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Review Article

Integrating Spirituality in Psychological Counseling: Historical Insights and Contemporary Applications

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Abstract
This article explores the close relationship between spirituality and psychology, carefully examining how definitions of spirituality have evolved over time in the psychological domain. It highlights the important distinctions between organized religion and spirituality, emphasizing how the latter is more individualized and transcends religious boundaries. Furthermore, it examines various counseling techniques that incorporate spirituality, such as methods centered on concentration, prayer, forgiveness, and contemporary applications such as mindfulness meditation. These approaches equip counselors with valuable tools to effectively address the spiritual aspects of their clients' lives. In essence, this article provides a holistic view of integrating spirituality into psychological counseling, highlighting the necessity of a strategy that is all-encompassing and sensitive to the particular needs of each individual.

Keywords:
Spirituality in Psychology • Counselor Competencies • Counselor Education • Counseling and Spirituality

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Introduction

There are numerous reasons why individuals may choose to seek counseling and/or psychotherapy. A pervasive sense of feeling lost or disconnected is often articulated. The confusion, indecisiveness, and loss of confidence that often accompany this reveals a need for understanding and support on a deeper level. Kenneth Pargament, who has conducted many important studies on the role of spirituality and religious belief in coping with stress and trauma, says the following about the role of negative life events in our lives:

> There is a deeper dimension to our problems. Illness, accidents, interpersonal conflicts, divorce, layoffs, and death are more than "significant life events." They raise profound and disturbing questions about our place and purpose in the world; they point to the limits of our powers, and they underscore our finitude… These deep questions seem to call for a spiritual response (Pargament, 2007, p. 11).

Empathizing with individuals requires understanding how they make sense of their world, or, in other words, their meaning systems (Slattery & Park, 2011). Through these meaning systems, people assign attributes to situations or objects, such as pleasant or unpleasant, which in turn produce emotional and/or behavioral effects, shape behavioral goals, and guide their pursuit (Park, 2005). The role of one's spirituality and/or religious beliefs in this process is so pervasive that it often goes unnoticed. For numerous individuals, spirituality and religion hold significant value in their understanding of life's meaning, often serving as the primary lens through which they interpret and make sense of the world (McIntosh, 1995). For instance, Çarkoğlu and Kalaycığlu (2009) showed that approximately 93% of respondents in Turkey believe in the existence of God without any doubt, and 90% think that life has meaning because God exists. Furthermore, research has also demonstrated that a significant proportion of nonreligious people continue to believe in God or a higher power. For example, approximately 37% of Americans identify themselves as spiritual but not religious, according to a survey by the Pew Research Center (2012). In recent decades, a novel form of spirituality has also surfaced in Turkey. A minority of individuals now identify as spiritual, acknowledging belief in a single God without affiliating themselves with any particular religion. However, due to a lack of research in the literature, the precise number of such individuals remains unknown (Altınlı-Macić, 2021). These data confirm the importance of these factors in the everyday lives of individuals.

The place of spirituality in human life dates back to the earliest times of humanity. Examining Indian, Central Asian, and Turkish-Mongolian cultures, shamanism emerges as a framework for understanding the bond between humans and the universe (Mandaloğlu, 2011). According to Singh (1999), spirituality forms the very foundation of this belief system, symbolizing the lively vigor of life. The term

shaman uncovers a shared spiritual healing tradition across ancient societies as an individual with dual roles as physician and clergyman (Winkelman, 2011). In ancient belief systems, healing is believed to stem from a state of balance and integration. The ideal state of physical and mental health involves harmony among biological, social, psychological, environmental, and cosmic factors (Singh, 1999). As such, spirituality has existed for as long as humans have been on the planet and remains one of the most fundamental concepts that comprise human beings' meaning systems across all ages.

Spirituality can also be considered a value for understanding human experience. According to Maslow (1971), self-actualization, the most elevated level of the hierarchy, encompasses the spiritual development of human beings, emphasizing an understanding of profound life aspects, including beauty, truth, unity, and the divine. In a similar vein, based on the works of Maslow (1971), Jung (1933), and many others, Elkins et al. (1988) defined nine universal spiritual values. They listed them as follows: having confidence in life's meaning and purpose, having a sense of duty or responsibility in life, believing in the sanctity of life, having a balanced view of material values, developing an altruistic attitude towards others, having a vision of making the world a better place and an awareness of the painful side of life, and living these values with discernible effects in relation to oneself, others, nature, and greater power. This perspective posits that spirituality is a universal and distinct concept that goes beyond traditional religious expressions and belongs to all of humanity. As Benner (1991) contended, all individuals are inherently spiritual beings. The differences stem from variations in awareness and response to self-transcendence, integration, and deep striving for identity. In this regard, spirituality can be conceptualized as an internal compass that guides individuals throughout their lives.

Spirituality Defined in Psychology

The field of psychology has long been engaged in understanding the distinctions and connections between spirituality and religion. Scholars have made numerous attempts to define these concepts; some have focused on the similarities between spirituality and religion, while others have preferred to focus on the characteristics that distinguish these two concepts. The study of modern psychology reveals that religion has been understood as both a subjective occurrence and an organized institution (Daniels & Fitzpatrick, 2013; Hill & Pargament, 2003). However, with the emergence of secularism in the 20th century (Turner et al., 1995), combined with sociocultural trends such as sociodemographic change and individualization (Pargament, 1999), the concept of religion has shifted to represent an outward and public display of faith, while the concept of spirituality has evolved to encompass the experience of a transcendent and personal power that encompasses all aspects

of life (Koenig et al., 2001). For instance, as described by Shafranske and Sperry (2005), religiosity involves a formal tie to a religious organization and following specific beliefs, while spirituality involves a personal, inherent, and principle-driven connection with a higher power, independent of conventional religious structures. The word spirituality has its roots in Latin. Signifying the essence of life or life force, the Latin word *spiritus* means to *breathe*. This definition's comprehension of spirituality fosters creative energy, motivation, and a connection with others. According to Clinebell (1995, as cited in Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999), spirituality entails the search for meaning and purpose, accompanied by a desire to connect with something greater than human consciousness. Similarly, Becker argued that spirituality forms the basis of the deepest aspects of human experience. Kelly (1995) described spirituality as a personal sense of connection to something beyond ourselves that transcends the universe. Shafranske and Gorsuch (1984) suggested that spirituality involves bravery in self-reflection, trust, and a profound admiration for boundless possibilities. Elkins et al. (1988) defined spirituality as a state of existence characterized by an awareness of a higher realm and a commitment to specific principles. These definitions highlight the human pursuit of a reality that extends beyond physical limitations, emphasizing the quest for profound and enduring life significance. Hence, it can be inferred that ideas of significance, transcendence, and dedication are intrinsic to human spiritual comprehension. May (1982) posited that spirituality compels individuals to seek and uncover significance beyond the material aspects of life, offering an intensely personal journey that fosters inner tranquility even amidst challenging situations. According to Piedmont (1999), transcendence entails a personal search for a connection with a higher power. A detachment from time and space enables individuals to observe life from a more comprehensive, objective viewpoint.

Comparing Psychological Views on Religion and Spirituality

Zeiger and Lewis (1998) have identified two typical approaches that psychology uses to deal with spiritual and religious issues. The first of these approaches is the explanatory approach applied by the most influential scholars, such as Sigmund Freud, John B. Watson, and B. F. Skinner. This approach considers religion as an outcome of external influences affecting the person, and how the person reacts to their surroundings leads to beliefs and actions that might not seem rational (Miller, 2003). Therefore, a negative perspective on religion and spirituality is the most basic feature of the explanatory approach. According to Freud (1927/1964), the founder of psychoanalytic theory, religion is an illusion or an expression of neurosis. The need for religion consists of the client's infantile and neurotic impulses. Watson, the founder of behaviorism, also adopted a negative view of spirituality, claiming that humans are no different than machines controlled by external factors. As such, the inner world of individuals, including their spiritual understanding, has no place in

understanding human behavior (Krasner, 1962). Likewise, another important figure in behaviorism, Skinner (1953), criticized religion for its use of negative reinforcement and threat of punishment, although he recognized that religion may be essential for some individuals (Wulff, 1996). Lastly, in the 1950s, Albert Ellis, the founder of rational-emotive behavior therapy, also regarded religion as irrational and outside the realm of science (Bergin, 1991).

The second approach put forward by Zeiger and Lewis (1998) is the descriptive approach, which has been adopted by many important prominent psychologists such as William James, Carl Jung, and Erik Fromm (Wulff, 1996). The core emphasis within this approach centers on the advantageous aspects that religion bestows upon the individual, coupled with the conviction that internal experiences play a transformative role in one's personal development (Miller, 2003). An illustration of this perspective can be traced back to the work of William James (1985), who stands as one of the earliest psychologists to underscore the indispensability of religion in human existence. According to James (1985), there exist two types of religion: first-hand religion, which aligns with the present definitions of spirituality, and second-hand religion, which matches the contemporary understanding of religion. Carl Jung (1933) argued that spiritual functioning has equal importance with physical, emotional, and mental functioning and that all the problems that individuals experience are essentially of spiritual origin. Further, Erich Fromm (1950), one of the prominent figures of humanistic psychology, believed that religion is beneficial for individuals, arguing that people need guidance and dedication to cope with the realities of loneliness and death. In Fromm's view, similar to James's, there are two different types of religion. Fromm described the first type of religion as humane with the above qualities, which focus on the development of one's potential, and the second type of religion as authoritarian, which hinders one's potential. In parallel to Jung's ideas, Victor Frankl (1956), the founder of logotherapy, claimed that the human being is a physical, mental, and spiritual entity. For Frankl (1956), worrying about the meaning of life is not necessarily a sign of illness or neurosis, and the correct diagnosis can only be made by those can see the spiritual side of the individual. Further, similar to Frankl, Emmy van Deuzen (2011) has handled the human being as a multidimensional entity that also includes the spiritual (*Überwelt*) dimension along with the physical (Umwelt), social (*Mitwelt),* and psychological (*Eigenwelt*) dimensions. According to van Deuzen and Adams (2011), the spiritual dimension is human contact with the unknown; therefore, it is where the individual creates a sense of the ideal world and a personal value system and finds meaning and purpose in life through introspection.

The Development of the Spiritually-Sensitive Counselor

Counseling and psychotherapy fields have placed great importance on the concepts of multiculturalism and cultural sensitivity, especially in the last forty years, with the influence of constructivist (Kelly, 1970; Mahoney, 1995) and social constructivist (Guterman, 1994; Lynch, 1997) approaches. The constructivist approach argues that there is no absolute truth or reality; people create their own realities through their personal structure systems and change by reconstructing their personal stories in the counseling process (Kelly, 1970; Vinson & Gliffin, 1999). The alternative approach known as social constructivism extends this idea even further, underscoring the influence of all cultural and social factors in the process of constructing people's subjective realities (Guterman, 1994). In other words, the emphasis on individuality that is present in almost all traditional approaches has been replaced by a more social and relational emphasis. The multicultural approach regards culture, sexual identity, age, gender, socio-economic status, education level, spiritual understanding, religious beliefs, and practices as integral parts of the client's identity and contributes to their strengths and growth areas. Considering the basic principles of the aforementioned constructivist approaches, the harmony and complementarity between the culturally sensitive perspective, which is described as the fourth power in the field of counseling, and constructivist approaches draw attention. Indeed, Zinnbauer and Pargament (2000) argued that the constructivist approach is one of the most flexible and sensitive approaches for people from different spiritual understandings and backgrounds. Similarly, Cottone (2007) pointed out that the basic principles of the constructivist approach support multiculturalism and cultural sensitivity in counseling and emphasized the importance of the social constructivist approach to the inclusion of spiritual understanding in counseling practices.

Spirituality has been defined by the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Psychological Counseling (ASERVIC), affiliated with the American Psychological Counseling Association (ACA), as a "capacity and tendency that is innate and unique to all persons. This spiritual tendency moves the individual toward knowledge, love, meaning, peace, hope, transcendence, connectedness, compassion, wellness, and wholeness" (p. 1, 2010). If one examines the most recent agreed-upon definition of counseling as "a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals" (Kaplan et al., 2014, p. 368), it is noticeable that all the aforementioned qualities of spirituality are in harmony with the main purposes of counseling. From this point of view, it is believed that the expansion of counseling to include spiritual understanding will create a holistic process in which the client will feel accepted in all aspects.

Since the 2000s, there has been extensive discussion in academic circles about the necessity of integrating spiritual dimensions into psychological counseling (Ağılkaya-Şahin, 2024; Karaırmak, 2004; Özdemir, 2023). Scholars emphasize that

without acknowledging spirituality, counseling might not fully comprehend the roots of human anxieties, hopes, and struggles and will lack the basic elements necessary to address how individuals interpret their identity, life purpose, and overall sense of meaning (Matise et al., 2017; Powers, 2005; Richards & Bergin, 2004; Stewart-Sicking et al., 2017; Ybañez-Llorente & Smelser, 2014). The view that providing sensitivity and awareness regarding spiritual understanding and religious beliefs is an integral part of a holistic approach to human and cultural sensitivity has begun to be accepted in the field (Robertson, 2010). Numerous scholars (e.g., Morrison et al., 2009; Steen et al., 2006; Young et al., 2007) have underscored the broad significance of spiritual comprehension and religious beliefs in the lives of individuals seeking counseling, showcasing the beneficial outcomes attained through integrating these aspects into the psychological counseling journey. Vader (2006) emphasized the significance of recognizing a person's spiritual understanding as a valuable asset for health professionals during treatment and coping strategies. Likewise, Heitink et al. (2008) highlighted the importance of integrating spirituality into counseling and psychotherapy, aiming to address existential needs alongside psychological or psychiatric diagnoses such as depression. They emphasized the significance of addressing uncertainties related to one's connection with a higher power beyond conventional social relationships.

Moreover, within the framework of psychological counseling, the well-being model formulated by Myers et al. (2000) recognizes spirituality as a fundamental component. Similarly, Engel's biopsychosocial approach, originally significant across various health domains, has evolved to encompass the spiritual aspect of human existence, now termed the biopsychosocial-spiritual approach (King, 2000; Saad et al., 2017). This model proposes that psychological disorders arise through a complex interplay of various factors—psychological, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, social, familial, genetic, and biomedical. Notably, it also acknowledges the significance of the spiritual aspect in understanding, treating, and safeguarding against these disorders (Brown et al., 2011). Furthermore, a study exploring clients' openness to addressing spiritual matters in counseling indicated that around 55% of participants expressed a desire to incorporate these topics into their sessions, considering them appropriate for counseling discussions (Rose et al., 2001, 2008). Similar research (e.g., Bannister et al., 2015; King & Bushwick, 1994; Lyon & Wimmer, 2005; Post et al., 2014) has consistently shown clients' interest in discussing spiritual concerns across various counseling contexts, encompassing individual, group, marriage, and family counseling settings.

Due to a growing consensus in the field, ASERVIC organized a summit in 1994 to discuss the significance of spiritual and religious matters in psychological counseling. This led to the establishment of qualification standards for counselors to effectively

address spiritual and religious values within their professional scope (Miller, 1999). These competencies, reassessed and endorsed in 2009, outline the essential knowledge, skills, and sensitivity required for counselors to appropriately navigate these issues in therapy (ASERVIC, 2009; Cashwell & Young, 2011). The 2014 edition of the ACA Code of Ethics acknowledged spirituality in its guidelines, complementing ASERVIC's competency standards. Notably, in Section E.8 on Multicultural Issues/Diversity in Assessment, it emphasizes counselors' awareness of how spirituality and religion influence test administration and interpretation. Furthermore, the Counseling and Related Education Programs Accreditation Council (CACREP) incorporated spiritual competence as a distinct area in its 2009 and 2016 accreditation standards. In Section F.2.g, focusing on Social and Cultural Diversity, CACREP highlights the necessity of addressing "the impact of spiritual beliefs on clients' and counselors' worldviews" within accredited program curricula (CACREP, 2016, p. 31).

In a related vein, an online survey involving 341 registered clinical counselors in British Columbia aimed to explore therapists' perspectives on integrating spirituality and religion into their practice. The survey inquired about their education and training in this area, as well as their perceived abilities, comfort levels, and competence when dealing with religious and/or spiritual matters. Findings indicate that while spirituality holds significance for both participants personally and in their work with clients, the integration of spirituality into practice was reported by less than half of the respondents (Plumb, 2011). Additionally, research by Vieten et al. (2016) revealed that between 73.0% and 94.1% of respondents agreed that psychologists should receive training and demonstrate competence in spiritual and religious competencies. Despite this consensus, the majority (52.2%–80.7%) reported receiving little or no training in these competencies, with between 29.7% and 58.6% indicating no training at all. These findings underscore the gap between the recognized importance of spiritual and religious competencies and the current state of training received by psychologists and counselors.

Applications in the Counseling Process

Given the current emphasis on incorporating spirituality into counseling, there is a need to determine the most effective ways to teach this topic to counselor candidates and to train counselors who are competent in working with spirituality. This places an increasing responsibility on counselor educators to teach counselor candidates techniques that have been empirically demonstrated to be effective, as well as to determine the extent to which revised counseling programs are beneficial (Burke et al., 1999; Sexton, 2000; Whiston & Coker, 2000). On this basis, Curtis and Glass (2002) conducted a pilot study to examine whether there was any change in the level of confidence of counselor candidates in bringing spirituality together

with the counseling process after taking the *Spirituality and Counseling* course given by the second author. As expected, the findings of the study showed that the course significantly increased counselor candidates' confidence levels in integrating spirituality into the counseling process (Curtis & Glass, 2002). A crucial component of the stated course was to teach counselor candidates certain methods that they can use when working with spiritual issues. The techniques that were determined by taking into consideration the criteria of addressing the spiritual dimension of the individuals, being inclusive of different beliefs and understandings, and being easily usable by counselors who are new to the field were (a) the focusing method, (b) the prayer wheel, (c) forgiveness, and (d) meditation.

The Focusing Method

The experiential focusing method developed by Hinterkopf (2005) is defined as the process of directing one's attention to something ambiguous in one's experience and allowing new, clear meaning, understanding, or insight to emerge. With this technique, the client learns to examine the subtle but concrete bodily sensations that are an important part of spiritual exploration and growth. The technique consists of six steps. The first step involves trying to put aside the problems and the feelings that accompany them. In the second step, the counselor encourages clients to consider a problem holistically. In other words, the counselor helps the client pay attention to where and how they feel the problem in their body. In the next step, clients find words that best describe what they are feeling. These words help clients stay in touch with the vague feeling. The fourth step is where clients review the words they found in the previous step and decide whether they are the words that best describe what they are feeling in the present moment. Here, clients are allowed to add or change, if needed, different words to best describe their feelings and emotions. The fifth step involves asking questions. Clients are encouraged to ask open-ended questions about their feelings and emotions. Asking questions may lead the client to find new meanings or answers. In this process of searching for new meanings, clients continue to focus their attention on their feelings and emotions. In the sixth and final step, the counselor helps clients accept the changes that occur in their bodies and the new meanings they find, in other words, to integrate these parts.

Prayer Wheel

The prayer wheel, a technique developed by Rossiter-Thornton (2000), consists of eight components. These components include: (a) reflecting on moments of gratitude: individuals jot down things they appreciate or are thankful for each day; (b) engaging with melodies of affection: individuals are prompted to sing, hum, or listen to calming, comforting tunes; (c) seeking guidance and safeguarding: individuals

request protection from their own and others' pessimistic thoughts and behaviors; (d) extending forgiveness to oneself and others: individuals compose letters granting forgiveness to themselves and others for previous mistakes. It is emphasized that forgiveness does not mean turning a blind eye or forgetting, but rather remembering, letting go, and moving on so as not to burden oneself anymore; (e) claiming one's needs: clients are encouraged to express everything they need in life; (f) asking to be filled with love and inspiration: clients reflect on the positive qualities they would like to have in their lives and express them in a few sentences. The aim here is for clients to focus on positive, constructive, and inspiring thoughts and feelings; (g) listening with a pen in hand: clients sit quietly with a pen in hand and note any feelings, thoughts, or images that arise. This is intended to put clients in touch with their inner-selves and listen to them without making any judgments; (h) your desire is my desire: clients are encouraged to "*let go*" and trust that whatever they need most at this time will come to them. In other words, this is the stage of surrender. Rossiter-Thornton (2002) described this stage with the following words: *"The truth is, we are not all-powerful, no matter how much money, knowledge, or power we possess. So here we have the opportunity to ally ourselves with The Maker of Life and acknowledge that while we may know what we want, we do not know what we need"* (p. 27).

According to Rossiter-Thornton (2000), the prayer wheel serves as an effective therapeutic tool for multiple reasons. Initially, it offers clients a structured yet adaptable approach to prayer. It's crucial to note that the term *prayer* here is not tied to worship but is derived from the Latin word *prarius*, signifying a complete acquisition or earnest request (Rossiter-Thornton, 2002). Secondly, the initial phase assists clients in gaining a clearer awareness of the positive aspects already present in their lives. Lastly, individuals practicing this method often discover solutions to their concerns and issues that previously seemed unsolvable. Therefore, the prayer wheel often has empowering potential for clients, as they realize that they can find answers to many of their problems.

Forgiveness

According to the forgiveness models developed by Enright, and the Human Development Study Group (1991), and Fitzgibbons (1998), the forgiveness process consists of four stages. These stages are (a) uncovering; (b) decision-making; (c) working; and (d) finalization. The first stage is where clients embark on an inner journey into the past and identify the situations or people they need to focus on for forgiveness. Asking the client questions about their biggest disappointments or regrets facilitates this stage. The second stage, or decision stage, is where clients examine the consequences of being still held captive to past sufferings caused by themselves or others. The third stage is where clients share all the thoughts, images,

and feelings that go through their mind while thinking about forgiveness. The final stage, the concluding stage, is where clients, together with the counselor, create a ritual that aims to end the process. For instance, clients might engage in activities like composing a letter, subsequently discarding it through burning, or envisioning a scenario where they grant forgiveness to themselves or others mentally. At this stage, counselors should emphasize that forgiveness is a gradual journey and may demand a specific duration for completion. Nevertheless, participating in a symbolic ritual representing the intent to forgive and release can assist clients significantly throughout this process.

Meditation

Meditation, which has a significant place, especially in Eastern culture, and has attracted considerable attention all over the world in recent years, derives from the Latin root *meditari*, which means *deep thought* (Hussain & Bhushan, 2010). Meditation, which has emerged as a difficult concept to reach consensus on, has been conceptualized by many researchers in different aspects. For instance, Manocha (2000) described meditation as a distinct and clearly defined encounter characterized by a state of thoughtless awareness or mental silence, minimizing mental activity while remaining attentive. Alternatively, Walsh and Shapiro (2006) defined meditation from a cognitive and psychological viewpoint as a set of self-regulation techniques directed at consciously controlling mental processes through deliberate attention and awareness. Other basic definitions of meditation include other components such as relaxation, concentration, suspension of logical thinking processes, and maintaining a self-observing attitude (Craven, 1989).

Curtis and Glass (2010) utilized the relaxation response method developed by Benson et al. (1974) within the scope of the course that was the subject of their study. This method, which is similar to the *Breathing Space Practice* in mindfulness, involves clients sitting in a comfortable position in the first step and then paying attention to their breath and silently repeating a word, an expression that makes sense to them (e.g., peace), with each breath. The second step of the method is to gently return the focus to the present moment, ignoring any thoughts or body sensations that may be passing through their mind at the time. Curtis and Glass (2010) suggest that integrating meditation at the start of counseling sessions can aid clients in feeling at ease, fostering a more profound level of personal expression. Moreover, assigning meditation as homework can assist clients in unwinding and discovering innovative approaches to address their challenges.There are many different types of meditation practiced today. However, according to Hussain and Bhushan (2010), it is possible to classify all meditation practices under two main categories: concentration meditation and mindfulness/insight meditation. Concentration meditation aims to achieve higher

awareness by focusing on a single point (any sound, image, sensation, etc.). Mindfulness mediation, on the other hand, involves constantly opening oneself to and being aware of passing thoughts, images, emotions, and bodily sensations, like clouds in the sky, without identifying with them. In other words, rather than narrowing the focus as in concentration meditation, during mindfulness/insight meditation, one expands one's attention to include the entire field of consciousness (Hussain & Bhushan, 2010). The *Sounds and Thoughts Meditation*, the *Three-Minute Breathing Space Practice*, and the *Body Scan Meditation* (Atalay, 2018) are examples of mindfulness practices that can be used for this purpose in the psychological counseling process (Brown et al., 2013). Throughout history, the essence of mindfulness has woven its way into various cultural and philosophical traditions worldwide. It resonates deeply with principles found in ancient Greek philosophy, existentialism, and humanism, mirroring similar beliefs ingrained in the teachings of Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, a prominent Anatolian Sufi from the 13th century (Uzun & Kral, 2021). This suggests that mindfulness holds a universal presence, evident in its alignment with diverse philosophical and spiritual systems, as observed in the foundation of Turkish sophism by Rumi and his scholarly contributions. Many researchers (e.g., Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Martin, 1997) argue that this simple practice, which involves accepting and observing the experience without judgment, is effective in the development of a strong and healing state of non-emotional reactivity.

Discussion

This study discusses the integration of the concept of spirituality into the field of psychological counseling. The focus is on how it has been defined by prominent figures in the history of psychology and how it differs from the often confused concept of religion. The historical context and the shift in the psychological community from viewing spirituality as a taboo topic to acknowledging its importance are then presented. Finally, various methods and practices that psychological counselors can use in their sessions are covered.

An effective counseling process should address not only the body and mind but also the spiritual dimension of the individual (Corey, 2006). However, it took a long time for the field of counseling to realize and accept that the problems and concerns related to the spiritual dimension of human beings are also within the scope of the counseling process. Today, there is a growing interest in the role of spirituality in different stages of the counseling process, from assessment to intervention. Evidence of this growing interest can be seen in the numerous books and articles that have been published since the late 20th century. Numerous scholars (e.g., Ağılkaya-Şahin, 2024; Karaırmak, 2004; Morrison et al., 2009; Özdemir, 2023; Steen et al., 2006; Young et al., 2007) have highlighted the significant role of spirituality in clients' lives, demonstrating the

beneficial outcomes attained through integrating these aspects into the counseling journey. The role of multiculturalism and culturally sensitive perspective, which has been called the fourth force in psychological counseling today, is undeniably great in this process, with the effect of postmodern thought and constructivist approaches developed along with it (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999).

Leading professional bodies highlight the importance of incorporating spirituality within the counseling process. The spiritual competencies defined by ASERVIC, a division of the ACA, underscore that spirituality is an integral aspect of the human experience and should be included in psychological counseling. This view suggests that addressing spiritual issues in therapy is meaningful, ethically appropriate, and beneficial for counseling practice in a scientifically grounded manner that remains independent of any specific religion. However, unlike in the USA, similar professional organizations in Turkey have not yet established regulations on spiritual competencies. In Turkey, spirituality and religion are often discussed together, with less recognition that spirituality can be a personal phenomenon independent of religion. As a result, many individuals perceive spirituality as solely a domain of religion, typically within the professional boundaries of religious officials. Indeed, a study by Altınlı-Macić and Coleman III (2015) found that a significant portion of Turks in their sample (41.8%) view spirituality as a religious concept. Therefore, it is essential for psychological counselors to have the knowledge, skills, and sensitivity to address spirituality-related issues that clients may bring into the psychological counseling process regardless of any specific religion. Additionally, having comprehensive theoretical frameworks can help guide the integration of spirituality into counseling for clients' benefit.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; Hayes, 2005) serves as a profound spiritual intervention in counseling by integrating core values resonating with many spiritual traditions. It encourages acceptance of thoughts and feelings without judgment, akin to spiritual surrender and embracing reality. The practice of cognitive defusion fosters detachment and mindfulness, recognizing the transient nature of thoughts. Being present, a central tenet of ACT, aligns with the spiritual emphasis on living in the moment. ACT's principle of self-as-context mirrors the spiritual concept of an enduring self or soul, providing inner peace and stability. Additionally, values clarification in ACT helps individuals identify and commit to their personal values, infusing their lives with purpose and meaning, much like living in accordance with one's deeper truths. Finally, committed action, guided by these values, parallels the spiritual pursuit of integrity and right action. Through these elements, ACT offers a holistic approach that nurtures both psychological and spiritual well-being (Santiago & Gall, 2016).

Spirituality-sensitive counseling requires an understanding of the client's worldview—the values and beliefs that form their system of meaning. Therefore,

developing local perspectives and theoretical frameworks based on the cultural background and spiritual understandings of Turkish society can be particularly useful. Additionally, it is believed that studies like the one conducted by Curtiss and Glass (2002) on methods and practices in psychological counseling can guide how to handle spirituality in the counseling process, especially for professionals at the beginning of their careers.

Finally, it is generally recognized that as individuals progress to higher stages of spiritual development, they tend to adopt more inclusive and unifying worldviews. Instead of viewing the world through a dualistic framework, they begin to perceive the interconnectedness of all things. This shift away from all-or-nothing thinking typically leads to greater tolerance, acceptance, and open-mindedness. The experience of increased connectedness results in greater compassion for others, ultimately leading to social action. In this context, counselors may consider engaging in advocacy efforts to promote understanding and respect for diverse beliefs. This could involve participating in educational activities at schools or higher education institutions to raise awareness about the multifaceted impacts of oppression and intolerance. By fostering a culture of diversity and providing a safe space for individuals to explore their spirituality, counselors can contribute to creating an inclusive environment that respects the beliefs and values of all clients.

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