

The Relationship between Psychology and Spirituality: An Initial Taxonomy for Spiritually Oriented Counseling and Psychotherapy

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Abstract

The authors present a theoretical and visual taxonomy of the possible relationships that can exist between the domains of psychology and spirituality. These focus on the context of spiritually oriented counseling and psychotherapy with the aim of further developing this field as an academic discipline and clinical specialty. Attention is paid to how Individual Psychology fits the taxonomy.

For spiritually oriented counseling and psychotherapy to develop and become a respected academic discipline and clinical specialty, theorists will, of necessity, need to specify its basic philosophical premises and to validate empirically its premises, constructs, and methods. For such theoretical and clinical developments to occur, the basic relationship between the psychological domain and the spiritual domain needs to be articulated and validated. This article is an initial attempt to specify the nature of the relationship between these two domains coupled with conjecture about where Individual Psychology contributes to such an endeavor. We provide an initial taxonomy consisting of five relationships between the psychological and the spiritual domains. We describe these relationships and some representative spiritually oriented counseling and psychotherapy approaches that reflect these relationships. Before presenting this taxonomy, we briefly discuss the role and necessity of theory development in the evolving specialty of spiritually oriented counseling and psychotherapy.

Theory Development in Spiritually Oriented Counseling and Psychotherapy

A discipline's viability and maturity is reflected by the presence of validated foundational theories. In the tradition of Enlightenment-derived intellectual inquiry, informed by the philosophy of science, an orderly progression of stages of theory development can be described. The sequence of

stages proceeds from observation to taxonomy to model and then to theory (Franfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1992; Parsons & Shils, 1962).

A taxonomy is a formal method or system for classifying and ordering observations of phenomena according to their relationships. For example, the listings and classification of symptomatic distress and impaired functioning for each diagnostic entity in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR)* of the American Psychiatric Association (2000) are taxonomies. The value and viability of a taxonomy is determined by the extent to which it is comprehensive in ordering observation.

Models are simplified representations of a reality. They are means of specifying relationships among ordered observations—taxonomies—of ideas, concepts, or methods. The diagnostic system of *DSM-IV-TR* is an example of a model of psychopathology. The value and viability of a model is determined by the extent to which it represents these relationships.

The next progression in the sequence is theory. Theory is defined as a means for explaining a wide set of observations and the relationships among these observations. The value and viability of a theory is determined by the adequacy of explanation. Unfortunately, there are few proposed theories that meet this test. For example, there are at least 300 theories of psychotherapy, and each posits some explanation for how psychopathology originates and can be changed or cured. However, few of these theories—in their entirety—have been empirically validated. In fact, the *DSM-IV-TR* is described as an atheoretical model of psychopathology. It remains a model based on taxonomies because there is yet to be a sufficient understanding of the etiology and pathogenesis of mental disorders to fashion a viable explanatory account or theory of psychopathology. Although there has been considerable scientific progress in recent years, it is not expected that a viable theory of psychopathology will be forthcoming for quite some time.

To become a respected specialty, spiritually oriented counseling and psychotherapy cannot short-circuit this sequence without notable consequences. The sequence cannot be subverted by jumping from limited observation of human experience to positing models and theories or importing them from other disciplines. An unfortunate consequence of such short-circuiting is reductionistic thinking and theorizing.

At this stage of its development, it may be premature to expect that an adequate and viable foundational theory for the practice of spiritually oriented counseling and psychotherapy will emerge soon. Presently, there are at least 12 different theories of spiritually oriented counseling and psychotherapy (Sperry & Shafraanske, 2005). None of these have been fully empirically validated. And while each refers to certain psychological underpinnings—some more specific than others—none of them refer to

Individual Psychology. The lack of citing Adler comes despite a robust literature that includes three special issues on the topic (Ansbacher, 1971; Huber, 1987; Mansager, 2000a) as well as a host of articles in the past 10 years (Christopher, Manaster, Campbell, & Weinfeld, 2002; Gregerson & Nelson, 1998; Johansen, 2005; Kawulich & Curlette, 1998; Leak, 2006; Manaster, 2004; Mansager, 2001, 2002; Mansager & Eckstein, 2002; Mansager & Gold, 2000; Mansager et al., 2002; Merler, 1998; Meyers & Sweeney, 2004; Rietveld, 2004; Roberts, Harper, Tuttle-Eagle Bull, & Heideman-Provost, 1995/1998; Sakin-Wolf, 2003; Savage, 1998; Shulman, 2003; Slavik & Croake, 2001).

Nevertheless, at this point in time, it would be reasonable and realistic to focus theoretical and research efforts on the development of comprehensive and integrative taxonomies and models. Again, efforts to gloss over this arduous and necessary stage in the sequence of theory development are foolhardy and potentially self-defeating.

Taxonomy of the Relationship between Psychology and Spirituality

As noted earlier, a taxonomy is a method of classifying phenomena according to their relationship. Because the spiritual and psychological are central considerations in spiritually oriented counseling and psychotherapy, it is most reasonable to begin articulating the relationship of both of these domains. In our opinion, this task is both necessary and long overdue.

One basis for articulating the nature of this relationship involves positing two characterizations of this relationship. The first consideration is whether the two domains are viewed as similar or different, that is, are they distinctly unique domains or are they essentially the same? The second consideration is whether the psychological domain or the spiritual domain has primacy, that is, which is or should be dominant in the therapeutic encounter? These four possibilities are characterized in Figure 1.

Theoretically, there also appears to be a fifth relationship which reflects the *holistic* perspective (Sperry & Mansager, 2004). Here, holistic is used to connote that from such a perspective dualistic conceptualizations of a deity outside the world that humans share in common need not be posited. Thus, in this perspective the domains of psychology and spirituality are differentiated in some respect, yet there is no primacy. From each of the five premises about the relationship of the psychological and spiritual domains arises a unique perspective on the relationship of psychotherapy and spirituality. The following five relationships characterize both these premises and perspectives.

Relationship 1. The psychological and spiritual domains of human experience and development are essentially the same with the psychological having primacy. In this relational view, the implication is that spiritual

		Primacy		
		Psychological	Spiritual	Neither
Comparison	Similar	Relationship 1	Relationship 2	Relationship 5
	Different	Relationship 3	Relationship 4	

Figure 1. A taxonomy of the relationships between psychology and spirituality.

growth is a facet of psychological growth, as is social and interpersonal aptness. By engaging in effective psychotherapeutic work, the client becomes more whole and thereby more spiritual as well. One implication of this relationship is that there appears to be little or no need for spiritual interventions or disciplines necessary to effect development, unless the client finds them useful. Relationship 1 is the epitome of psychological reductionism.

In the classical psychoanalytic view of religion and spirituality, religious and spiritual issues and concerns are essentially psychological issues and concerns in which the psychological domain has primacy (Freud, 1927/1995). Even in Rizzutto's (1979) influential work, *The Birth of the Living God*, the vestiges of psychological reductionism are evident, that is, the individual's God representation basically reflects his or her paternal representation(s). Among more recent versions of Relationship 1, the forgiveness approach described by Worthington and Wade (1999) involves interventions in which the psychological and spiritual domains are considered similar while the psychological domain has primacy. In this approach, religion and spirituality are considered simply moderators of forgiveness.

Relationship 2: The psychological and spiritual domains of human experience and development are essentially the same with the spiritual having primacy. In many respects, this perspective represents a theoretical possibility with limited probability. Aside from a few traditional approaches to spiritual direction and pastoral counseling, this perspective is unlikely to serve as the basis for a contemporary approach to psychotherapy that is sensitive to the spiritual domain. Many contemporary approaches to spiritual direction find the basic premises of this perspective untenable (May, 1982) because it represents spiritual reductionism.

That being said, Jung's analytic psychology has been described in terms remarkably similar to this relational perspective. Cortright (1997) describes how, historically, psychology attempted to remain respectable and "scientific" and thus scrupulously avoided the spiritual domain and spiritual language. Jung, on the other hand, "kept his psychology and his spirituality together, melding them into one" (Cortright, p. 82). Jung viewed the unconscious as a transpersonal and spiritual unconscious and considered all problems experienced by those past midlife as spiritual problems, representing the death of the inauthentic self which needs to be "reborn to a higher, spiritual form of Selfhood" (p. 83). Assisting this rebirth is the task of Jungian therapy.

Relationship 3: The psychological and spiritual domains of human experience and development are different, though at times overlapping, with the psychological having primacy. Spirituality is distinct from, but may parallel, psychological growth. While the spiritual and psychological can intermingle and can be synergistic (i.e., growth in one area can be reflected in the other), it is not inevitable. Psychological growth therefore does not necessarily involve nor lead to growth in spirituality. Furthermore, spirituality is distinct from psychotherapy. In some approaches that reflect Relationship 3, spiritual growth builds on and depends on psychological growth. Thus, a client must develop sufficient psychological maturity before being able to profit from spiritually oriented work. If deeper or subtler psychological conflicts arise while doing spiritual work the focus "returns" to process psychological issues before resuming a focus on spiritual issues.

Representative of this particular relational perspective is spiritually oriented psychoanalysis and the existential-humanistic approach to spiritually oriented psychotherapy. In spiritually oriented psychoanalysis, psychological and spiritual growth are viewed as divergent and parallel, although development occurs within each domain and may lead to an emergent reorganization of one's psychology and spirituality in a hierarchical fashion (Shafranske, 2005). In the existential-humanistic approach, psychology encompasses the spiritual domains; psychotherapy should be conceived of in broad enough terms to include the soul, the sacred, and the spiritual domains, yet the psychological has primacy (Elkins, 2005).

Relationship 4. The psychological and spiritual domains of human experience and development are different, though at times overlapping, with the spiritual having primacy. In this perspective, spirituality is viewed as distinct from, but may parallel, psychological growth. Still, spiritual growth does not necessarily require psychological growth or vice versa. While the spiritual and psychological can intermingle and can be synergistic (i.e., growth in one area can be reflected in the other), it is not inevitable. Thus, there have been saintly individuals who were nevertheless neurotic

(e.g., St. Theresa of Lissieux; Helminiak, 1984). The implication is that both spiritual disciplines and psychological, psychotherapeutic work are necessary.

Perhaps most representative of this perspective is the transpersonal approach to psychotherapy. According to Cortright (1997), the transpersonal approach contends that the psychological and spiritual domains are different while the spiritual domain is foundational, meaning it has primacy. Accordingly, achieving psychological integration is not essential for spiritual realization, nor does spiritual realization bring about psychological integration. However, "only entering into spiritual Being will provide a complete resolution to the dilemmas and pain of psychological, egoic existence" (Cortright, pp. 237–238).

Another approach reflecting this same perspective is the theistic spiritual strategy of psychotherapy (Richards & Bergin, 1997, 2003). In this approach, the two domains are different and overlapping. Thus, psychological disturbance is understood to be caused by various factors, including spiritual problems; however, the primacy of the spiritual domain is clear: "At its core, healing and change is a spiritual process" (Richards & Bergin, 2003, p. 14). Furthermore, integrative spiritually oriented psychotherapy (Sperry, 2003), spiritually oriented cognitive-behavioral therapy (Tan & Johnson, 2005), and interpersonal psychotherapy from a spiritual perspective (Miller, 2005) also exemplify Relationship 4.

Relationship 5. The psychological and spiritual domains of human experience and development are different yet neither has primacy nor is reducible to the other. Spirituality and psychology/psychotherapy are understood as contiguous, goal-oriented processes which strive toward different ends. When the client's concern involves immediate symptom relief or problem-resolution, his or her psychology or personality is involved, and psychotherapeutically oriented strategies and methods are appropriate. When the client's concern involves ultimate answers (Emmons, 1999)—seeking, searching, striving for transcendence and transformation—one's spirituality has primacy and spiritually oriented strategies and methods may be applied. Relationship 5, a holistic orientation, moves comfortably between psychological therapy and spirituality or spiritual direction addressing either short-range and long-range goals or ultimate/transcendent ones as they arise.

Intensive soul care (Benner, 1998) is one approach that comes somewhat close to the holistic methodology consistent with Relationship 5. It combines elements of analytical and existential psychotherapy with spiritual direction. In this approach, psychological and spiritual dimensions form two faces of the coin of the so-called "inner self" with no distinction being made between the soul and the spirit. Both are intimately linked and the journeys of both

are essential for full growth. Yet with a distinction being made between an inner and outer self, holism would not be the most appropriate term for such a relationship.

In another example of Relationship 5, Adler's holistic thought has been applied and described as a "critical collaboration" between psychotherapeutic and spiritual approaches to the person (Mansager, 2000b, 2005; Mansager & Savage, 2003). Such collaboration draws inspiration directly from Individual Psychology (Adler as quoted in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956) and critical ecumenical theology (Küng, 1987/1988). This holistic viewpoint posits that conscious awareness is the very point of connection between spirituality and psychotherapy. "Both spirituality and psychotherapy provide methods for exploring, deepening, and expanding consciousness" (Sperry & Mansager, 2004, p. 158). This inclusive approach can support both natural and supernatural considerations of human difficulties as well as nontheistic understandings of spirituality, such as those inherent in Buddhism and other secular understandings of ultimacy and the person (Mansager et al., 2002; Noda, 2000). It promotes therapeutic intervention that is tailored to the client's belief system irrespective of the therapist's orientation.

Theoretical Value and Clinical Utility of the Taxonomy

Theoretical value. This taxonomy offers much that is of theoretical value. First, because the taxonomy systematically classifies observations about the relationships among 2 first-order constructs, spiritual and psychological domains, it allows a theoretical analysis of the primacy as well as its degree of psychological and/or spiritual reductionism of each of the five perspectives or relationships. Second, because a clinical approach will primarily reflect one of these five perspectives or relationships, the taxonomy offers a framework for evaluating various traditional and contemporary approaches to spiritually oriented counseling and psychotherapy. Third, the taxonomy affords theorists and researchers a framework in which to specify related concepts (i.e., second-order constructs such as transcendence, psychological maturity, character, actualization, and God-representations). The specification of multiple taxonomies fosters the development of a relational map of related constructs which can form the basis of a model and subsequently a theory.

Clinical utility. This taxonomy also offers much that is of practical value and clinical utility. The old saying, "There is nothing more practical than a good theory," presumably can be extended to a good taxonomy. This taxonomy might conceivably serve as a strategy for planning tailored treatment or interventions for a specific client without imposing the therapist's own

values or worldview. More specifically, the taxonomy can be considered as accounting for differing observations of the therapeutic relationship: what the client brings from a spiritual outlook and what the therapist brings from the theoretical and clinical perspective. The client's position on spiritual importance could be considered the "primacy" aspect, while the therapist's position could be understood as the "similarity or difference" between the spiritual and psychological movements exhibited by the client. To ignore either the client's understanding of spirituality or the clinicians' own undifferentiated clinical understanding of the psychological and spiritual dimensions of the individual is not helpful. Such uninformed approaches to the therapeutic relationship raise unnecessary risks, risks that range from incompetent meddling to psychological damage. The taxonomy might also be helpful in thinking about how to incorporate various ethical and spiritual guidelines (e.g., American Counseling Association and Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling) in treatment with specific clients.

Concluding Note

In this article, we have attempted to make the case that spiritually oriented counseling and psychotherapy is at the taxonomy stage of theory development and that it is premature to short-circuit this stage and attempt to propose models and theories without it. To flourish as an academic discipline and clinical specialty, the developing theory must articulate and correlate such first-order constructs as the relationship of the psychological and spiritual domains. A taxonomy of five relational perspectives on the two domains was offered. A review of these five suggests that neither Relationship 1 nor Relationship 2 reflects recent developments in spiritually oriented counseling and psychotherapy. In comparison to the other three perspectives, neither Relationship 1 nor Relationship 2 appears to have much heuristic value probably because of each's unabashed psychological or spiritual reductionism. Despite some vestiges of reductionism, Relationship 3 and Relationship 4 seem particularly appealing as the basis for more fully articulated foundational models and approaches to spiritually oriented counseling and psychotherapy. In the future, it may well be that the holistic perspective, Relationship 5, will provide a fuller alternative to both psychological and spiritual reductionism. The holistic relationship, wherein neither the psychological nor the spiritual domain has primacy and which is compatible with both natural and supernatural spiritual viewpoints, encourages the development of both theistic and nontheistic spiritually oriented counseling and psychotherapy models and approaches.

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