Religion, Spirituality & Positive Psychology

Lecture 10
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Religion versus spirituality

- **Religion**: Creed, Code, Cult, Community
- **Spirituality**: “a search for meaning, for unity, for connectedness, for transcendence, and for the highest of human potential” (Emmons, 1999/2003, p. 5).

Religiosity & Spirituality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Spirituality</th>
<th>Low Spirituality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious or spiritual</td>
<td>Neither religious nor spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred or Secular</td>
<td>Secular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search for significance</td>
<td>No search for significance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Psychology of Religion

- A branch of psychology that uses the theoretical framework and methodology of psychology to examine religious sentiment and behaviour.
- More precisely, it studies the effect of religiosity and spirituality on human mind and behaviour - collective and individual.
- Division 36 in the APA.
- In the past decade psychology of religion has found a viable theoretical framework within positive psychology.

Positive Psychology & Religion

- "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.”


Religion & PP: Points of convergence

- Psychology and Religion Research Programme at Cambridge see positive psychology as a possibility to pursue the dialogue between religious traditions and human qualities like forgiveness, gratitude, and hope (Watts, Dutton, & Gulliford, 2006).
- Happiness and wellbeing are clearly associated with goal, purpose and meaning-making (Emmons, 1999). One reason religious and spiritual traditions have been persistent in human history is that they provide meaning (Park & McNamara, 2006). Damon (2008) points that religion provides a path to purpose – individuals who identify their purpose of life in terms of calling are happier than others.
The correlation between forgiveness and mental health and wellbeing is also abundant (McCullogh & Witvliet, 2005). Interventions to facilitate forgiveness also show significant decrease in grief, anger, and anxiety after treatment (Coyle & Enright, 1997).

Research works on mindfulness also bring together spirituality and wellbeing. Mindfulness is seen in positive psychology as a means to facilitate novelty, flow and optimal experiences. Its relation to spirituality is duly acknowledged (Snyder & Lopez, 2007, pp. 243-261).

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).


PP – a Confucian critique

- "The empirically validated vision of the good life is a happiness donut (sic) with something missing at its very core—the moral map. And along with the moral map, the ability to evaluate moral claims. Seligman sees in empirical evidence a better alternative than authority (the Bible, Confucius, etc.) as possible groundings for our values.”