

Spirituality in Therapeutic Recreation: A Qualitative Study Exploring How Spirituality is Understood, Addressed and Facilitated in Practice

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INTRODUCTION

Spirituality

- Spirituality can be described in many ways some examples include: religion, integrative energy, values and beliefs, process and journey, a connectedness to self, others, higher being or place, a search for meaning or purpose in life and a search for answers (Lepherd, 2015).

Spirituality and Therapeutic Recreation (TR)

- The leisure-spiritual coping TR model describes how leisure can be a context for dealing with life stressors (Heintzman, 2008).
- Leisure spiritual coping behaviors and leisure spiritual connections lead to leisure spiritual meaning making which can lead to well being (Heintzman, 2008).
- Spiritual strengths can be built through activities like yoga, journaling, meditation and religious traditions (Anderson & Heyne, 2012).

RESEARCH QUESTION

How is spirituality understood, addressed and facilitated by Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialists (CTRS) in the context of TR services?

METHODS

Participants & Recruitment

- This study recruited three CTRS in Atlantic Canada.
- All three participants were recruited through a professional association for CTRS in Atlantic Canada.
- Two participants worked in long term care and one participant worked in acute care.

Data Collection

- 30 – 45 min interviews were conducted in person or over the telephone using a semi-structured interview guide.
- Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

- Interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis.

FINDINGS

Definitions

- Each participant had a different definition of spirituality.
- Some ideas that participants had around spirituality were about religion, needing structure, *"an individualistic perspective on hope, faith, connectedness and community"* and a personal connection to a physical or non-physical being and emotional release.
- Examples of spiritual activities included: church, praying, mindfulness, music, being near the ocean and contemplation.

Theme #1: Beliefs

- Participants believed that their clients should define spirituality and their own definition should not get in the way.
- Some participants believed spirituality was a domain in TR.
- Participant 1 and 3 saw the spiritual, emotional and social domains all connected.
- Participant 1 described how spirituality is naturally a part of TR through the joy and hope it brings clients. She also believed that sometimes spirituality couldn't be planned:

"We can do all the writing in the world and write all the goals in the world but when a natural organic experience is happening around faith and spirituality its just happening right?"

Theme #2: Reasons and Motivations

- Religion was mentioned frequently as some clients were already part of a religion and wanted to participate in those activities.
- Spiritual activities facilitated peace for some clients.
- Spirituality was used as a way to cope with difficult situations. These situations included death, grief, war and transitioning to long term care:

"He doesn't want to be here. He wants to be home with his wife but she's unable to care for him any longer and this seems to be bringing him a bit of peace being here."

Theme #3: The Role of a Recreation Therapist

- Participants often connected their clients with some other professional, person or resource related to spirituality.
- Participants facilitated spiritual interventions. Religious activities were the most frequently mentioned.
- Participants also got to observe or "witness" clients during spiritual moments
- Spiritual conversations occurred during one to one conversations between participants and clients.

"...we do a lot of one on one individual stuff and people are having dialogues about... things that make them positive, things that give them hope, things that give them faith..."

Theme #4: Factors that Impact Spiritual Care within TR Service Delivery

- Clients were often private about spirituality.
- There were sometimes rules in place that prevented participants from asking about their clients religion or spiritual preferences.
- Participant 2 felt uncomfortable at times facilitating spiritual activities.
- Group spiritual activities were sometimes difficult to facilitate because the needs of the group weren't being met.

"Some residents will tell me it's none of my business... my faith is my faith and I practice what I practice, and... they're very strong with that."

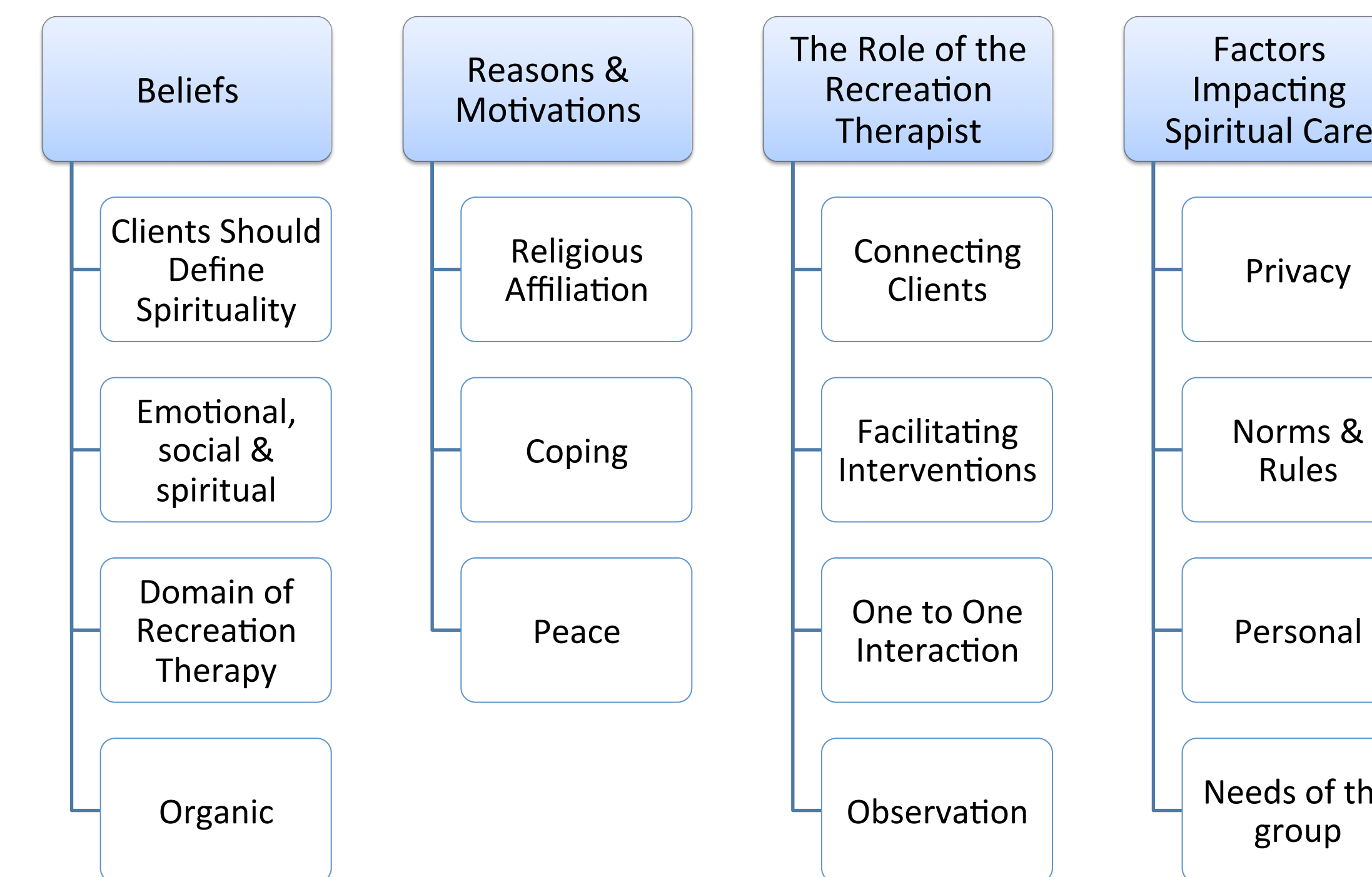


Figure 1: Themes and subthemes

DISCUSSION

- Findings from this study are generally consistent with previous literature on this topic.
- This study found that one reason clients participated in spiritual activities was because it helped them to cope with difficult situations in their lives. These findings are consistent with Heintzman's (2008) leisure spiritual coping model, where he said that when a person has a stressor in their life leisure spiritual behaviors and connections can be "mediating factors in the stress coping process" (p.65).
- Spiritual interventions that participants facilitated are consistent with the activities suggested by Anderson & Heyne (2012) especially around religious traditions.
- Spiritual activities can be hard to implement because of the rules of an organization. If an organization does not allow professionals to ask clients their religion then it makes it difficult to create programs and activities focused around spirituality.

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