their sense of self. The themes demonstrate that spirituality is a key dimension to self understanding and is part of relationships, social engagement, an understanding of meaning and purpose in life, and an overall sense of happiness and joy. Keywords: Spirituality, Self, Inductive Analysis

Psychological research on the topic of spirituality has focused on particular aspects of spirituality: its role in resiliency (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2009), the relationship of spiritual practices to mental health (Cummings, Ivan, Carson, Stanley, & Pargament, 2014), and spirituality as a resource for coping (Bryant-Davis & Wong, 2013) or stress reduction (Shapiro, Astin, Bishop, & Cordova, 2005). Other research has considered personality type in relationship to spirituality or spiritual practice (Saroglou & Munoz-Garcia, 2008; Simpson, Newman, & Fuqua, 2007). The measures of spirituality used in research generally conceive of spirituality as something outside of the person or as a personal habit, preference, or choice (Kapuscinski & Masters, 2010). In treatment and counseling, spirituality is typically viewed as an alternative or ancillary approach requiring a special set of competencies (Vieten et al., 2013).

In addressing the problem of research on spirituality from a scientific perspective, Cairns (2011) summarized the challenge for research on this topic in this way:

Our problem is all about perspective. We usually try to describe spirituality from within our acquired belief systems. This is self-limiting and constrains our understanding of both the origins of spirituality and the beliefs of others. It particularly creates a problem in heterogeneous communities with a wide range of often-contradictory explanations for life. I think we should set aside our various culturally driven beliefs that tell us how things work and what to think. With a clean slate we can start to consider the phenomena we describe as spirituality... (p. 187)

Offering a similar critique of research on spirituality, Robertson (2007) contends that many investigations of spirituality in psychology and other sciences are primarily based on religious or metaphysical understandings of spirituality. In place of religious or metaphysical approaches to spirituality, he recommends pursuing research of spirituality using a paradigm of the self and the notion of personal integration of spirituality with the self.

A small number of studies have considered spirituality in terms of the self and personal identity. Morga (2014) presented a narrative analysis based on semi-structured interviews with a participant in her early 20's of Anglo Asian Muslim background. In describing her identity, Morga found that, "this narrative implies that religion, for some people, seems to have an important role in the construction of their identity...her faith and religion seems to play a constructive role for pluralism and integration. From her narrative it

seems that to enhance pluralism and integration, the fears of discrimination and Islamophobia need to be addressed through policy and practical actions” (p. 20). In other words, spirituality, expressed through identification with Islam, was a core construct of personal identity. As a core construct of identity, spirituality was an essential part of personal growth and integration as well as a foundation for approaching life challenges in this case study.

Approaching the integration of spirituality with the self from a different perspective, van Dierendonck (2012) used an experimental scenario study design and recorded the responses of 660 participants from two different samples on a survey of personal well-being of an imaginary person. This investigation found that “spirituality positively correlates with leading the good life, including moral development, meaning, and self-actualization. Spirituality positively correlated to relatedness and self-determination (p. 685). It’s important to note that “the overall results showed that spirituality may provide an extra psychological dimension for people to live the good life, both in terms of desirability and moral goodness” (p. 697).

Research Problem

Despite the body of research in psychology related to spirituality, there remains a fundamental divergence in the way psychology has operationalized the construct of spirituality as opposed to the ways in which religious and spiritual traditions use the term “spirituality.” This divergence may be related to psychology’s attempt to approach spirituality from a scientific perspective. As noted, Robertson (2007) posited that the solution for a scientific approach to the investigation of spirituality in psychology was to begin with the concept of the self.

Religious and spiritual traditions commonly describe spirituality in ways different from the operational definitions used in psychological research, which often focus on spiritual practices or other measurable behavior and attitudes (Kapuscinski & Masters, 2010). Spiritual traditions use terms that imply a spiritual dimension is a constituent part of the person. Among those terms implying this connection are embodied spirit (Aquinas, 1981), soul and soulful as found in the Abrahamic religions as well as Jainism and Hinduism, and statements asserting that humans are spiritual beings having a human experience (see Teilhard de Chardin, 1955).

Given that religion and spiritual traditions understand spirituality as part of the construction of identity, the current inquiry, from a psychological perspective, posed the following research question: how do people with a sustained value for spirituality understand spirituality as related to their sense of self? In this context, “self” is understood from the Rogerian perspective. Hall and Lindzey (1957) explained Roger’s approach stating that “the self which is a differentiated portion of the phenomenal field and consists of a pattern of conscious perceptions and values of the *I* or *me*” (p. 478). The definition of spirituality has no common consensus even though many definitions have been posited, including by this author (Kavar, 2012). For this study, participants were asked to define spirituality in a way that was comfortable for that participant.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this investigation was to gather and analyze personal reports of spirituality’s relationship to the sense of self from people who articulate a value for spirituality over a sustained period of time. The need for the study is based on the lack of research on spirituality as it relates to an understanding of self. Having used standard search engines including ProQuest, PsycArticles, and PsycINFO with key words including

spirituality, self, identity, personality, and experience in various combinations, no studies were identified that specifically considered an individual's experience of spirituality and its relationship to self.

The significance of this qualitative investigation is that it may serve as a basis to investigate the how people experience spirituality as part of their identity and within daily life. The results of this study may be significant to the fields of psychology, religious studies, and their ancillary disciplines including social work, counseling, pastoral counseling, and spiritual direction. The significance is found in the investigation's examination of the experience the ways an individual understands spirituality as part of personhood or sense of self.

Research Question

Using a qualitative research design with a semi-structured interview process based on guiding questions for data collection and inductive analysis of that data, this study investigates the research question, "How do people with a sustained value for spirituality understand spirituality as related to their sense of self?"

Conceptual Assumptions

The theoretical assumption for this investigation is that spirituality is a dimension of human experience whereby individuals fundamentally integrate spirituality with their sense of self. Further, the spiritual dimension enables individuals to create, discover, or encounter meaning, purpose, and value in other dimensions of life including the cultural, the embodied, or the social and psychological (Kavar, 2012).

The methodological assumption for investigation is consistent with other qualitative research: that human experience is constructivist in nature and that the role of the qualitative researcher is primarily inductive.

The general limitation of the study's approach is the assumption that spirituality is a construct that is understood in unique and personal ways. While the sample for this study is composed of individuals with various beliefs who maintain different spiritual practices, the sample is, by definition, limited to the experience of spirituality as described by the participants.

Procedure

Criteria based purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants. The criteria were that participants should be over age 25, speak English well enough to be interviewed, and consider spirituality an important aspect of life for at least the last two years. Participants were not given a definition of spirituality but asked to define this construct in a way that was comfortable for them. Sampling closed when data saturation was determined.

Participants were recruited through the researcher's contacts with various spiritual and religious organizations. Leaders of these organizations recommended participants to contact the investigator.

The sample for this investigation was comprised of six adults ages 41 to 66, two men and four women; two African-American and four Caucasian; three practicing Christians, one practicing Buddhist, and two with no religious affiliation.

After obtaining written and verbal informed consent, participants were interviewed by the researcher using a semi-structured interview format based on guiding questions.

Interviews were conducted either in the researcher's office or the participant's office, based on the participant's preference. Interviews were digitally recorded.

The guiding questions for the semi-structured interview were:

1. Describe your experience of being a spiritual person.
2. How do you understand the way that your spirituality has been part of your life?
3. You know what spirituality is in your life. What has spirituality led or empowered you to do?
4. In what ways is spirituality related to your sense of self?
5. How is spirituality related to other aspects of your life?
6. What is most important to you about spirituality in your life?

Following the collection of data, the researcher transcribed the recorded interviews using ExpressScribe software. The researcher analyzed the data using the five steps of the Thomas (2006) model for inductive analysis. Summarizing the steps of this model, the data was prepared in a common format; transcripts were reviewed in detail; categories for major and minor themes were created; over-lapping themes were clarified; a synthesis of coding categories was created.

The Researcher

The researcher is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ and describes himself as a progressive Christian with an inter-faith orientation. With a master's degree in formative spirituality and a Ph.D. in counseling psychology, the researcher has experience working in medical and mental health settings that utilized integrated models for care that included a focus on spirituality. The researcher has been involved in inter-faith dialogue and programs and is a spiritual director primarily for those who consider themselves Christian or spiritual but not religious. The researcher's background in qualitative research dates to his training at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA, in the 1970's and 1980's. His current faculty appointment is that of lead faculty member for qualitative research in General Psychology in the Department of Psychology at Capella University

As noted in the researcher's previous publications, particularly *The Integrated Self: Holistic Approach to Spirituality in Mental Health Practice*, the researcher holds the position that spirituality is a dimension of self that is primarily experienced in individuals as meaning and purpose found in other dimensions of life, including but not limited to relationships, career, hobbies, or culture. The researcher addressed this bias in data collection by not introducing terms like "meaning" or "purpose" in the interviews and avoided speaking of spirituality as a dimension of self.

The researcher recruited participants based on the recommendation and referral from leaders of various groups and organizations; obtained informed consent; conducted the interviews; transcribed the interviews; and conducted the analysis. Participants were given a numeric code (P1, P2, P3, etc) identifying the individual participant data which was kept separate from the actual data and securely filed. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study and specific identifying information was edited from the transcripts of the interviews.

The Participants

Participant 1 is a 41 year old, white, male holistic health practitioner. With minimal background in religion, he was introduced while in graduate school to a variety of popular spiritual writers and developed spiritual practices of intentionality and meditation. Six months before the interview, he began attending a Christian church with his spouse.

Participant 2 is a 52 year old African-American female. This participant holds three graduate level degrees. She grew up in a family that attended a traditional Black Christian Church. In adulthood, she was active in international service-oriented programs sponsored by Christian denominations. In this context, she was introduced to meditation. For approximately 20 years, she has maintained a Buddhist practice.

Participant 3 is a 60 year old white female. Following a career as a nurse, she now works as an energy healing practitioner and musician. She has belonged to Presbyterian, United Methodist, and Unitarian Universalist congregations. She has been active in a twelve-step program for addiction recovery for approximately twenty-five years. Her present spiritual practices include meditation and drumming.

Participant 4 is a 46 year old white female. She holds an undergraduate degree in business and works in health care. As a child, she attended a Methodist church with her family. As an adult, she was introduced to yoga as a spiritual practice and went on to become a certified yoga instructor. In addition to yoga, she practices tai-chi and meditation.

Participant 5 is a 55 year old white male. With advanced degrees in science and engineering, he works in an engineering field. A life-long practicing Christian, he has belonged to Episcopal, Catholic, Methodist, and United Church of Christ congregations. His spiritual practices include singing, private prayer, and community worship.

Participant 6 is a 65 year old African-American female. She is currently a retired ordained minister. She was raised in a Muslim family and later converted to Christianity. She regularly practices meditation and mindfulness.

The Findings

The analysis was conducted using the steps of the Thomas (2006) model for inductive analysis. Following transcription of the interviews, the transcripts were scrubbed of any information that may identify the individual participants. Following several careful readings of the transcripts by the researcher enabling the researcher to be immersed in the data, a simple coding system using colored highlights of participant's words was used. The codes were later transferred to a spreadsheet format. In this process, 13 separate codes were initially created. Codes were then combined to form the six major codes presented here. To assure the quality of the analysis, the researcher reviewed the actual statements with the context presented in the original transcripts assuring that participant's statements were not taken out of their original context.

Analysis of the interview transcripts led to the identification of six major themes that were consistent among the participants. These themes addressed the participant's understanding of spirituality as related to the sense of self, relationships, connections with a wider community, and personal growth and transformation.

Each theme is briefly described and illustrated with exemplar quotes from the participants.

Theme One: Understanding of Self

All of the participants reported that spirituality is fundamental to their understanding of self. The understanding of self is contextualized in each person's unique idiom and faith perspective. Yet, no matter the idiom or beliefs, spirituality informs self-understanding in fundamental ways.

Participant One was very clear about the role spirituality plays in understanding his life when he said, "I feel that every decision I make, every step I take, every thought process ... every word, how I treat people, how I do anything or how I live my life, is a reflection of growing spiritually as a being that comes from that source." He and other participants experience something all encompassing about spirituality in that it is an active part of cognition and behavior. Spirituality also plays a role in relationships as well as draws a person to something that's self transcendent. This connection was exemplified by Participant Four's statement, "I feel connected to the universe."

Idioms and metaphors from particular belief systems were used to explain the way spirituality was fundamental to understanding self. Participant 2, a practicing Buddhist, stated, "Buddhism has been very helpful to me in recognizing the fluidity of self, of myself." Similarly, as a practicing Christian, Participant 5 explained it this way: "My life is a gift from God to be used wisely to build the kingdom of God...I have to remember always is that my life is not really mine. It's God's life." In these statements, the language of religious traditions has been adopted to describe the understanding of self that is rooted in spirituality.

While there's a primary inward dimension of the understanding of self related to or rooted in spirituality, it is also in context within the context of a larger, outward worldview. That was reflected in the statement above from Participant One, but takes on a particular nuance with Participant Six. Reflecting on a variety of struggles in life, she noted, "Spirituality allows me to see myself as a person of value in a society that has in many cases tried to dehumanize me.... The spirituality I have enables me to see myself as a person of worth no matter what others might say to me, no matter what circumstances might be. I know because of my faith, who I am and my relationship with God, that I am someone of worth and that's really important to me."

The understanding of self as rooted in spirituality expressed by participants was not something that occurred in just a moment or a singular spiritual experience. Instead, in looking over the course of their lives, the participants saw this understanding of self as having developed over time. As Participant Three described it, "I was always on a spiritual quest to find out more about who I was, to find out more about what life is all about, to find out more about what I can do to deepen the connectedness that we all have together, the depth at which we're all connected as one."

The sense of self described by each participant is drawn in clear ways from their understanding of spirituality. The sense of self is integrated with the awareness of personal growth, evolution, and connection with others and the world understood to be part of the individual's spirituality. Spirituality is related to the sense of self worth and an awareness of one's own life within a larger context.

Theme Two: Way to Live

Each of the participants reported that spirituality provides a context for their way of living, the decisions they make, and how they interact with the world and other people. While the participants engage in spiritual practices and spiritual activities, this is secondary to the way in which spirituality permeates other aspects of daily life. Moreover, the way in

which they understand day to day interactions, choices, and the way they carry themselves throughout life is colored and shaped by spirituality.

Perhaps most clear about the importance of spirituality in terms of his way of life was Participant One who said, "How I think, how I do, what I put in my body, what I eat, the food choices I make, any product that I may buy, spiritually where is this coming from? Food that I eat -- who's touched it? What energy do they have or spiritual essence that they are putting on the food that I'm putting in my body? Almost absolutely everything is impacted by my spirituality." His stance to life is pro-active with spirituality as the first consideration in daily decision making.

A particular nuance on this theme was the focus to live in the present moment in a particularly focused way. Participant Two described her here-and-now way of living when saying, "What it (spirituality) means to me now is to not get caught up in the things that make you unhappy and also to be, to live ethically, to try to do no harm to others, and there are many ways that we can harm so no it's more of an exploration of how can I refrain from harming others, how can I contribute to be a benefit to others, and I don't concern myself with the afterlife --- that is whatever it is."

Part of the here-and-now focus for life includes doing good for others. As Participant Three explains, "It's a way of ministering for me as well. I believe that I use drumming as a tool to bring people together for wellness and for healing but it also, in that 12-step program that I've been with for 25 years now, is that attracts people to me as well." This sentiment was also echoed by Participant Five when he reported, "God has given me gifts and I need to use those gifts and I need to use them productively. God has given me a lot of ability in my field and that's where I need to use those gifts. That's my part to play. Participant Four explained that living in a way that does good has implications for the broader global community as well as for the immediate community of her family. She stated, "I feel more like needing to make things better in our living life, in our community, in helping people who need help, thinking about what's going to happen with Earth. I feel like when I'm in that realm, when I'm praying or whatever, I feel like I'm thinking of the future, especially for my son, I want to have everything still around for him, like for the Earth to still have running water, and things that we enjoy right now."

While the participants indicated that spirituality was the basis for how they lived, they also understood spirituality as part of the integration of self. Participant Six stated it in this way: "The totality of it is all integrated and not compartmentalized. It's corporate worship, how I live my life, pastoral care, relationships with family and friends. In order to have a balanced life and a balanced spirituality, you have to be able to integrate all those things all together. It's not compartmentalized

Perhaps Participant 6 summed up the theme of spirituality as a way to live most succinctly: "It's not compartmentalized." Spirituality is the basis for decisions about food choices, environmentalism, altruism, and relationships. There's a clear ethical component about the way to live but none of the participant's spoke of rules or guidelines. Instead, this ethical awareness is an inner reality connected with spirituality.

Theme Three: Relationships and Connection with Others

Participants shared the importance of spirituality in their connections with others. Spirituality played a critical role in understanding relations, both intimate relationships as well as a larger sense of a connection with people as members of a community. A key aspect of this theme was doing things for and with other people. This included providing care, creating positive options for others, as well as a moral dimension of being a positive force in

the lives of others. While this has been a part of the previous themes discussed, the connections the participants experience with others takes on a significant role.

Participant One was very clear that spirituality undergirds his relationships with and connections with others. "I guess in every way: my relationships with everybody whether it's with my loved ones, with my family, with strangers on the street, ahh...my spirituality very much in relationship and judgment of others, which I recognize that it exists and I think that judgment is not in alignment with spiritually with who I really want to be and who I attain to be." This focused experience of spirituality as key for relationships with others was also echoed by Participant Six when she said, "For me, my spirituality is an integration of the spiritual aspect, relationships, family, friends, and also intimate relationships. All of those things are part of the integrated mix and makes me healthier -- having those things in balance." It's important to note that both of these participants saw spirituality and relationship as an essential part of inner life balance or alignment but also part of healthy living.

It is striking that some of the other participants identified spirituality and relationships through doing things for other people. Participant Two was quite clear when she said, "I got a completely different view of spirituality through serving others." The act of doing things for others connected her with a sense of spiritual growth or evolution. This was also clear with Participants Three, who had been a nurse throughout much of her professional life. "I was a nurse for 30 years, and a massage therapist, so that way I got to be with people, to care for people, do what I believe God wants me to do in this life. And my love now for drumming and my love for music and it finding its way to finding people and bringing people together, that's what I do....I bring it all together."

In a different context, Participant Four also identified service to others as a significant spiritual connection between her sense of self and others. For Participant Four, the service comes in the form of teaching yoga. "I teach yoga, so I feel I'm in a spiritual community that way. And I feel like when I'm teaching a class that I'm connected with people and then they're connected to whoever they want to be connected to. But I feel like that we're all connected at that point together."

Spiritually rooted in his Christian belief system, Participant Five shared a deep insight using the distinctively Christian concept of grace. He understands what's done for others as an act of grace. "Grace has to be made. But it's free to the people who receive it but other people have to make the grace, that is, it's grace if someone who's hungry can find something to eat. But food didn't fall out of the sky. It came because someone else gave food to the food bank, because someone else put money in the hand of the guy standing on the street holding a sign, it's because people worked to grow the food, to raise the food, even if it was stolen food, someone had to work to produce it. So, nothing comes about magically. Grace is not magic. It's given. It's not given out of thin air. It's given out of the work that people do to build the kingdom of God. And that's our job. Our job is to manufacture grace." For Participant Five, it's not just that he experiences spirituality as a connection with others but that he is called or obligated to respond to others as a way of manufacturing grace for others.

While this third theme of relationship and connection with others is similar to the previous theme of a way to live, the sense of connection that was rooted in spirituality was pronounced among all the participants. For that reason, relationships and connections with others was identified as a separate theme. Like the theme, way to live, there is an altruistic and ethical dimension to the relationships and connection with others. But positively impacting the lives of others takes on a certain kind of priority. As Participant 5 stated, "It's our job."

Theme Four: Personal Transformation

Each of the participants reported that spirituality was related to personal transformation, growth, or empowerment. The experience of transformation should not be viewed as dramatic to an outside observer. However, the growth and transformation was significant to each participant. There was a deep sense of conviction that the experience of personal transformation was spiritual in nature and enabled each person to become more or accomplish more than she or he previously had.

Each participant discussed uniquely personal experiences of transformation. Participant One experienced transformation in regard to personal relationships. "I think spirituality has empowered me and enabled me to get to where I am in life and create the relationships that I have had and spirituality has allowed me to be much more forgiving and allowed me to meet my husband."

The transformation experienced by Participant 2 was of an existential nature and the fear of death. Clearly, one cannot be sure how death will be experienced before it occurs, but this participant is hopeful about spirituality's ability to ease her fear of death. "I hope that spirituality has enabled me to not be afraid of dying...My hope is that through my spiritual practices that I have alleviated to a large degree all those anxieties about what's going to happen to me upon my death."

While the transformation was individualized, a common aspect conveyed was a sense of transformation in the participant's perspectives about their own lives. Participant Three is particularly direct about this when saying, "everything that I have done up until now...it's very, very clear as to where I was and as to where I am now. All of it came together. Everything in my past, all my struggles, all my joys, all my sadnesses, my ups, my downs, my trainings, my learnings, everything that -- cause I'm 60 years old now--- and everything, my adoption, my struggles with not feeling lovable, everything I believe it has been divine, and that it's been all God's working in the tapestry which he's woven in order to bring me where I am now. It's just remarkable."

The transformation for the others was more subtle but was expressed as important to them. Participant Four began discussing a practical aspect of transformation. "I think it helps me keep calm in my life because you have all sorts of things thrown at you, or people's attitudes, or life in general, or general stress. I feel like I can handle that a lot better now since I've been doing that for years." Participant Five linked the transformation to a particular context: "I had a big period of aimlessness and loss, so the solution was that I opened myself up to what God was calling me to do and I ended up going back to college." Finally, Participant Six provided a sense of transformation as something of a life appraisal: "I knew I had to get through it and that somehow God would sustain me in the midst of it. And I did make it through. But it was very difficult. So, just getting up in the morning, God gave me the strength because otherwise I just wouldn't have been able to do that."

The personal transformations reported by participants were aspects of life that made a difference to each participant. For Participant Six, it was the ability to get up in the morning when faced with challenges. For Participant Two, the transformation deals with facing mortality. Learning to forgive, to be calm, or view self as lovable reflect an integration of spirituality with self-awareness and becoming a better person on one's own terms. The transformation was unique to each participant but the theme was clear to identify.

Theme Five: Meaning and Purpose

Participants reported that spirituality provides an understanding of self related to a sense of meaning or purpose in life. The sense of meaning or purpose is individual and

idiosyncratic rather than universal. It's something of an answer to the question, "Why am I here?" on an intuitive level. It is evident in the following statements from the participants that meaning and purpose are highly individualized.

Participant Two conveys a kind of developmental understanding of looking for meaning in various aspects of life but then eventually finding an authentic sense of meaning through spirituality. "I used to think that having more things meant that I would be happier -- having more things, nice things, having degrees, you know, just having, collecting, it would equal happiness. And now I know that's not true. Even now, I try to scale back. I look at my closet and say if I can't reach for what I want in there, then I have too much. Every year I have a scaling back and what I think about spirituality and what impact it's having on me now, I think about the dreams I have for the future. The content of my dreams are more about really living as simply as possible, not having any regrets, guilt, things that I have to worry about, just living lightly with few worries and being available to others --- that's my ideal."

Participants One and Three identify this sense of meaning as connected with their individual spiritual practice. Participant One spoke of intentionality as a primary spiritual practice where for Participant Three the primary spiritual practice is drumming. They explain meaning in life as connected to the practice. Participant One, "Living life with intention and love and knowing that my influences are much greater than just me walking down the street and going to the grocery and buying something and going home and feeling like I'm not part of anything greater or bigger. I feel I'm living my life with a reason, if that makes any sense, a reason to be a better person." Participant Three conveyed a sense of meaning and purpose in this way, "I really believe that I know what my purpose is. There's a wonderful word in the world of West African music that means 'born to do this.' I really believe that God's brought me through, that all those things that happened to me in my past, that there are ways for healing, for wellness, for bringing people together, for connecting people, and I believe that as long as I stay on that path with God and the purpose I'm supposed to be doing that. That's why I'm here."

Participant Five was the most succinct on this theme when she said, "I think that there is some greater purpose in life, in being alive." Perhaps this theme of meaning in life is best summarized by Participant Six when she said, "Spirituality gives joy and meaning to my life. It gives my life purpose because of the faith and how I experience and live out my spirituality. I find meaning in what I do."

The participants all stated spirituality provided a context for understanding that they had a reason to live. Life became meaningful and purposeful because of the spiritual dimension of self. Struggles earlier in life took on a valuable context while ordinary responsibilities had intrinsic worth.

Theme Six: Joy and Happiness

Spirituality has led the participants to experience a sense of joy and happiness in life. The terms "joy" and "happiness" seem to be used interchangeably. As Participant 6 stated, it's not "the sense of jumping up and down." Perhaps it could be described as a kind of contentment or positive sense in one's life.

Some of the participants identified joy as something like a state of being which results from the spiritual dimension of life. Participant Three stated, "I feel joyful. I feel connected. I feel happy. I feel energized and relaxed all at the same time." Participant One connected the experience of joy with spirituality and ethics by saying, "Who I am as a person would be a reflection to spiritual teaching which would be honest, good, and happy and joyful." The experience of joy and happiness was expressed by Participant Four who also felt the desire to

help others share the same experience: "It makes me happier. It makes me a lot happier because when I feel connected to other people and to God, I feel happy. I feel like I don't need other people to make me happy, I feel like I'm almost more balanced in myself."

Participant Six was clear that this was not an emotional state that passes easily but a quality of living. "I want to use the word *joy* but I don't want to use the word *joy* in the sense of jumping up and down. Spirituality gives joy and meaning to my life." This was explained in a simple way by Participant Two: "I'll be whatever I'm going to be, and seek to experience life joyfully."

A theme of joy and happiness connected to spirituality was also evidenced. This contentment or satisfaction with living is connected by Participant 1 as a reflection of spirituality, as a result of spirituality by Participant 2, and as a gift from spirituality by Participant 6.

Discussion of the Findings

The research question for this study asked: how do people with a sustained value for spirituality understand spirituality as related to their sense of self? Raising the question from a psychological perspective, the investigation employed Rogers's concept of self as an individual's understanding of her or his identity. To answer this research question, data was collected from six participants using a semi-structured interview process and analyzed inductively based on the Thomas (2006) model for analysis.

The analysis demonstrated that individuals who hold a value for spirituality understand their sense of self as integrated with spirituality. Consistent in the data, participants described an internalized and holistic understanding of spirituality that both gave shape to self-understanding and was reflected in their thoughts, behaviors, and emotions. While there was variety in the metaphors used to express this integration based on beliefs and spiritual practices, no matter what metaphors were used, a similar sense of self in the world was expressed. In other words, it did not matter if the participant was Christian, Buddhist, a yogi, or followed a very individualized approach to spiritual practice, spirituality was intertwined with self-understanding in a foundational way.

Spirituality was not limited to the participant's self-understanding but was also integrated with the way in which the participants lived and the relationships they formed with others. There was a direct sense of continuity between the spiritual dimension of self and day to day life including things like the choices of food, caring for others, using abilities and talents to enhance the world or the lives of others, in work settings, and in intimate settings including choosing a mate. Spirituality was not only internalized by each of the participants and integrated with the core self but it was also globalized and became part of the expression of self in relationships, activities, and even a less tangible sense of life purpose.

Personal growth and transformation was also rooted in the spiritual understanding of self. While this may have been expected from the participant involved in a twelve-step program, it was found among all the participants who discussed how spirituality was important during challenging life experiences as well as in more subtle ways, like learning to forgive others or to understand oneself as capable of change.

As an extension of the other themes, spirituality was identified as the source of a sense of meaning and purpose in the lives of the participants. In each case, meaning and purpose was not based on some external source but was derived from the participants' engagements with others or through work of some type. Both the engagements with others and the specific work or activity mentioned were described as related to spirituality. Also, engaging in life from a spiritual perspective led to the additional awareness of meaning and purpose in life.

The result of the meaning and purpose was something the researcher understood as contentment but that the participants described alternatively as happiness or joy. Happiness or joy were not understood to be emotional or passing feelings but as deep-rooted aspects of life lived as spiritual.

Previous research on spirituality in psychology has focused on spirituality as an ancillary support for coping, resiliency, or treatment of various mental disorders. Such research views spirituality as something outside of the person and primarily related to practices or beliefs. In the practice of mental health, the ancillary view of spirituality is reflected in terms of viewing spirituality as something that may be of help to individual treatment, much like a change in diet or regular exercise.

The results of this investigation stand in sharp contrast to an approach to spirituality as ancillary. Instead, the clear and consistent evidence from this investigation is that spirituality is an integral part of an individual's understanding of self. Roger's concept of the Self or Self-Concept is a triangle with three sides comprised of the Perceived Self, the Real Self, and the Ideal Self. The Perceived Self is a person's self understanding; the Real Self is how the person really is; and the Ideal Self is the way the person wants to be. This investigation specifically examined the participants understanding of themselves or the Perceived Self. Consistent among the participants was an understanding that the Perceived Self included spirituality or a spiritual dimension. However, the data also sheds light on the Real and Ideal Selves. Participants discussed spirituality as part of relationships, work, and other endeavors implying that to some degree that the Real Self is shaped by the spiritual dimension. Beyond this, it was clear that the Ideal Self was understood as a person living from a foundation of spirituality. The participants' experience of spirituality is that spirituality is essential to the core understanding of themselves and is operative in the very domains that psychology traditionally views as under its purview: cognition, affect, and behavior.

The Rogerian understanding of the Idealized Self also comes into play in the participants' description of personal transformation which they attributed to spirituality. Each participant described becoming a person who is more whole or integrated in some way. It's noteworthy that one participant spoke of alignment on several occasions. It appears to be an experience of congruency.

The summary of the themes identified in this study echoes aspects of the research by van Dierendonch (2012) on spirituality and the good life. In this study, van Dierendonch found that there was a positive correlation among a value for spirituality, connection with others, moral goodness, and happiness. Van Dierendonch's understanding of connection with others and relatedness includes having a sense of belonging with others; moral goodness is understood as being a positive influence on the lives of others; happiness is an attribute related to meaning in life and life satisfaction. In the present study, the six participants identified a strong sense of connection with others beginning with family members and extending to an enlarging sense of community. Positive interactions with others were part of this connection with others. All participants spoke of the meaning spirituality provided in life as well as a sense of joy and happiness. However, the themes identified in this study provide a more complete description of the experience of spirituality than was measured in the variables in the van Dierendonch investigation.

Much like the Morga (2014) study, the participants in the present investigation did not separate their spiritual or religious dimension from their identity or sense of self. Perhaps this was best seen in Participant 5 who clearly spoke of spirituality in terms of Christianity.

Kavar (2012) defined spirituality "as the dimension of human experience that enables an individual to create, encounter, or discover meaning, purpose, and value in life" (p. 11). Kavar went on to describe the spiritual dimension as being mediated through three other

dimensions of what he called the integrated self. Those dimensions include a sociohistorical dimension which includes both one's personal history and cultural context; the embodied dimension addressing the physical aspects of self including growth and development, aging, genetics, and neurology; and the engaging dimension which includes relationship, work, hobbies and the various ways a person engages with the world. Kavar posited that spirituality is operative in and through each of these dimensions. The results of the present investigation support this earlier theoretical work and contextualize Kavar's framework in the day to day experience of the study's participants. These participants discussed specific spiritual practices and aspects of personal history including the process of personal transformation as understood from the perspective of spirituality (the sociohistorical dimension); the emotional experiences related to spirituality in the theme of joy and happiness; and the role spirituality plays in relationships, work, and other interactions (the engaging dimension). The meaning and purpose found in life is experienced in and through the other dimensions and is reflective of the value for spirituality.

This study also responds to the recommendation made by Robertson (2007) to define spirituality in terms of the self for research in psychology. The present study demonstrated that individuals understood spirituality as interwoven with their sense of self and was part of their self concept. The findings of this investigation are substantively different from those based on measuring spiritual and religious practices. By using a qualitative approach to investigate spirituality and the self, the current study provides a richer and fuller understanding of the role spirituality plays within individual's lives and experience. Investigations limited to measuring discrete variables like a particular spiritual practice or frequency of participation in a religious or spiritual group miss the way in which spirituality is woven throughout an individual's life and sense of self. To this end, it should be noted that in this study, participants only mentioned specific practices tangentially. Based on the data presented, it was not any particular practice that related to the sense of self but the dimension of spirituality itself.

The evidence presented in this study is that spirituality is integrated with the understanding of self among those who articulate a value for spirituality. It is the researcher's conclusion that the value for spirituality provides vocabulary for articulating the awareness of spirituality as integrated with the self, but that this integration may be a life process for others who do not have the value for spirituality and its vocabulary. Further investigation is needed to verify this position.

Limitations of the Study

The study followed a qualitative approach that was both credible and dependable. However, there are two clear limitations to the study:

1. The construct of "spirituality" was not defined for the purpose of this study. Instead, the participants were free to define "spirituality" based on their own experience. The reason for not using a standard definition for "spirituality" is because definitions vary greatly. Even the researcher's own definition which was published in a previous work could not be considered a standard definition for the purpose of research. This is a clear limitation to the study.
2. While the inclusion criteria for the sample did not address this, all participants were deistic in their beliefs. Two were explicitly Christian with a third having recently joined a Christian church shortly before data

collection. The other participants used terms like god, higher power, and divine in their interviews.

Recommendations for Further Research

Because of the lack of existing research related to spirituality and the understanding of self, any further research in this general area would be significant. The predominant focus of research has investigated spirituality as a practice, belief, or something distinct from the individual. The results of this study clearly indicate that spirituality is interwoven with every aspect of self and an individual's life.

Research on spirituality and the self among those without deistic beliefs would expand the knowledge available on the experience of spirituality. Those without deistic beliefs may be found among Buddhist practitioners, those who consider themselves spiritual but not religious, and among humanistic groups.

Research by Mercadante (2014) has demonstrated that there are generational differences in the experience of both religion and spirituality. Further research on the experience of spirituality and the self within specific generational groups would expand the understanding of how spirituality is experienced in relationship to self.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how people with a value for spirituality understand spirituality as related to their sense of self. The investigation demonstrated that there is an integral connection with spirituality and the understanding of self. The research supports understandings from religious and spiritual traditions about the nature of the individual. Researchers in psychology and the mental health disciplines have the opportunity to consider ways in which spirituality is integrated with the understanding of self among individuals.

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