

Mental Disorders & Religious Practices

Lecture 3
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Learning Objectives – Lecture 3

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

- Discuss the issues involved in the interaction between religion and some specific issues: depression, suicide, OCD and ASD.

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Depression

- It is characterised by one or more of a number of symptoms, including feelings of sadness or misery, unexplained tiredness and fatigue, the feeling that even the smallest tasks are almost impossible, a loss of appetite for food, sex or company, excessive worry, feeling like a failure, unjustified feelings of guilt, feelings of worthlessness or hopelessness, sleep problems and physical symptoms such as back pain or stomach cramps.

Depression & Spirituality

- Loss of, or lack of, meaning and purpose in life is associated with depression.
- Religion/spirituality could offer a sense of purpose;
- However, some religious experiences (“dark night of the soul”) could be accompanied by depression. (This will be discussed in Lecture 8)

Durkheim: Suicide & Religion

- Emile Durkheim (1858-1917): individuals belonging to communitarian religions might turn to suicide less.
- This could be attributed to two dimensions:
 - the individual’s sense of community (supportive role);
 - Community’s control over the individual (proscriptive role).
- Durkheim: Suicide rates are lower among Catholics than Protestants. (In the recent years the rates are the same!)

Suicide & Religion

- Suicide rates may be affected by the attitude of religions to suicide. Some religions could be more tolerant than others.
- Low rates of suicide among adherents of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as compared to Hindus and some Eastern religions.
- Even though Hinduism condemns suicide;
- But *sati* is a case in point!

Cook, C., Powell, A. S., & Sims, A. C. P. (Eds.). (2009). *Spirituality and psychiatry*. RCPsych Publications. (pp.62f)

Spiritual Issues in Suicidal thoughts

- Death by suicide raises a lot of questions about faith, hope, and the meaning of life.
- Faith might help someone to emerge from a life crisis rather than to succumb to it.
- People who have suicidal thoughts experience meaninglessness and futility.
- Belief might offer meaning (“why did God make you?”)

Video on Suicide

Mental Health, Religion, & Suicide

- There is the ethical issue of assisted suicide!
- Dealing with the survivors of suicidal attempt – who might have to face a legal case in some countries;
- Dealing with relatives who have lost people in suicide.

OCD

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

- intrusive thoughts that produce uneasiness, fear or worry (obsessions), repetitive behaviors aimed at reducing the associated anxiety.
- However, the inability to perform the repetitive behaviour might increase anxiety;

Video on OCD

Religiosity - OCD - Anxiety

- “generally there is an association between religiosity and measures of guilt and obsessionality, particularly in religious traditions that encourage scrupulous detailed Observance...”
- “However, measures of guilt do not predict anxiety and depression, and measures of religiosity do not predict clinical obsessionality (obsessive-compulsive disorder, or OCD)”

Loewenthal, K. M., & Lewis, C. A. (2011). Mental health, religion and culture. *Psychologist*, 24(4), 256-259.

Religiosity - OCD - Anxiety

- A study by Greenberg and Witztum (2001) of OCD among orthodox Jews, concluded that religion offers ways of expressing the disorder, but does not in itself foster the disorder.

Greenberg, D. & Witztum, E. (2001). *Sanity and sanctity: Mental health work among the ultra-orthodox in Jerusalem*. New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press.

Loewenthal, K. M., & Lewis, C. A. (2011). Mental health, religion and culture. *Psychologist*, 24(4), 256-259.

Asperger's Syndrome

- Autism Spectrum Disorder refers to a range of disorders that are characterized by social deficits and communication difficulties, stereotyped or repetitive behaviors and interests, sensory issues, and in some cases, cognitive delays.
- Asperger's syndrome is one type of ASD that is characterized by significant difficulties in social interaction and nonverbal communication, alongside restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior and interests. It differs from other autism spectrum disorders by its relative preservation of linguistic and cognitive development.

ASD and Religion

- People with ASD since they lack in social interaction abilities, can they be feeling guilty that they are not able to be compassionate as their religion recommends them to be?
- Could they also find refuge in some cloister type of religious life?
- People with Asperger's syndrome when they live religious communities away from their families – what are the dynamics of relationship with strangers?

Video on Melancholy