



Religion and Wellbeing

Lecture 09
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Learning Objectives – Lecture 09

By the end of the lesson the learner should be able to:

- demonstrate the contribution that religiosity and spirituality – and their components – can make to psychological wellbeing.

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Religion & Positive Affect

- “Perhaps what is distinctively human about our emotional lives then is our ability to open our minds far enough to fathom or create a connection to God, or another Higher Power. This broadened mindset can in turn provide a wellspring of profoundly experienced emotions, many of them positive. Thus, religious practices may be distinctive human ways of proactively cultivating positive emotions with their attendant adaptive benefits.”

Fredrickson, Barbara. L. (2002). How does religion benefit health and well-being?: Are positive emotions active ingredients? *Psychological Inquiry*, 13, 212.

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Religion & Coping

- Coping is a conscious effort to resolve a stress or a difficulty of intrapersonal or interpersonal nature, in order to manage or minimise stress or conflict.
- When the effort to cope up is unconscious it could turn out to be a **defence mechanism!**
- Even conscious coping could be **functional/adaptive or dysfunctional/maladaptive.**

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Pargament’s Religious Coping

Conserve Significance

Transform Significance

Prevention

Rites of Passage

Support

Conversion

Purification

Reframing

Pargament, K. (1996). Religious methods of coping: Resources for the conservation and transformation of significance. In E.P. Shafranske (Ed), *Religion and the clinical practice of psychology* (pp. 215-239). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

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Pargament’s Religious Coping

- **Prevention:** Religious systems through its taboos prevent adverse situations;
- **Support:** Through God or community religion provides support from unpreventable adverse situations;
- **Purification:** Religious traditions provide mechanisms to purify themselves and re-establish wellbeing;
- **Reframing:** Providing another interpretation to sustain significance (eg. May be God is preventing me from some greater disaster...)
- **Rites of Passage:** Religions prepare adherents to face crisis through rites of passage (eg. Transitions, death);
- **Conversion:** Crisis situations may contribute to deeper conviction.

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Pargament's Religious Coping

Summary Points:

- Seeking meaning (significance) is an important dimension of life, related to wellbeing. Events and situations that threaten meaning cause stress.
- Coping is a successful way of dealing with stress.
- This is achieved either through conservation of significance or transformation of it.
- Religion plays an important role in this.

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Meaning in life and Wellbeing

- Another related area that contributes to wellbeing is meaning.

Two meanings of meaning in life:

- **Purpose:** wanting to achieve something with life (related to Damon William)
- **Significance:** things around life make sense.

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Meaning & Religion

- This process of meaning-making is closely linked with religion. Rollo May, a humanistic psychologist, defined religion "as the assumption that life has meaning. Religion is whatever the individual takes to be his ultimate concern. One's religious attitude is to be found at that point where he has a conviction that there are values in human existence worth living and dying for."

Rollo May, *Existential Psychotherapy* (Toronto: Bryant Press, 1972), 180.

Damon: Purpose & Wellbeing

- Damon's study suggests that one-fifth of the youth, between the age of 12 and 26, of the U.S. are thriving. They are highly engaged in activities that they love. They experience a lot of energy and general wellbeing.
- The other four-fifths of the young population are not clear about what they want in life. They are wasting their energy, and without some serious mentoring, they may not reach their full potential.
- The difference between these two groups of young people is the "sense of purpose".
- A clear sense of purpose in life not only prevents young people from engaging in deviant behaviour, but also provides meaning in life, and contributes to wellbeing – better health of mind and body.

Damon: Purpose in Life & Religion

- "Another powerful long-standing source for finding purpose in life is religious belief. ... Every religious tradition advances the notion that the closer we come to God's purpose for us, the more satisfied we shall become in our daily lives." (Damon, *The Path to Purpose*, 44-45.)

Hope & Wellbeing

- Studies that suggest a significant impact of hope on subjective wellbeing are abundant. This is true across populations drawn from different continents, various age groups, and among general as well as clinical populations.
- Hope is also found to correlate positively with a number of beneficial constructs of ordinary life, including academic achievement.
- On the other hand, depression and suicidal behaviour, and to a lesser degree, alcohol abuse, are correlated to hopelessness. Hopelessness is understood as the absence of purpose in life and, more precisely, the lack of self-efficacy and problem-solving abilities.

Selvam, S.G., & Poulson, M. (2012). Now and hereafter: The psychology of hope from the perspective of religion. *Journal of Dharma*, 37(4), 393-410.

Gratitude and Religion

- Gratitude and religion go hand-in-hand. “Where one finds religion, one finds gratitude” (p. 93).
- “Although gratitude is most at home in monotheistic traditions, there is not a religion on earth that believes that thanksgiving is unimportant” (p. 195).

Emmons, R.A. (2007). *Thanks! How the new science of gratitude can make you happier*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co.

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Gratitude and Wellbeing

- Trait gratitude measures are strongly correlated with various measures of subjective well-being (e.g., McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002; Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003b; Wood, Joseph, & Maltby, 2008).
- Longitudinal studies have found that gratitude predicts increased well-being over time, and gratitude is one of the strongest predictors of happiness amongst the strengths identified by the Values In Action (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).
- Experimental studies have provided promising evidence that gratitude exercises may actually enhance immediate mood state (Watkins et al., 2003b), and long-term subjective wellbeing (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005)

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Compassion

- Compassion is the emotion aroused by an acknowledged awareness that others are suffering.
- The feeling depends on the ability inherent in humans to make a connection with others so as to be aware of their suffering.
- Compassion necessitates identification with the sufferer (empathy).
- Generally, felt compassion evokes: the desire to do something to relieve the sufferer

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Compassion & Wellbeing

- People who are altruistic, sociable and display empathy are consistently happier than others. People suffering from depression are generally self-absorbed, distrustful and focus defensively on their own needs (Seligman, 2002).
- “Volunteers are more likely than non-volunteers to perceive themselves as being in good health (Young & Glasgow, 1998). In fact, the health benefits of volunteering include reduced mortality risk (Harris & Thoresen, 2005; Musick, Herzog, & House, 1999; Oman, Thoresen, & McMahon, 1999) and less vulnerability to depression (Lum & Lightfoot, 2005; Musick & Wilson, 2003; Wilson & Musick, 1999) and serious illness (Moen, Dempster-McClain, & Williams, 1992)” (Dillard, Schiavone, & Brown.)

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Forgiveness & Wellbeing

- Research evidence on the correlation between forgiveness and mental health and wellbeing is abundant (McCullough & Witvliet, 2005).
- Experience of forgiving others is associated to mental wellbeing (Reed & Enright, 2006) and physical health (Thoresen, Harris, & Luskin, 2000).
- The experience of being forgiven by God was related to fewer depressive and anxious symptoms (Exline, Yali, & Lobel, 1999).
- Interventions to facilitate forgiveness also show significant decrease in grief, anger, and anxiety after treatment (Coyle & Enright, 1997).

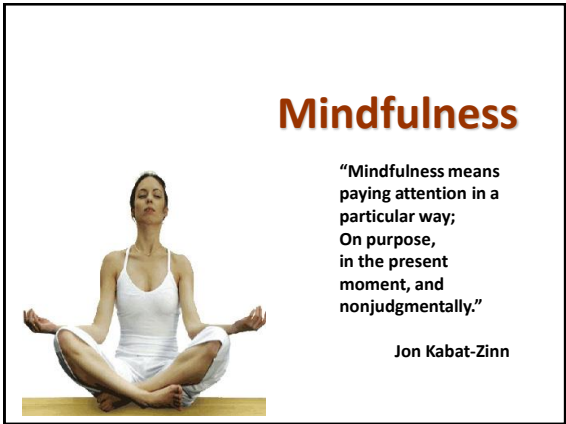
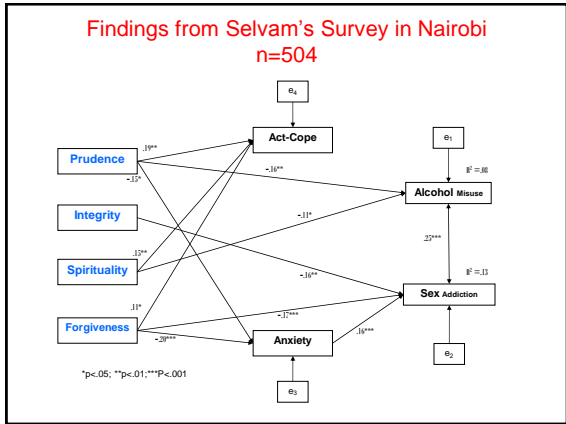
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Religiosity and Addiction

1. Religiosity has been found to have some protective effect on addictive behaviour (Cook, 2009); and,
2. Spirituality based interventions sustain maintenance of recovery (Miller & Bogenschutz, 2007).

(Note the difference between religiosity and spirituality)



Use of Mindfulness in Clinical Setting

- In the UK, for instance, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE, 2004) recommended Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) for people who had experienced depression.
- This was further confirmed by a research published by the Mental Health Foundation (MHF, 2010) that reported that out of the 250 General Practitioners (GP) surveyed, 72% think it would be helpful for their patients with mental health problems to learn mindfulness meditation skills.
- In a representative sampling of 2,007 British adults, 51% of those surveyed said they would be interested in attending free meditation classes to help them deal with stress and thus look after their health.

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Mindfulness & Psychotherapy

- Evidence for a beneficial effect of MBSR on depression and anxiety was equivocal (Toneatto & Nguyen, 2007).
- Mindfulness-based intervention might have some effect on stress reduction in healthy subjects (Chiesa & Serretti, 2009).
- Mindfulness-based therapy is a promising intervention for treating anxiety and mood problems in clinical populations (Hofmann, Sawyer, Witt, & Oh, 2010; O’Driscoll, 2009).
- Baer (2003, p.140): although the “empirical literature supporting its efficacy is small,”...”mindfulness-based intervention can be rigorously operationalized, conceptualized, and empirically evaluated” in the context of health and wellbeing.

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Effects of Yoga

- Two kinds of scientific questions about procedures such as yoga: ‘outcome’ questions and ‘process’ questions.
- Research on the effectiveness of yoga indicates that it has a variety of beneficial effects, but there is more doubt about whether it has unique effects.
- The ‘processes’ questions on how yoga achieves its effects - both mental and physical processes need to be investigated.
- Jung: In the Western mind there is a split between religious belief and practical technique that did not exist in the Indian culture from which yoga comes. Western people therefore fall into one of two traps: they either believe Yoga teaching uncritically, or they see yoga just as a set of useful exercises.

Watts, F. (2000). Psychological research questions about yoga. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 3(1), 71-83.