Dominican Scholar

2019

The Importance of Multiple Narrative Spirituality in Child Development of Morality in a Pluralistic Society

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A senior project submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts in Literary and Intercultural Studies

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May 5, 2019

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Abstract

With the assumption that humans are innately spiritual, I investigate research regarding the development of spirituality that takes place from childhood to adulthood. Over the past 30 years, James Fowler has called upon Erikson's and Piaget's cognitive developmental stages of children, in order to understand their spiritual development phases. When reading the myths and origin stories of spiritual belief systems, the commonality found within all of these narratives is the persistent focus on underlying morality. When utilizing stories as a way to teach spiritual morality, children are easily able to recognize and go back to these basic narratives, using their imagination to superimpose them onto their own lived experiences. Drawing from a wide array of sources, I argue that these spiritual myths and origin stories, in fact, become the underlying foundation of children's ideologies. In others words, these spiritual stories actually become vital life-affirming resources, as they have the potential to expose people to, and catalyze in them, moral development and connection that is crucial to sustain life. In the end, these narratives guide children with their decisions through their ever-changing lives, for they increase quality of life by enhancing the value of others, as well as the self-esteem of themselves through solid identity. This reality creates pluralistic interconnectedness and shows a strong responsibility for community support to better extend cultural and spiritual awareness, and help develop a morally strong self identity in a progressively intercultural world.

Introduction

Utilizing the developmental faith stages of James Fowler in children, and William Damon's positive asset promotion, as a baseline for my research paper, I found how important diverse spiritual narratives in children are. Using previous research mainly influenced by Kohlberg, Piaget, and Erikson, I am a second hand witness to what types of influence spirituality can have on overall morality and quality of life. The purpose is to discover if diverse and active spirituality affects not only children's ability to see from other points of view, but also enhances their self-esteem while creating a solid identity. With almost 40% of couples in the United States married after 2010 being multi-religious (Bidwell), this is a trend to take note of and understand, as it affects the children of these couples and communities they choose to live in. This paper shows that the connections made with spirituality/faith can increase self-esteem in children and the value of others around them, improving overall quality of life.

I draw upon information others have researched, e.g., Fowler, Bohm, Bidwell, Damon and others, to bring pieces together to conclude that spirituality affects quality of life and development in a positive way, and specifically, as a whole. When one takes the discipline of Humanities into account, the most important aspect is understanding how one part affects the whole, as well as how the whole affects the part. Likewise, when studying the objects of human thought - both reasoned and imaginative - many are coming to understand that psychological research and development of spirituality are naturally combined, making our understanding of the mind more integrated. It is very human to be curious and introspective. It is also human to want to be a part of

something more than yourself. Within both fields, there is curiosity, imagination, revelation, development, expression, and community.

When people search for the why's of inner life, they often turn to spirituality and psychology. This particular intersection is a common daily experience for many people such as social workers, spiritual leaders, counselors, professors, and people wanting to expand their minds in either field, as well as people searching for peace in their own personal lives. These are where we find the history of the mind and the possible discovery of the soul. These are where we find the causes and effects of our daily inner struggles and the means by which we study ourselves, and how we create and recreate our identity. The effects spirituality have on each developmental stage can change the way children see their inner selves as they learn and try to connect to a process in which they find life meaningful.

Evidence of the significant relationship between well-being and spirituality is not surprising. James Fowler, an American theologian who was Professor of Theology and Human Development at Emory University (and director of both the Center for Research on Faith and Moral Development and the Center for Ethics until retiring in 2005), states that faith is, "So *fundamental* that none of us can live well for very long without it, so universal that when we move beneath the symbols, rituals and ethical patterns that express it, faith is recognizably the same phenomenon in Christians, Marxists, Hindus and Dinka, yet it is so infinitely varied that each person's faith is unique"(xiii-emphasis added). The basic primacy of spirituality is deeply ingrained in ritual and interconnected facets of different cultures, and it holds true that the effects of such are incredibly

substantial. Active spirituality offers the availability of essential support and affirmation in stressful life circumstances and a greater self confidence in basic moral values and identity.

In this atmosphere of intolerance to the unknown, it is an appropriate time to focus on an interfaith world. When a human searches for purpose and prioritizes this quest for understanding, coherence within the variables of life is a goal for any spirituality. Learning the complexities about others and ourselves creates empathy and compassion. As an underlying moral and spiritual guideline, I was taught that compassion and love for the other, are compassion and love for the self. To become a society in which spiritualities are held with an underlying understanding that is shared among all who practice, is a goal that must be achieved. It is that deep search for comprehension that brings people together in a crucially needed community. The precedence for a place of sanctuary, within this context, is to find a place where it is comfortable to practice and learn what is right for the individual: a place where imagination, connection, and personal revelation can take hold without judgment.

A common universally accepted truth is that connection is necessary and a foundation for survival; in a word, humankind should not live alone. When coming to an impasse or an extremely burdening life event, something spiritually challenges and changes. This creates an opportunity for connection and necessity for modification. In any event where the perception of the self is challenged, there is a chance for spiritual growth from a spiritual community and/or from within. How we get to that connection or that jolt of change, needed to adjust behavior, is different for everyone. Perhaps what

is often unrealized is how this affects the development of an individual and eventually of a whole community.

The relationship between spiritual development and narrative is crucial in children's lives because of the moral understanding learned most often through those stories at critical moments in aging. The spiritual application to ritual, education, social justice, and morality can be found in many origin stories and spiritual myths. These ideas in childhood are carried over time; they saturate culture, communities, and history. The narrative, as a sanctuary in one's mind, proves to be a safe and useful place for exploration. It is common enough to be considered and studied in relation to care in many healthcare fields.

If a person is stuck with only one narration of the way life can be, there is little inclusion for others of any kind in a world where there are many stories behind the reasons people and communities use to make decisions. Not opening to a sense of universal understanding creates division, which, in turn, creates barriers, weakness, inequality, and fear. It only seems natural that, as the world progresses, the understanding of the possibility of what spirituality can be, progresses as well. As relationships in personal, business, political and spiritual lives become more global and inclusive, the search for what we all have in common is necessary to expand the concept of community. Origin stories/narratives can help feed and underline their commonalities. Diversity is needed in order to prevent and disperse such inequality and division seen today; the potential result: the strength and mutual flourishing of all.

In *Ecology and Religion,* Grim and Tucker discovered and promote the following seven values shared among all religious, spiritual, and/or contemplative paths are: "Reverence, Respect, Responsibility, Reciprocity, Restraint, Redistribution, Restoration"(8). These common modern values create a basis for what spiritual/faith progress looks like. These are the commonalities to build an original morality foundation in a child. Spiritually-learned unity and respect can start to help the world heal from all of the destruction and displacement that has occurred. The solace that humanity has needed against division, and currently searches for, is a way to be wholly united in some way. This desire for community and communication can be partially attained in understanding multiple worldviews and immersing oneself in one or numerous spiritual traditions. Considering the multiple ways in which pluralistic teachings can be integrated into child development, this paper focuses on these aspects: the importance of spirituality, origin narratives and connection within identity creation.

Assumptions

The basic and bold assumption of this paper is that all human beings are spiritual regardless of their race, orientation, religious or non-religious affiliation. Spirituality is an important dimension to be developed in the lives of every human being. Murray & Zentner eloquently stated:

> In every human being there seems to be a spiritual dimension, a quality that goes beyond religious affiliation, which strives for inspiration, reverence, awe, meaning, and purpose even in those who do not believe in God. The spiritual dimension tries to be in harmony with the universe, strives for answers about the

infinite, and comes essentially into focus in times of emotional stress, physical

illness, loss, bereavement, and death. (259)

Esteemed scholar of religion at Harvard Divinity School, Wilfred Cantwell Smith,

offered a similar message,

Faith is deeper, richer, more personal...Faith, then, is a quality of human living.

At its best it has taken the form of serenity and courage and loyalty and service; a

quiet confidence and joy which enable one to feel at home in the universe, and to

find meaning in the world and in one's own life, a meaning that is profound and

ultimate, and is stable no matter what may happen to oneself at the level of

immediate event. (qtd. in Fowler 11)

Fowler agrees, "Faith, rather than belief or religion, is the most fundamental

category in the human quest for relation to transcendence. Faith, it appears, is generic, a

universal feature of human living, recognizably similar everywhere despite the

remarkable variety of forms and contents of religious practice and belief" (14).

It seems there are many esteemed authors and experts that agree with this

sentiment. "It is that sense of wonder in being alive; it is our meaning-making and

question-asking nature. In this sense, then, it is universal" (Roseborough 49). This

description of faith excludes no one. It seems as if believing in being a part of something

larger than ourselves is a part of human life.

Limitations

The limitations of this paper are many, as the study of spirituality and faith

involves some research that is specifically religion based. We must take into account

that the faith stages are based upon cognitive and moral stage theories from Piaget,

Erikson, and Kohlberg, limiting the lens of this information and how it is seen. In

researching, I encountered some discoveries.

Some of this research indicated lowered self-esteem, very stressful struggles,

estrangement, and depression in the Queer/LGBTQ community, due to the restrictive

nature of those particular religious communities (Campbell). In those studies,

participants were not allowed the open, safe space to express themselves and therefore

had no spiritual peace. Hence, in their times of change, struggle and quest for meaning

and identity, they were not free to reach out and explore their spirituality or identity.

Their existence was unwelcome. In a more accepting and pluralistic space, there would

be less negative consequences.

In addition, there is not one singular universal way to teach or bring up children,

and there is a privilege attached to the idea that people are allowed or have the

opportunity to be educated in multiple faith/spirituality traditions. This stipulation is

common among residents of this planet that do not have to focus on mere survival first.

For example, if a person is focusing on basic survival necessities, daily, they would not

necessarily have the supportive spiritual community, access to multiple

narratives/stories, or certain opportunities. Not everyone has any and/or all of these.

Definitions

As spirituality may or may not necessarily be affiliated with a particular religious

doctrine, and it may or may not be connected to an institution, looking at multiple

definitions is imperative. In this paper, spirituality and faith are used as non-Christian

based general terms. They have a stronger focus on the interpersonal relationship and the development of this outwardly as a reaction with, and to, the community in which a person lives, and do not indicate belief in a deity. In this paper, faith and spirituality are the same.

Spirituality

The Oxford English Dictionary defines spirituality as, "The quality or condition of being spiritual; attachment to or regard for things of the spirit as opposed to material or worldly interests." And spiritual is defined as, "Of or relating to, affecting or concerning, the spirit or higher moral qualities, esp. as regarded in a religious aspect."

John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker are Senior Lecturers and Research Scholars at Yale University. They are founders of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale. They define spirituality as,

> A quest to deepen, renew, or tap into the most profound insights of traditional religions or to consecrate otherwise secular (worldly, mundane) endeavors. A search for the sacred in which humans experience their authentic being in relation to a larger whole. This usually involves self cultivation through contemplative practice...The spiritual journey situates the human in larger context so that the small self is seen in relation to the greater self. (29-30)

Spirituality is defined as a "universal and fundamental aspect of what it is to be human, to search for a sense of meaning, purpose, and moral frameworks for relating with self, others, and the ultimate reality" (Canda & Furman 37).

There are many definitions of spirituality, yet there is a definite connection between them all regarding morals, self cultivation, and connection to something larger than ourselves, namely, the universal. Spirituality can be seen as an awareness of one's inherent nature and the deep relationships with all of creation. This relationship has enormous capacity. The ever present quest for the sacred, for truth, and purpose, is reflected in our actions, art, and symbols. Spirituality and faith are multidimensional and can be individual and/or collective; they are concepts that are difficult to define in one sentence. This paper focuses on the importance of what is similar and defiantly states that one way is not the correct way over another.

Faith

Faith is a human concern, brings value, and creates what makes life worth living. This paper also focuses on stages of development and faith, from the studies of James Fowler. He calls upon many sources including Erikson and Piaget, in his book *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning,* to help define faith. Here, it is plain to observe the similarities between faith and spirituality.

Fowler defines faith many times, like spirituality, for it is complex. "Faith is not always religious in its content or context...Faith is a person's or group's way of moving into the force field of life...Faith is a person's way of seeing him-or herself in relation to others against a background of shared meaning and purpose" (4).

Fowler pulls from theologian Richard Niebuhr, who says that,

> He sees faith taking form in our earliest relationships with those who provide care
> for us in infancy. He sees faith growing through our experience of trust and
> fidelity- and of mistrust and betrayal - with those closest to us. He sees faith in the
> shared visions and values that hold human groups together. And he sees faith, at
> all these levels, in the search for an overarching, integrating and grounding trust
> in a center of value and power sufficiently worthy to give our lives unity and
> meaning. (qtd in Fowler 5)

Pluralism

Like colonization: forcing mono-religious identity erases the deep connections
and relationships that would be possible with a multi-religious/spiritual/faith approach.
Then looking toward pluralism creates those connections and opportunities for
community that humanity seeks. Pluralism adds value to others, aids in identity
creation, and societal creation. It is in this way that diversity is strength.

In *The Oxford English Dictionary*, pluralism is generally defined as, "The
presence or tolerance of a diversity of ethnic or cultural groups within a society or state;
(the advocacy of) toleration or acceptance of the coexistence of differing views, values,
cultures, etc.". In addition, pluralism, as a philosophy, as defined by *The Oxford English
Dictionary*, " The theory that the world is made up of more than one kind of substance
or thing; (more generally) any theory or system of thought which recognizes more than
one irreducible basic principle."

The authors of *The Center Can Hold* conclude, "for democracy to work in a pluralistic society, we must learn to be moderate even in our pursuit of what we think to be justice. That is why toleration—a virtue that is far from natural and is under significant strain today—is such an important habit to learn, and to teach one other." Even moderate conservatives can see the value in learning from one another and teaching one another in this pluralistic society.

Diana Eck, Professor of Comparative Religion at Harvard University, demands more than just tolerance, and states in the *Veritas Forum*,

Pluralism is the study of the complexity of our world today. It is engagement with diversity. Tolerance is too thin a foundation in the world we live in today. We need to know more about each other and not simply tolerate each other. Pluralism is not relativism. Pluralism does not mean that we all agree on any particular thing. The paradigm of pluralism does not require us to leave behind our identities and commitments behind because pluralism is the encounter of commitment. It means holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relation to one another. The language of pluralism is the language of dialogue.

Starting with respect of others, as to engage in actual understanding and dialogue with them, about the *why* of their lives, is a step toward a more pluralistic society.

This leads to benefits for all included with no exclusionary principles. The trend in the United States and globally, is that we are becoming, and shaping more coherent and spiritually flexible identities. Vinoth Ramachandra states in the *Veritas Forum*,

The *other* is indispensable to our own self discovery. The *other's* views are

important enough to engage with them seriously... Shows a profound respect for

people. Tolerance is used as a way of avoiding - it can be dangerous - meaning

leave me alone, don't examine and critique my world. Relativism/ secularity can

entail this... The theory that the knowable world consists of a plurality of

interacting entities is well known.

With the percentage of multi-religious households on the rise, due to the global

community and its consequences, trying to give understanding and space for

multi-religious and spiritual households (with differing individual spiritual identities) is

the next logical societal step.

The importance of teaching diversity, preventing fear, and creating community is

accentuated in how much the country is responding to racial hate. Katelyn Johnson's

senior thesis, *Teach your Children White?* reiterates the importance of multiculturalism

within the context of educating children during their development of identity. When

children become more aware of other cultures, they become more accepting. Johnson

states,

In her book, *Multicultural and Ethnic Children's Literature in the United States*,

Donna Gilton, professor of library and information sciences, defines

multiculturalism as the view or understanding that all cultures– whether

dominant or minority—have equal value and worth: "At its best, it enables all to

participate in general US public culture and to maintain their own cultural base.

It enables bicultural people who cannot completely assimilate to live very creatively. If done well, it also encourages people to be interested not only in themselves but in their neighbors as well." (11).

Looking at racial and cultural tensions today in the United States, there is lack of understanding, respect, and restoration. It is easy to see that we have a long way to go before becoming a united community.

Importance of Origin Stories

Recognizing value, relationship, and story in spirituality, within the self and community, renews its importance and purpose cross-culturally. In the ever changing and expanding parts of life, spirituality can keep us grounded and connected in ways that are intangible and irreplaceable. Spiritual communities create origin stories to create ways of regarding ethics. Kate Anderson spoke of relationships with origin stories and said, "Those essential building blocks are our life story, how we communicate and engage the world around us, and the most effective way for each of us to nurture meaningful relationships." The essentiality is being an active member of these relationships.

The first five to six years of foundational stories and positive pluralistic exposure in a child's life is essential in development. In Chapter One of *Doing Environmental Ethics* Robert Traer states, "How our parents and other caregivers spoke to us about what is right and wrong, the stories they read us as children, as well as our exposure to moral dilemmas in our family, preschool, or on television and other media—all these and other experiences shaped our understanding of ethical choices and our reasons for

making these choices" (4). When children are forming the ability to create reality and expand common operational structure, stories produce greater and greater ways of knowing.

In her senior thesis, *Language of Reality (2018),* Sarah Lindquist discovered, "The various constructs of language may espouse different modalities, lines of thought, and methods of discernment; however, the common thread is the quest for truth of Self, though the means of attainment may express themselves diversely, or even seemingly at odds with other forms; joy can serve as the impetus to seek wholeness, as well as suffering." Being able to express individual thought, emotion, and confusion should be part of our daily language. Recognizing the power of language and symbolism early in life is needed to understand the power of the origin story or stories that are taught to us. Fowler states, "Others before us have composed, giving us language, symbols, myths and concepts which both awaken and guide faith's composing. We are accountable to them and to other contemporary companions, the heirs of other faith traditions. We do not compose alone"(30). The background for many cultures is stories as a guide to how to live and create stories truthfully. As society and individuals learn others' stories, and create together, and react upon, the meaning of those stories.

Narration becomes a gateway into the reason why people are the way they are. It becomes a way to get through barriers. Sarah U'Brien, the manager of Dungog Shire Community Centre, states that, "In the telling and in listening, often a path can become clearer. Stories have always been the way we have shared our history, honoured our past and shared learning. Storytelling is a part of us all, it is how we connect with our world,

how we make sense of our lives and how we share with others."(web). In this sense, the way to identify a person and try and see their whole self, is through their story, and a way to give them a feeling of importance, is to actually listen to it.

In this world there are numerous origin/ creation stories imbedded in the backbone of culture. "Like Creation stories everywhere, cosmologies are a source of identity and orientation to the world. They tell us who we are. We are inevitably shaped by them no matter how distant they may be from our consciousness"(Kimmerer). These are where the hierarchy of human beings and non humans are formed. It is where differentiating these moral compass guides can be examined. Multiple ways of creating moral guides mean that no life is viewed and understood to be less than and then disregarded. When focusing on the well-being of everyone rather than just one, humans tend to identify with the similar and this creates connection, responsibility, and mutual growth in unity.

The story of every single person defines their formation and identity. Diana Eck states, "We live by powerful resounding stories." The story line behind it all (the origin story they base life off of) relates individuals to others and shows them how to connect or not. Peoples' views are seen and shaped through the lens of their own experiences. "In each of the roles we play, in each significant relationship we have with others, in each institution of which we are part, we are linked to others in shared trusts and loyalties to centers of value and power... we remember shared stories, we celebrate and renew common hopes" (Fowler 19). Learning and being actively involved in others' stories help develop more empathetic and pluralistic relationships, which will help

define a community and how it interacts and grows as a group. It is imperative to

harness this power of the origin story for the betterment of society.

Connection

The role of narratives and spirituality exposing and developing the

interdependence between all people, extending to all of creation, shows the importance

of this communal support. That it is life-changing and in some cases, life saving. Fowler

states, "Faith is interactive and social; it requires community, language, ritual and

nurture. Faith is also shaped by initiatives from beyond us and other people, initiatives

of spirit or grace" (xiii). This makes the spiritual community a person chooses at any

point in life a crucial decision and a responsibility of all to make that safe space in every

society. With regards to how deep the connection is, theologian Thomas E. Reynolds

offers commentary regarding human beings in relationships as part of a Divine process

of co-creation. He writes:

> Humankind is fundamentally relational. We are caught up in a web of
>
> interdependence with the created world, inescapably dependent upon creation
>
> for sustenance and well-being. As the creative power of God extends itself in
>
> relationship with others, so does the Imago Dei. Creative power essentially is a
>
> relational power. Fundamental to human relationality is a material, bodily
>
> existence... And our bodies define our limits. To deny this is to deny our
>
> relationship to other creatures, for relationships depend upon the differentiation
>
> created by bodily limits...It is God who knits us together in our mothers' wombs,
>
> fearfully and wonderfully making us, intricately weaving us from the depths of

the earth (Psalm 139:13- 15). Our bodies are woven into the fabric of creation, connecting us to the elements in a way that makes us a part of the dynamic interdependence of all things. (178)

From this perspective, it can be seen that relationship in life is inevitable and a necessity. The interdependence of all things creates a responsibility to all living beings. If we are to lose this interconnectivity throughout life, we lose ourselves and in losing ourselves, we lose each other. In gaining and re-learning this communal connection, we can grasp part of that relationship back through something that is truly sacred to us - our own creation.

We are intricately woven into the depths of the earth, and if we can acknowledge that relationship, it will become even more sacred. It will come from a place of different spiritual understanding and knowing. Science echoes the concept of connection. Concepts of an underlying unity pervading the universe are beginning to be commonly referenced in contemporaneous physics theory:

Science itself is demanding a new, non-fragmentary world view, in the sense that the present approach of analysis of the world into independently existent parts does not work very well in modern physics. It is shown that both in relativity theory and quantum theory, notions implying the undivided wholeness of the universe would provide a much more orderly way of considering the general nature of reality. (Bohm xiv)

One of the most prominent physicists of the 20th century, Stephen Hawking encourages this whole view: "It seems very reasonable to suppose that there may be some unifying principle, so that all laws are part of some bigger law. So, what we are trying to find out is whether there is some bigger law from which all other laws can be derived. I think you can ask that question whether or not you believe in God" (qtd. in Harwood).

Bringing hard science and spirituality together, research, in regards to care and spirituality, give value to the community we choose to be a part of. The importance of being active in that whole is demonstrated over and over. In her 2006 Masters thesis *'The care that shines from within': The Role of Spirituality in Aged and Palliative Care,* Anna Chetan Bloemhard found that,

> Religious and spiritual connectedness is increasingly rated as a very important support base for older adults; not necessarily as the traditional refuge in times of need, but also a source of inspiration for living the later stages of life more fully and contentedly (George, Larson, Koenig & McCullough, 2001; Levin & Chatters 1998; MacKinlay 2001a; Moberg, 2001). Furthermore, it is said that spirituality allows people to 'transcend their current feelings and circumstances, enabling their well-being to be maintained' (Kirby, Coleman & Daley, 2004: 127). Therefore it is not surprising that older adults, especially those who experience ill health and frailty, are turning to their spiritual roots seek solace and adjustment. (Bloemhard 8)

This reality of human relationship with a spiritual community shows the life-long being active can bring to the quality of later stages of life as well. Mixing medicinal care with spiritual practices seems to alleviate worry and aid in adjustment periods.

Bloemhard also discovers what many other researchers have found, that when coping with life's difficulties spiritual practices can provide resilience in times of need. This has lead to policy and education changes all over the world.

A publication by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing (2004: 131), however, states that 'spiritual counselling and support are essential to a palliative approach'... Traditionally, the domain of the clergy, spiritual care is nowadays considered integral to contemporary nursing and involves, amongst other things, developing meaningful relationships (Milligan, 2004: 163). The essence of a holistic nursing practice involves attention to the 'physical, psychological, social and spiritual' needs of clients (Theis, Biordi, Coeling, Nalepka & Miller, 2003: 48). (Bloemhard 7)

The role of spirituality in care giving expands across cultures and backgrounds. It is such a pronounced part of life that numerous studies are being done in order to connect with patients in different capacities for an end result of better quality care.

With the intersection of multiple patient care fields, spirituality education seems to be needed in psychiatry in order to deal with the complexities of life. The need for an

integrative and intersectional approach is becoming more and more apparent. In the

foreword of *Spirituality and Psychiatry* this intersection is apparent in crisis,

> As psychiatrists we work with people with serious mental disorders, many of
>
> whom may have lost meaning and purpose in their lives. Each person's journey of
>
> recovery will seek to find new meaning and purpose, hopefully supported by
>
> friends and family who have shared values (Care Services Improvement
>
> Partnership et al, 2007). Spirituality, defined in this book in part as being
>
> 'concerned with matters of meaning and purpose in life, truth and values' is
>
> clearly relevant. This sharing of values and belief systems with other members of
>
> one's community and achieving a personal equilibrium seem intuitively likely to
>
> improve one's coping capacity. (Cook, Powell, Sims x)

This significance within treatment processes has led to the development of The

Spirituality and Psychiatry Special Interest Group of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in

London, moreover, in India, the Indian Psychiatric Society created a 'Spirituality and

Mental Health' Task Force to understand better the implications of the intersection of

spirituality and psychiatry treatment. Social workers, psychiatrists, and counselors

globally, are recognizing the need for incorporation of spirituality and the possibility of

improving quality of life it has within their realm of care. (McCourt, Whiting, Davidson,

Josephson & Dell, Cook, Voyles, Tramontana)

   A connected life of purpose is designed from a strong sense of self. "Norman

Garmezy (1983), for example, reported longitudinal data showing that religious faith

was the personal characteristic most likely to keep at-risk youth out of trouble. Hart et al. (1995) found that a major difference between disadvantaged adolescents who were exemplars of prosocial behavior and those who were frequently antisocial was the presence of a strong spiritual sense"(Damon 21).When our actions become a reflection of our character, we lean more heavily toward the moral and generous choices. Over time it can become part of us. Strong spiritual beliefs can shape the way a person identifies and outwardly projects themselves, showing the influence of observation and stories at this time in life.

Identity

This intersection with spirituality is needed throughout a lifetime. Focusing on the relationship, reciprocity, and community that can affect a person's development, Daniel Siegel comments on how spiritual interconnectedness influences our identities. From within our identities, created partially by the stories we are told and stories that we see, comes also the decision of how we interact with the world. In his book, *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology: And Integrative Handbook of the Mind*, Siegel writes, "The mind is influenced by, indeed fundamentally created in part by, our social interactions as well as our relationships with entities beyond our bodily selves, with experiences we have with the environment surrounding us. In this way we can say that the mind is both embodied and it is embedded in our relational worlds" (5). The way in which people relate to the sacred is a fluid relationship much in the way people relate to themselves and others. This interconnectivity deepens the moral and relationship guide

within the narrations already absorbed in the mind and makes it even that much more crucial to be exposed to multiple variations of in today's society.

William Damon, professor of education and the director of the Center on Adolescence at Stanford University, has written widely on moral commitment at all ages of human life. Damon focuses on changing the view of youth from problems and deficits, which stresses punishment over prevention, to looking at young people as resources and potentialities. Looking at a person as a whole instead of what they did wrong. This view of youth includes all types of young people, not leaving a single one behind due to background. These youths are not disposable or broken.

Even though humanity does not have a united consciousness, there is a social and moral shift that focuses on being less self centered and more aware of the cultural and spiritual differences among the community and globe in and which they live. In *Child and Adolescent Development: An Advanced Course,* edited by William Damon and Richard M. Lerner, "several chapters in this book (Chapter 17 by Cole; Chapter 18 by Berenbaum, Martin, & Ruble; and Chapter 19 by Spencer) are focused specifically on the substantive importance of diversity in elucidating what is normative in regard to the structure and/or function of developmental change in children and identities"(8)

Using research from Peter Benson in 1997, Damon saw that, "Internal assets are personal characteristics of young people and specifically positive ones, such as commitment to learning, positive values, social skills, and positive identity"(17). Focusing on these positive assets is what his research is now based on and manifests. According to leaders of this asset view approach, Lerner, Fisher, and Weinberg write,

"Preventing the actualization of youth risk behaviors is not the same as taking actions to promote positive youth development (e.g., the inculcation of attributes such as caring/compassion, competence, character, connection, and confidence)"(Damon 18). This approach of creating compassion and connection helps create solid identity, and prepare young people for interacting with and behaving in society.

To be accepted in your own identity aids significantly in the endeavor of creating positive impact. As part of the human condition, it is necessary to find this established connection requisite. "Spiritual peace is said to be associated with the reduction of feelings of depression and anxiety and the promotion of optimism and self-esteem" (Ellison & Fan 251). And finding that safe place where a person is at home enough to express their individual differences can be a part of the sanctuary needed for peace of mind. In *Stages of Faith,* Smith says that faith, "At its best it has taken the form of serenity and courage and loyalty and service: a quiet confidence and joy which enable one to feel at home in the universe, and to find meaning in the world and in one's own life" (11). The research founded upon this relationship is discovered many times over for the evidence of such strength in relation to quality of life is regarded highly in development and lifespan.

Development Stages: Childhood - Adolescence

With the search for understanding oneself in the context of the world around them, a child looks toward their primary caregivers and what to mimic. Research indicates that empathy comes naturally. "As far as we know, young children everywhere start life with caring feelings toward those close to them and with adverse reactions to

inhumane or unjust behavior. Differences in how these reactions are triggered and expressed emerge only later, once children have been exposed to the particular belief systems and values of their cultures" (Damon 18). This inborn compassion for justice and equality should be encouraged. In *Just Babies* psychologist Paul Bloom reports that,

> Newborns tend to cry when they hear another baby crying. At three months, infants watching shapes that interact by helping or hindering movement prefer the shapes that are helping. After six months, sharing begins spontaneously and children show distress when they harm others. Children who are eight-months-old generally prefer a puppet that fairly punishes a mean puppet over a puppet that is nice to the mean puppet. (qtd. in Traer 3)

As infants, we learn by observation and what is given to us within our first years is increasingly important. Bloom's research verifies the significance of mirroring what we see in our authority figures when he says that any racial bias among the adults caring for children will be reflected in them by age six (Traer 6).

This gives teachers, caregivers, and persons of importance in that child's life the opportunity and responsibility to expose different realities into their mind, expanding this definition which, in turn, aids in the creation of their personal identities.

> Opportunities for taking the perspectives of others, for facing and conversing about situations of moral conflict and perhaps for observing and hearing others' ways of dealing with moral dilemmas are some of the requisite experiences for the development of new structures of moral judgment and social perspective taking… [The child is] aware of and must take account of the interests, needs and

claims of others. There is the recognition that in order to get others to assent to or even come to cooperate in the achievement of one's own goals, one must be prepared to reciprocate… A very significant step toward the understanding of (and acting upon) justice involves coming to feel and honor the force of reciprocal rights and claims…In this concrete reciprocity we find roots of justice as fairness. (Fowler 66)

Because this development is within concrete operational thought and individualistic, the more positive cultural and spiritual exposure during this stage, the more likely the moral behavior will reflect this broadening scope of the world. Further moral development should reflect upon this.

In childhood, Piaget emphasizes the "use of language brings the beginning of internalization" where experiences of others are assumed to be like their own. This stage "gives rise to a construction of reality" (Fowler 64). Erikson warns that the danger of this stage lies in a sense of inferiority and inadequacy which can turn into a sense of doom and regress. "Where good modes of leadership and not too severely interrupted opportunities for learning and growth enable children to avoid these dangers, a lasting sense of competence results" (Fowler 67). In a secure pluralistic spiritual society this sense of value and equality can be confidently felt and crises are less traumatic.

Moving toward the stage of adolescence, the importance of these influence combines as minds expand the ideas of self and others. Fowler's studies of Piaget indicate,

It is important to recognize that while the transition from the patterns of thought

that ripen in late childhood to those of adolescence does bring disequilibrium and

disruption, the emerging new cognitive structures provide markedly increased

capacity, flexibility and stability… The formation of personality, as a matter of

reflective personal engagement, only emerges with the development of formal

operational thinking…Formal operational thought is thinking about thinking.

(Fowler 69)

The development of third person perspective builds upon the previous stories embedded

in the mind. This is the groundwork responsibility laid down by community and

caregivers. Building upon this moral development stage, true societal perspective can

develop.

Erickson refers to personality formation, as identity. As adolescence progresses,

"new capacities for self awareness and for interpersonal relations" add to the

complexities of the physical changes. Finding identity in this time is a complex issue

especially as "an accrued awareness of oneself that maintains continuity with one's past

meanings to others into oneself and that integrates the images of oneself given by

significant others with one's own inner feelings of who one is" (Fowler 77). Continuing

in this thought, who one is perceived to be at this time in development, seems to also be

based on the perceptions of the perceptions, of the community in which we surround

ourselves.

 The positive youth approach "consider[s] the whole community in relation to the

whole child rather than privileging any particular interaction or capacity" (Damon 19)

reiterating the point of broadening the knowledge base. A whole person is complex just as a community is complex. Fowler reiterates the importance of a community of support for young people. "Where social conditions and favorable personal relationships support young persons in building a firm enough sense of identity to feel ready to commit themselves —in friendship, to future work rules or in loyalty to religious or other ideological visions and communities— we may expect the emergence in them of the ego strength or virtue we call fidelity" (77). The connection young people have within a community changes their outlook on others as well as themselves. This gives the community a responsibility to do so in a just and positive way.

Conclusion

Philosophy, psychology and medicine cannot afford to leave spirituality behind. Reason and rational logic alone do not provide sufficient solidarity for all that is needed to collectively move forward. The moral ground on which both religion and philosophy share, is an idea of unity and belonging. Philosopher Charles Taylor, "has acknowledged that the modern secular age is not simply an era of unbelievers. Instead, our contemporary period offers a pluralism of options, which are steadily widening. This results in the emergence of hybrid and fluid identities so that the secular and the religious are not exclusive categories but often mutually interpenetrating" (qtd. in Grim and Tucker 19).

Research proves that our worldview changes when we are exposed to others, which enables our view to expand, broaden, and strengthen. In addition, it is crucial for diverse positive influences and support to be introduced, with positive intention, to

young children during identity development in order to prevent crises and insecurity. The substantiated importance of diversity, in showing a child what is normative in regards to forming their own identity, creates strength, for it fosters positive healthy inclusion and provides support during transitional periods. This strength creates two outcomes: one of higher self worth and one of increasing the value of others in this world around them.

Getting to a place and identity that allows one to access compassion and empathy for the other starts early in life. Shared stories and narratives play a major role in uniting basic global ideals throughout society and are the foundation for how children learn moral values. Teaching multiple origin myths is an activity that now should be considered an ethical commitment and duty, for such teaching comes with the gift of nothing less than freedom: the freedom to embrace life-affirming relationships with multiple ways of living. This freedom can save lives. It shows the child that every being has value and is not disposable. To recognize this as an obligation of understanding and giving value to other living beings, our partners in this collective space (even when we disagree), is crucial to human flourishing, that is, to all we might be and to all be might become.

Our ethical responsibility to our children, and the generations that follow, requires developing stronger and more confident global citizens, who know themselves as belonging to something greater than themselves, and actually having that sense of community. Narratives have the power to teach young children not to fear the differences of the *other;* rather, to embrace diversity with a sense of respect, wonder and

awe. The responsibility of feeding the minds of future leaders, who focus on the whole rather than the individual, starts in childhood, but doesn't end there. Such increase in awareness and understanding creates a deep connection with others: one would not have noticed otherwise. This would take us back to the seven values shared among all religious, spiritual, and/or contemplative paths that Grim and Tucker found: "Reverence, Respect, Responsibility, Reciprocity, Restraint, Redistribution, Restoration" on a global level.

With expansion of narrative origin stories and moral myths, colonial dominant ideas should fade and equalize. It must in order to change the value of each other. Creating intrinsic value of other beings who are unlike ourselves enforces and encourages unity, responsibility, reverence, and respect. When people feel as if they belong in this world and that it has intrinsic value, it becomes a sacred sanctuary. Therefore, its value is increased and is seen as reciprocal and relational, which means the health of the world matters. The intersection of spirituality and psychology can aid the growth of a new world that doesn't specifically impose one way or another. Starting with a child's identity, a world is created. The new world that is waiting and wanting to be created is a world of cultural pluralism and reciprocal relationships. Let no one imagine that building the new intersectional world community will be easy, but this is a fundamental challenge facing humanity today.

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