

## Holistic Flow Model of Spiritual Wellness - Application

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The importance of spirituality in counseling and counselor education was brought to light during the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) 1995 Summit on Spirituality. As a result, nine competencies were suggested for counselor training programs seeking accreditation through the Counsel for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) (Miller, 1999). The competencies ensure a standardized approach to integrating spiritual intervention strategies into counseling. In addition to spirituality's role in the counseling profession, and because it is a part of each person and is essential to healing, growth, and happiness, spirituality can not be neglected in the psychotherapeutic realm (Benjamin & Looby, 1998; Hodge, 2001; Maher & Hunt, 1993; Standard, Sandhu, & Painter, 2000).

One of the challenges of integrating spiritual interventions into counseling practice is the lack of defined strategies. In addition, there is some apprehension that counselors may, without proper training, impose their personal values on their clients without thoroughly assessing the situation (Grimm, 1994; Maher & Hunt, 1993). For example, a religious counselor may mistakenly push his or her religious values while working with a nonreligious, yet spiritual client.

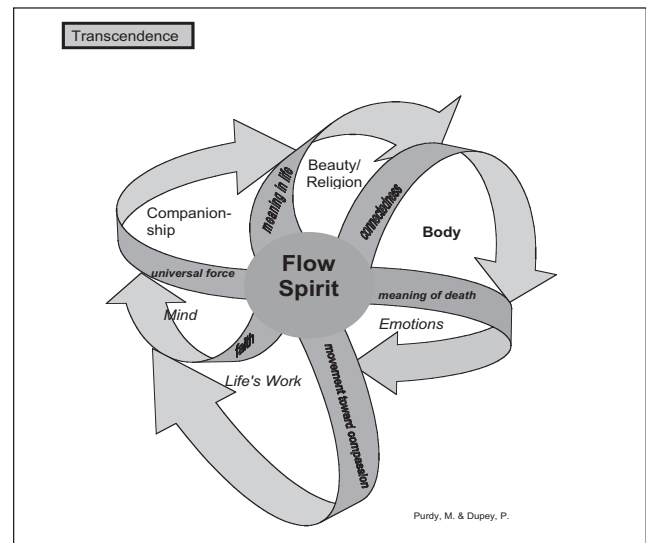
Holistic wellness models provide information on spirituality for counseling purposes (Eberst, 1984; Hawks, 1994; Hettler, 1984, Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000). These wellness models incorporate life task components such as emotional, intellectual, occupational, physical, and social. The spiritual component is generally considered one of the life tasks. The Holistic Flow Model of Spiritual Wellness (Purdy & Dupey, 2003 in press) is a comprehensive spiritual wellness model in which spirit is the primary component influencing all the life tasks.

This article provides a description of the Holistic Flow Model of Spiritual Wellness. It also presents appropriate strategies for applying the tenets of the Holistic Flow Model of Spiritual Wellness in counseling practice.

### Holistic Flow Model of Spiritual Wellness

The Holistic Flow Model of Spiritual Wellness was conceptualized after an exhaustive review of the literature on spirituality in counseling and psychology, after analysis of existing wellness models, and after many professional discussions on the role of spirituality in counseling. The theoretical construct (see Figure 1) is based on the concept of flow. The amount of personal energy flowing from one life task to another depends on the amount of energy that each task requires. When one is feeling balanced and healthy, there is healthy spiritual energy flowing among all life tasks.

Figure 1. Components of Holistic Flow Model of Spiritual Wellness



During difficult times the flow of spiritual energy may be impeded, becoming either thin and lacking substance or becoming thick and viscous. Both changes result in difficulty functioning in daily life. For example, if one is going through an emotional crisis, much of his or her spiritual energy is devoted to the issue at hand, taking energy from other areas. The individual may not be taking care of his or her physical well-being or may have stopped appreciating his or her environment. In these situations, the other life tasks and spiritual components may be neglected or ignored.

Transcendence, the human inclination to improve oneself, is also an important element of this model. It represents moving out of one's current view of self into a new, different way of being. The concept of transcendence accepts that change is the only constant in life. In researching the model, the authors concluded that people may be more likely to become aware of their spiritual wellness during times of crisis than during relatively carefree periods of their lives. During times of crisis one may realize he or she does not have the spiritual tools to cope with the difficulties at hand, such as the death of someone dear, the end of a relationship, the sudden termination of a job, or an illness.

The life tasks in the Holistic Flow Model are similar to those presented in other wellness models, but the descriptors have been updated to reflect the diversity of our culture. They include companionship, mind, life's work, emotions, body, and beauty and religion. Companionship is the ability to create and maintain loving relationships. It includes belonging and acceptance in social groups. Mind is the ability to make rational decisions through analysis, reasoning, and creativity. Life's work represents finding and doing work that is meaningful and fulfilling. The task of emotions is defined as the ability to identify, manage, and express emotions in beneficial and appropriate ways. It includes coping with stressful situations and adjusting to change. Body is taking care of the physical self, including good nutrition, exercise, and proper rest. Finally, beauty and religion is appreciating the beauty of the world around. This includes appreciation of people, nature, and, for some, affiliation with a religious belief system.

The components of spirit are interdependent and complementary, and include the following: belief in a organizing force in the universe; faith; movement toward compassion; making meaning of death; connectedness; and making meaning of life. The intent of the Holistic Flow Model of Spiritual Wellness is that by improving competency in the spiritual components, individuals will be better equipped for difficult times, and better able to lead happier lives.

Belief in an organizing force in the universe allows individuals to experience the integrated, dynamic essence of nature. It is one's relationship with the unknown, unproven, and unobservable. Depending upon one's beliefs, one may consider the force God, nature, or other descriptors that reflect their beliefs and values. Faith in the context of the Holistic Flow Model of Spiritual Wellness is a belief that one's worldview accurately reflects reality and that by living honestly within one's worldview all will be well, even if the end result differs from one's original goal. Faith provides motivation to act with purpose, and allows one to live

with ambiguity and change.

Movement toward compassion is acting selflessly for the benefit of all with the goal to improve quality of life for all people, and being more conscious of other people's condition in daily life. Making meaning of death is one of the most difficult spiritual tasks because it requires facing one's own mortality. In this model, connectedness is the transcendence of one's physical and emotional worlds in order to appreciate reality outside the self, and to feel a part of something greater. Further, making meaning of life allows one to attach meaning and value to one's life. Making meaning of life is an ancient and changeable contemplation.

### **Application of Model**

As mentioned previously, the authors maintain that strengthening the spiritual components will lead to enhanced wellness and spiritual health. Using the case of a 36-year-old female college student, the following provides strategies that counselors can employ or adapt to help clients develop their spiritual health. (For more detailed exploration of the components, see Purdy & Dupey, in press.)

Cynthia sought counseling for academic concerns. She returned to college after being away from campus for 16 years. Although she knows what she should study, she has some apprehension about being the oldest student on campus and, worst case, failing academically. Cynthia recently left her husband of 16 years and their 13-year-old son. Life with her family felt empty and meaningless, and she described her marriage and relationship with her son as hollow. In addition, she believed that her son did not respect her.

Cynthia traveled thousands of miles from her home to escape her situation. She now questioned her decision to leave her family and state, though she had been thinking about it for years. She had no money and two low paying jobs. She knew very few people in her new community. When the counselor mentioned that it sounded like the client's spirit was drained, she sighed and readily acknowledged that this was the case.

Cynthia needed strategies to help nurture her spiritual wellness in the components that she and her counselor identified as fragile, including faith, connectedness, and her ability to make meaning of life. As mentioned earlier, effort to improve one area generates movement and change throughout the components. The interdependence of the model's components allows holistic assessment and plans of action.

In questioning having left her family situation in such a manner, Cynthia was questioning her faith in her behavior despite thoughtful contemplation and

decision making. One strategy used to strengthen her faith was a reflection exercise in which she recalled other times in her life when things were not going as she expected and the ultimate outcome. Cynthia journaled the events and commented on whether the outcome was better or worse than anticipated. The journal entries revealed that in most of her examples, results that differed from the expected often seemed like disappointments at the time but ended up giving her the confidence to leave. This exercise often results in clients recalling earlier unanticipated but positive outcomes of their actions, and helps restore their faith in their judgment and decision making.

Another strategy to help clients explore their faith is asking them to define what faith means to them personally, and to consider other meanings of faith. The goal is to help the client expand his or her perception of faith to provide alternative avenues for developing faith in oneself and in life's journey.

Cynthia described herself as lonely, and she felt a lack of connection to the people and events in her new environment. Initially shy but very outgoing, she was living on a ranch in a small community with a friend of a friend. The rural community fulfilled her desire to be with nature, one of her needs for connectedness. Cynthia rode horses each day out into the countryside, giving her a sense of belonging in the physical world and providing her with a way to connect with her interpretation of the universal force.

Since journaling was an effective means for the client to explore her faith in decisions that influence the direction of her life, Cynthia and her counselor decided to continue her journaling as she adjusted to her new community and dealt with feelings of isolation and loneliness. In addition, the counselor asked Cynthia to consider some strategies for establishing relationships within her new life.

Although she originally planned to take college courses online, she decided to attend some classes at the local community college and to join one community organization. The work she planned to do through the nonprofit group would help Cynthia transcend her own emotional and physical worlds to appreciate reality outside of her own life, and to feel a part of something larger than herself. In addition, Cynthia planned to meet people by maintaining a part-time job away from the isolation of the ranch.

Through her work with the counselor, her journaling, and her thoughtful actions to reach out within her new environment, Cynthia began to find meaning in her new life. Over time she became more comfortable with her decision to leave her family and found peace within herself.

Making meaning of death is very difficult for most people, and though not part of the strategies present in the case, needs to be discussed here. Typically, individuals begin the process of assessing what death means to them when they are terminally ill or have grown old. The construct of this model proposes that individuals begin the exploration when in a healthy state of being. It is discouraged if one is depressed. The topic may be broached with clients under a number of situations, particularly if the individual is facing the loss of something (such as job). One of the authors of this article has designed a Guidebook to Developing Your Death Perspective, which is a four-part exercise done through journaling and reflection. One exercise that is very insightful is to have individuals think about who they would have at their deathbed. This helps to clarify unfinished business. Another is to help clients prioritize their values as though they were going to die in a month.

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