

Positive Psychology and Spirituality

Introduction

Since Psychology became a healing profession, multitudes of historical revelations from theorists who devoted their lives to the study of human behavior made the science of mental illness very effective as well as transferable. The field of psychology has come up with valid and reliable ways to measure indistinct concepts such as anger, schizophrenia, and depression, while simultaneously earning recognition for the development of both experimental and longitudinal methods necessary in gaining insight as to the causal pathways that result in undesirable consequences for the client/patient. Most importantly, psychology researchers have developed both pharmacological and psychological interventions that are known for making fourteen previously untreatable mental disorders highly treatable disorders and even curable disorders in some cases. The timeline of psychology graciously marks these theoretical revelations as these theorists devoted their lives to the study of human behavior. Each of these theorists had their own beliefs concerning the behavior of our species, including the why, when, how, and under what circumstances gives rise to a particular behavior. Because of these theorists, today's counselors have the opportunity to refer to the plethora of knowledge made available through the different theoretical approaches made famous by the said forefathers of psychology as they design their own theoretical frameworks to fit each client. That being said, it makes perfect sense to also take into account Positive Psychology, one of the more recent approaches proven effective in decreasing despair from focusing on the positive aspects of man. This paper will explain the concepts of positive psychology and how the goals of the approach combined with spirituality can help Juanita overcome her barriers to marijuana abstinence and reach her full potential by focusing on her strengths to markedly decrease the dissatisfactions they present.

Positive psychology was founded on the notion that people want to be the best that they can be, as they should. But more so, because it aims to use what is already within us, but has yet to be recognized, to promote wellness and fulfillment which impacts society as a whole in a positive and productive manner. A major component of positive psychology is the promotion of one's inner strength, thereby enabling them to better interact with others, and to react to others with confidence putting them on an even playing field as opposed to being submissive, timid, and insecure benchwarmers. Positive psychology takes the focus off the presenting mental and emotional distress of the client and redefines the client's issues more as problems of everyday life. Juanita, like other clients, is relieved that this is not the dreaded, time consuming, tear-jerking, and overwhelming feat she expected to face; making her more receptive to the therapeutic process. The comfortable environment and positivity of this approach should encourage Juanita's cooperation as she and the counselor examine how her dissatisfactions and major concerns were originally cultivated and the repercussions thereof.

Juanita's history notes that her mother was very critical of her throughout her childhood. This explains the low level of Juanita's

Review Article

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self-worth. Unfortunately, Juanita does not have the tools she needs to obtain sobriety because her mother failed to reinforce her worthiness or instill even a hint of a strong self-image. Instead of being critical of her inadequacies, her mother should have helped Juanita identify her strengths as a way to build her self-esteem. Juanita's history mentioned that she excelled in math and biology but did not continue her education. According to Mancini, "mathematics is typically associated with masculinity therefore females without father figures may have less interest in the subject matter" [1]. With her father being absent from her life, it was her mother's responsibility to teach her the significance of assertiveness, because combined with her proficiency in math and biology, Juanita could have a number of good paying employment opportunities. Additionally, it cannot be stressed enough how important it is that parents encourage their daughters to choose a partner who will be respectful and supportive of her choices. Juanita's story describes her boyfriend as a selfish person with no concern for Juanita's best interests. By remaining in the relationship, Juanita is unconsciously hindering herself from the benefits of the therapeutic process. Because Juanita has allowed her boyfriend to belittle her, she feels too weak to be able to stop using on her own and too ugly to ever be able to find another boyfriend. The positive psychology approach is suited just right for Juanita's needs because her sobriety depends on whether she can gain the confidence to make her own choices while ignoring the negative influences of her boyfriend. Since humans are creatures of habit, it would be advantageous for Juanita to practice some exercises on her own based on positive psychology in between sessions to keep her focused on the positive aspects of her character.

One simple exercise that proves to be effective in reducing symptoms of degradation is to practice self-talk. Self-talk includes not only our conscious thoughts but also our unconscious beliefs and assumptions [2]. A large majority of the time, our self-talk is distorted and self-defeating, especially for those with damaged self-images like Juanita. By challenging her irrational thoughts and replacing them with realistic thoughts, it is possible for her to change the negative aspects of her thinking process. With practice, she can train herself to recognize her negative thinking and make

the conscious choice to rethink the situation in a way that would be more productive [2]. Over time, she will gain a new perspective and become aware of how skewed her thinking has been as well as how her inaccurate thoughts negatively impacted her life.

Another exercise for Juanita to practice between sessions is made up a combination of different activities designed to build character strength. The basic premise is for her to choose activities that are not part of her regular routine. For example, she could begin by getting in touch with her creative side like art or writing. As she begins to feel the growth of her inner strength she could follow through on something from her past that she was unable to pursue because of her inability to deal with opposition or critique from others. Success does great things to a person's self-worth and this is an area in which she needs work. The more she realizes the power she has within herself, the stronger she will become. A final example of an exercise for Juanita is one of the most important. Although it is mentioned last, it is one of highest priority. Juanita's history did not offer any information as to whether her mother instilled in her the importance of believing in a supreme being. For this reason, if nothing else, she should educate herself on spirituality and consider practicing a spiritual discipline.

It is necessary that Juanita learns the meaning of spirituality as well as how it differs from religion before she pursues a specific discipline, should she choose to do so. The term spirituality is derived from the Latin word spiritus (breath of life) or, simply stated, that which keeps our spirit alive [3]. It is a shared notion worldwide that spirituality moves one toward love, peace, hope, connectedness, compassion, wellness, transcendence, and a sense of wholeness [3]. But fully understanding spirituality is very dependent on one's perspective and whether they are the type to adhere to sets of beliefs and rituals that make up religion. Although seemingly congruent to many, spirituality and religion are not one in the same. Spirituality views all religions as valid, similar to the analogy that all roads lead to Heaven. A religious person would not agree with that statement because:

- a. Religion carries on the teachings of a sacred book
- b. There are numerous sacred books (et. al., The Christian Bible, The Qur'an, The Vedas) that are in accordance with the religion they teach

Spirituality invites one to question and also to choose their own actions, all the while being willing to assume the consequences of their choices. Religion, on the other hand, looks down upon those who question and has an assembly of rules that are to be followed under all circumstances; hence the term faith. Faith is a core concept in religion from which no one can waver. Hebrews 11:1 states that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (King James Version). Consider the fact that we have faith in our natural laws of inertia and gravity assuming they will always apply. We cannot physically see either one, but we hope they remain constant. Religious people have faith and believe the words on the pages of their sacred text although they have no concrete proof. Either way, the Journal of Affective Disorders explains that research reveals that "high-power believers may be onto something, especially if they are suffering from mental illness" [4]. Furthermore, believers in God or a higher power respond better to therapeutic treatment and show improved psychological wellness than non-believers [4]. All the more reason for Juanita to try to do the last exercise noted above.

Integrating spirituality and positive psychology is a promising approach to help Juanita achieve her goals. Many studies reveal the same outcome- that there is an undeniably strong connection between religious faith and happiness. Additionally, Juanita needs to know that millions of recovering addicts of Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous will agree that therapy combined with the at-home exercises will not be enough, and that the belief in a higher power is a must for recovery [5].

References

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