

Spirituality and Coping

Some valuable insights may be derived from the recent work of Socha (1999) on spirituality and coping. Emphasizing the "human existential situation," Socha goes beyond religion to a broader spiritual scheme. (See the discussions of "religion" versus "spirituality" in several previous chapters.) He offers a holistic, growth-oriented view, in which a person recognizes

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the transitory nature of situations and acknowledges his or her own coping limits. Such awareness implies knowing when to define circumstances in terms of "sacredness"—a religious or secular notion of placing things in broader perspective. Belavich's (1995) work indicates what is done on a day-to-day basis; Socha's outlook suggests why, and introduces a different theoretical frame—a phenomenological approach that emphasizes how the individual perceives and explains the situation. This takes us back to the question of the meanings that precede the actions people take (another direction for research on coping and religion).

In other work relating to spirituality, Kennedy, Rosati, Spann, Neelon, and Rosati (n.d.), like Socha (1999), broaden the notion of coping from a focused pattern of responses to a broader approach based on making lifestyle changes. Working within a medically based program, these workers felt that their therapeutic procedures would constructively affect well-being and spirituality. Though they did not distinguish between religion-based and non-religion-based spiritualities, half of the participants in their program evidenced an increase in spirituality, and close to 100% reported an increase in their subjective sense of well-being. Positive and significant correlations were obtained among spirituality, well-being, and meaning. Distinguishing between faith-oriented and non-faith-oriented spiritualities should provide a substantive direction for further research, and may enable participants to utilize such avenues more effectively to make the desired lifestyle changes.

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