

Handbook of Psychotherapy and Religious Diversity (2nd Ed.)

Richards P. S. & Bergin, A. E. (Editors). (2014). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

It is increasingly recognized that spirituality and religion are important aspects of human diversity. For many people, spirituality—typically manifested in the form of an individual's relationship with God—is more important in shaping one's beliefs and values than race, gender, class, or sexual orientation. The same can be said about religion, the shared cultural forum that typically mediates an individual's relationship with God or the transcendent.

One of the texts that played a role in fostering awareness of this reality is the first edition of this Handbook (Richards & Bergin, 2000). Indeed, Richards and Bergin have been leaders in introducing many important concepts into the academic literature including, for example, the notion of a theistic perspective (Richards & Bergin, 2005). Along with Brent Slife and others at Brigham Young University (BYU), these scholars have been at the forefront of widening understandings of diversity in professional discourse to include spirituality and religion.

The second edition follows the same general pattern as the first edition. The text begins with an overview of the religious diversity that exists in the world, with a particular emphasis on the United States and Canada. The majority of the book is devoted to discussing religious traditions that clinicians commonly encounter in North America. This discussion includes content on each tradition's history, distinctive beliefs and practices, and suggestions for working in a culturally sensitive manner with members of the tradition. This second edition has been extensively updated to reflect contemporary demographics, issues, and data.

This text is characterized by many strengths. Perhaps most importantly, the editors clearly understand that many people of faith are hesitant to seek professional assistance due to concerns that counselors lack sufficient levels of cultural competence regarding their spiritual beliefs and values. This is an issue of fundamental importance. If the beliefs and values of the clients are not respected, then the therapeutic relationship will likely be damaged. This text provides a lot of information to help ensure that damage doesn't occur.

Another strength is the extensive array of traditions covered. The groups discussed include Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Mainline Protestants, evangelical Christians, Pentecostals, Latter-day Saints, Seventh-day Adventists, Orthodox Jews, Conservative and Reformed Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists. In recognition of the fact that spirituality and

ethnicity are often intertwined, additional chapters focus on spirituality as commonly expressed among African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and American Indians. Variation within traditions is also discussed. For example, Sunism, Shiism, Wahabism, African Americans, and Sufism are all discussed in the chapter on Islam.

Generally speaking, the authors of the various chapters do a good job of relating the beliefs and values of various groups to counselors. Nevertheless, some room for improvement exists in this area. Some content is relatively deficit-based—as opposed to strengths-based—and risks reinforcing the negative stereotypes cultural outsiders often hold about people of faith. Similarly, beliefs and values are sometimes presented as seen through the lens of the dominant secular culture, rather than as people within the tradition would tend to self-describe.

Take, for instance, the discussion on home schooling in the chapter on working with evangelical Christians. Culturally sensitive practice with families of faith who home school is facilitated by understanding why such families make the sacrifice to prioritize home schooling. The chapter appropriately provides a rationale. However, the rationale for homeschooling is framed as “to keep children unstained by the carnal influences of the public school system” (p. 134). This framing is relatively rare among evangelical Christians whose concerns tend to center around the lack of respect for diversity in public forums (Smith, 1998; Smith, 2000).

In terms of a rationale for home schooling, the chapter might have mentioned the ridicule and bullying that Christian students often encounter in public schools at the hands of both their secular peers and instructors. Indeed, the chapter might have noted how public school officials have banned students from sharing religious viewpoints, prohibited religious publications, banned student religious clubs, and barred spiritual groups from meeting (Hodge, 2009). Homeschooling is naturally appealing to parents concerned about the disparate treatment their children encounter in public schools. Relating such concerns in a way that reflects common understandings among families of faith helps counselors understand and relate to clients in a culturally empathetic manner.

The degree of framing bias varies from issue to issue and chapter to chapter, and is likely contingent upon the author's degree of assimilation to the dominant secular culture. It is important to note that people of faith from minority subcultures are under-represented in psychology, and most other helping professions (Koenig, 2013). In addition, the currents of assimilation are strong and authors may not always be aware of views, perspectives, and events that are well-known within a given tradition. This may explain why the chapter on evangelical Christians states that James Dobson is the leader of Focus on the Family, even though he resigned as president in 2003, and has not been involved in the radio program since 2010. Nevertheless, the issue of framing is a dynamic of which readers should be aware.

Although this issue should be borne in mind while reading the text, it does not distract from the importance of this handbook. Although written by psychologists, the content has clear application to social workers, especially those in clinical practice. Indeed, this handbook will be of use to essentially all readers interested in working with people from different religious traditions in direct practice settings. ❖

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Counseling and Christianity: Five Approaches

Greggo, S. P., & Sisemore, T. A. (Eds.). (2012). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

The purpose of *Counseling & Christianity: Five Approaches* is to apply theories described by Johnson (2010) to help others learn how to engage in Christian counseling. There has been little information to help counselors integrate their own Christianity in the delivery of counseling. Therefore, the authors describe five approaches that include levels-of-explanation, integration, Christian psychology, transformational, and biblical-counseling for specific use with Christian clients.

The levels-of-explanation approach is said to be the most common approach used by Christians who engage in clinical practice, particularly in secular settings that involve third-party payers. For social workers,