

CLARIFYING THE DISTINCTIONS AND CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION

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Based on a survey of a nationally representative sample of NACSW affiliated social work students in publicly funded gradate programs (N = 88), this study explores students' perceptions of the connections and distinctions between spirituality and religion. More specifically, using qualitative analysis of the content of interviews, we explore how spirituality and religion are defined and what, if any, relationship exists between these two constructs in the eyes of respondents. The results indicated that students define spirituality primarily in terms of belief in or connection with God or a Higher power. In contrast to spirituality, multiple themes were often used to define religion, with the most prominent being the practice of one's spirituality or faith. The vast majority of respondents reported that some type of relationship exists between spirituality and religion, with only 4% stating that no relationship exists between the two concepts.

THE RESURGENCE OF INTEREST IN SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION IN THE social sciences has spawned a diverse array of definitions (Canda, 1997; George, Larson, Koenig & McCullough, 2000; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Plante & Sherman, 2001). As observers have noted, the definitions are often inconsistent and even contradictory (Furman & Chandy, 1994; Zinnbauer, et al., 1997).

In short form, spirituality has been defined as "a complex, intrapsychic dimension of human development" (Derezotes, 1995, p. 1), "the relationship of the human person to something or someone who transcends themselves" (Bullis, 1996, p. 2), "devotion to the immaterial part of humanity and nature" (Barker, 1995, p. 363), "the human search for purpose and meaning of life experiences"

(Sheridan & Amato-von Hemert, 1999, p. 129), "a relationship to force greater than oneself" (Netting, Thibault & Ellor, 1990), and "the essence of the individual" (Carroll, 1997, p. 27), or "one's basic nature" (Carroll, 1998, p. 2).

A similarly diverse range of definitions has been associated with religion. For example, religion has been conceptualized as "the external definition of faith" (Joseph, 1988, p. 444), "a search for the significant in ways related to the sacred" (Pargament, 2002, p. 169), "an organized set of beliefs and practices of a faith community" (Furman & Chandy, 1994, p. 21), "believing" (Gotterer, 2001, p. 188), and the "acceptance of a particular set of beliefs and ethics" (Cascio, 1998, p. 524).

The contradictory nature of some of the conceptualizations is perhaps most clearly seen when the association between spirituality and religion is discussed. While generally spirituality and religion are widely defined as overlapping constructs, spirituality is often defined as encompassing religion (Canda, 1997). In other words, a person may be spiritual but not necessarily religious.

Conversely, others define religion as encompassing spirituality (Tan & Dong, 2001). Within this conceptualization, religion, whether in traditional or non-traditional forms, provides the supportive context in which spirituality can be developed (Hill & Pargament, 2003). Some scholars have tended to polarize spirituality and religion, viewing spirituality as "good" and religion as "bad," while others have tended to treat them as identical entities (Ai, 2002; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Pargament, 1999).

As Ai (2002, p. 112) has stated, "conceptual clarity is essential for social work education as well as for research," and by implication, practice. Without consensus regarding what terms signify, it is difficult to know what meanings individuals attribute to these terms (Zinnbauer, et al., 1997). In practice settings, for example, miscommunication can occur if the practitioner and the client use the same words but attach different meanings to them. While understandings may never be absolute, it is important to move toward greater degrees of conceptual clarity that approximate shared understandings.

The need for conceptual clarity is especially pressing in light of current developments in public, professional, educational and governmental spheres. Interest in spirituality among the general public is increasing (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999; Gallup & Jones,

2000), and many individuals want to have their spiritual beliefs and practices more overtly integrated into the clinical dialogue (Bart, 1998; Larimore, Parker & Crowther, 2002; Mathai & North, 2003; Rose, Westefeld & Ansley, 2001). The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), the organization that accredits most hospitals as well as many other mental health organizations in the United States, now recommends that a spiritual assessment be undertaken with clients in many settings (JCAHO, 2002). The JCAHO requirements find a parallel in the new "NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice" (National Association of Social Workers, 2001), which explicitly mentions the need for practitioners to exhibit competence in the areas of spirituality and religion.

These trends are also present in educational and governmental funding programs. The number of social work educational programs offering courses on spirituality and religion has increased from approximately 5 in 1991 to 50 in 2001 (Miller, 2001), reflecting increased interest in spirituality and religion among social work students (Canda & Furman, 1999; Sheridan & Amato-von Hemert, 1999). The National Institutes of Health (NIH), which recently released its first global "NIH Plan for Social Work Research" (National Institutes for Health, 2003), has formed a Working Group on Spirituality, Religion, and Health, and launched a number of research initiatives on spirituality and religion (Miller & Thoresen, 2003).

The increasing focus on spirituality and religion, in tandem with the lack of clarity surrounding definitions of spirituality and religion, has sparked calls for empirical investigation of the subject (Gallup & Jones, 2000; Gilbert, 2000; Zinnbauer, et al., 1997). Directly below we review the extant literature on this topic and discuss how this study builds upon, and adds to, current understandings.

Literature Review

A number of studies have been conducted with small samples, using approaches such as interviews or focus groups, in an attempt to better understand the meanings attached to spirituality and religion (Canda, 1988; Arnold, Avants, Margolin & Marcotte, 2002). For instance, in an early study, Canda (1988) explored how 18 social workers from diverse religious backgrounds understood spirituality. The perspectives represented included Atheist, Buddhist, Christian,

Existentialist, Jewish, and Shamanistic. Based in part upon these interviews, spirituality was defined as “the gestalt of the total process of human life and development, encompassing the biological, mental, social, and spiritual aspects” (Canda, 1988, pp. 43-44). The spiritual aspect was further defined as an “experience of a quality of sacredness and meaningfulness in self, other people, the non-human world, and the ground of our being (as conceived in theistic, non-theistic, or atheistic terms)” (Canda, 1988, p. 44).

Using a quantitative methodology, Derezotes (1995) examined levels of agreement with a series of definitions of spirituality and religion. The non-probability sample (N = 1,120) used in the study consisted of social work students, practitioners, and faculty located in Utah (n = 1,060), supplemented by a small sub-sample of faculty and students from a state university in Idaho (n = 60). Respondents were presented with definitions of spirituality and religion and asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a Likert response key.

Derezotes (1995) reported results for 7 spirituality definitions and 5 religion definitions. The definitions, for spirituality and religion respectively, and level of agreement for each definitional statement is summarized as follows. Spirituality: meaning in life (91%), purpose in life (86%), acceptance of self/world (79%), appreciation of the transcendent (71%), highest levels of well-being (66%), highest levels of consciousness (61%), and sense of idealism (49%). Religion: system of shared beliefs (85%), reverence for a supreme creator (77%), system of shared doctrines (74%), system of shared rituals (72%), and institutionalized form of worship (67%).

Canda and Furman (1999) used a similar approach in their study. The study was conducted using a stratified random sample of practitioners (N = 2,069) affiliated with the National Association of Social Work (NASW) (Canda & Furman, 1999). Respondents were presented with 16 primarily one-word descriptors, (e.g., Belief) and asked to select all the descriptors that best defined the terms spirituality, religion, and faith. Given that many respondents selected the same descriptor to describe two or more of the terms, the authors suggested focusing only upon those descriptors that were selected by over 50% of the respondents.

The descriptors that reached the 50% threshold for spirituality were: Meaning (85%), Personal (82%), Purpose (78%), Values (75%), Belief (72%), Personal relationship with a Higher power (72%), Ethics

(64%), and Meditation (61%). For religion, the descriptors were: Organization (78%), Ritual (77%), Belief (74%), Scripture (73%), Prayer (66%), Community (64%), Values (61%), Sacred texts (59%), and Morality (51%). For the term faith, however, only three descriptors were chosen by over half of the respondents: Belief (87%), Personal relationship with a Higher power (61%), and Personal (53%).

Furman, Benson, Grimwood, and Canda (2004) replicated this method in the United Kingdom. The sample used for this study consisted of a stratified random sample of social work practitioners (N = 789) affiliated with the British Association of Social Work (BASW). Although the rank order differed, with some minor divergences essentially the same descriptors were selected to describe spirituality, religion, and faith by practitioners in the US and the UK. Perhaps the most notable differences were that the descriptor "Personal relationship with a Higher power" did not reach the 50% threshold as a definition of spirituality and the descriptors "Prayer" and "Community" did not reach the 50% threshold for religion in the UK sample.

At least two studies have explored understandings of spirituality among members of the general public. Zinnbauer and associates (1997) explored definitions of spirituality and religion among several diverse groups in Pennsylvania and Ohio. The study's sample (N = 346) consisted of 11 groups chosen because the researchers believed that the groups would hold differing understandings of spirituality and religion. The groups included rural and urban churches, liberal and conservative congregations, faculty and students, and New Age and Christian college groups.

Respondents were asked to write their own definitions of spirituality and religion on a survey instrument, and their responses were analyzed and grouped into definitional categories. Spirituality was most often defined in experiential terms, such as having a relationship with God or a Higher power (36%), and personal terms, such as believing in God or a Higher power (34%). As was the case in the two studies above, a certain degree of overlap was apparent in the definitions ascribed to spirituality and religion, as religion was defined most frequently in personal terms, such as believing in God or a Higher power (22%). Religion was also defined in terms of organizational practices, such as performance of rituals or church membership, and thirdly, in terms of commitment to organizational beliefs (16%).

A second study exploring understandings of spirituality among the general public was conducted by the Gallup organization (Gallup & Jones, 2000). The sample consisted of a randomly selected national sample of adults ($N = 100$). Respondents were asked what the term "spirituality" meant to them. The responses were then analyzed, coded into distinct categories, and rank ordered. Frequencies were not provided for each category. The authors did state, however, that just under one-third of the responses made no mention of God or a higher authority, which implies that the first two categories (Belief in God/seeking to grow close to God, and Belief in a Higher power, something beyond oneself/sense of awe and mystery in the universe) accounted for approximately 70% of the responses.

The remaining definitions, which appear to account for just over 30% of the responses, can be summarized as follows: Inner peace/state of mind, Seeking to be a good person/lead a good life, Seeking the inner self/evolving into a whole person, Reach human potential, What was learned from upbringing/school/church/Bible, A mystical bond with other people, Sense of right and wrong, A calmness in my life, and Going to church and being a good person (Gallup & Jones, 2000).

These studies provide some understanding of how individuals define spirituality and religion. However, with the exception of the Gallup and Jones (2000) study, the insights are limited due to the lack of generalizability of the results. When local samples are used, the results may reflect geographically unique characteristics. Results in Utah, for example, may be dissimilar to results in other areas of the nation where Mormons are less prominent.

Generalizability is also an issue for the two studies based upon national samples of NASW and BASW members, although for different reasons. It is generally held that response rates must exceed 50% to generalize the results to the entire sampling frame (Babbie, 1998). Response rates for these two studies were, respectively, 26% (Canda & Furman, 1999) and 20% (Furman, et al., 2004). Consequently, caution is warranted regarding generalization. Individuals who have strong sentiments about spirituality and religion, for instance, may have been particularly motivated to respond.

Further, we are aware of no national study of helping professionals that has explored definitions of spirituality and religion in tandem with an exploration of how those two constructs are

related. Since the nature of the relationship between spirituality and religion has been a source of much discussion, particularly in the social work literature (Ai, 2002), it is important to understand what connection, if any, helping professionals see between these two entities.

Accordingly, this exploratory study examines definitions of spirituality and religion, and the relationship between these two constructs among a national sample of MSW students. Directly below we describe the methodology we used to conduct this exploration.

Method

In order to develop a more in-depth understanding of helping professionals' views, we elected to use a qualitative methodology. Qualitative methods are considered by many individuals to represent the most appropriate choice for new areas of inquiry, particularly those that seek to understand participants' understandings.

Quantitative approaches that use key word descriptors, for instance, require respondents to conform their understandings to pre-determined categories, which reflect the pre-existing beliefs, values, perceptions and theories of the researchers who designed the categories. Providing potential respondents with the opportunity to provide their own answers to the underlying questions researchers are attempting to explore yields data that mitigates these value effects. This does not mean that qualitative methods are free from the influence of researchers' values. The coding process commonly associated with many qualitative approaches is also informed by the values of those doing the coding. Rather, qualitative approaches are generally held to provide a closer approximation of respondents' realities (Lincoln & Guda, 2003).

In light of the increasing interest in spirituality and religion, we decided to survey social work students. Surveys have repeatedly shown that most current practitioners have received little or no training on spirituality and religion (Canda & Furman, 1999; Furman, et al., 2004; Sheridan & Amato-von Hemert, 1999). For instance, in their national survey of NASW affiliated direct practitioners (N = 2,069), Canda and Furman (1999) found that 73% of respondent practitioners had received essentially no training on spirituality and religion during their graduate education.

Students, however, may be more likely than practitioners to have received some training in spirituality and religion. In keeping with the growing interest in spirituality across the social work profession (Canda & Furman, 1999; Miller, 2001), curricula content devoted to spirituality appears to be increasing (Rice, 2002). Work conducted by Sheridan and Amato-von Hemert (1999) tends to support this supposition. They reported that among respondent faculty (N = 280), 42% reported receiving at least some training on religion/spirituality during their graduate education, among practitioners (N = 108), the percentage rose to 64, and among students (N = 208), 88% received at least some training on religion/spirituality. While it is impossible to make any definitive assessment about these differences given the nature of the samples, one way to interpret the findings is that successive cohorts of students are being exposed to increasing content on spirituality and religion. Consequently, in addition to representing the voice of a next generation of social workers, the present cohort of students may be better equipped educationally to address questions about spirituality and religion.

To obtain a national sample of students, the North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW) was contacted. NACSW has a national membership suggesting the results will not be unduly biased by regional characteristics. Only students currently enrolled in publicly funded, instead of faith-based, programs were selected for the study. This sampling procedure was followed to facilitate comparisons with NASW student perceptions of spirituality and religion, which were explored in another study currently in the review process.

A telephone survey methodology was used in conjunction with a systematic sampling design. Compared to mailed surveys, telephone surveys tend to foster more accurate responses and a higher response rate (Babbie, 1998). To ensure that as many students as possible had completed at least one semester of social work education, calls were placed in the spring semester. Eight call-backs were used to maximize the response rate.

Eighty-eight individuals agreed to complete the survey, 7 individuals declined to participate, and in a further 30 instances, no one was reached at the listed number. Thus, it is possible to calculate at least two response rates. If it is assumed that the instances in which no one was reached represent potential respondents, then

the response rate is 70% (88/125). Conversely, if it is assumed that the instances where no one was reached did not represent potential respondents (e.g., student moved, wrong number, etc.), then the response rate is 93% (88/95). Both rates, however, are well above the 50% rate widely accepted as adequate for analysis and generalization to the wider population (Babbie, 1998).

Table 1 lists the demographic characteristics of the sample. Analysis was conducted to explore the extent to which the NACSW sample differed from the NASW sample. No significant differences emerged between the two samples in age, gender, marital status, race, number of semesters in social work education, or length of time in the social work profession. Significant differences did emerge, however, with religious demographics. The NACSW sample was significantly more Protestant than the NASW sample (92% vs. 35%; $\chi^2 = 86.36$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$). Among those who self-identified as Protestants, the NACSW sample was comprised of significantly more evangelical Christians (60% vs. 8%, $\chi^2 = 39.86$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$).

Table 1: Sample Characteristics (N= 88)

Characteristic	N	Missing	%	Mean	SD	Median	Min	Max
Age	85	3		33.36	9.50	30.0	22	58
Gender	88							
Female	73		83.0					
Male	15		17.0					
Marital Status	87	1						
Single	37		42.0					
Married	39		44.3					
Widowed	1		1.0					
Separated	2		2.3					
Divorced	8		9.1					
Partnered	0		0.0					
Race	87	1						
White	68		77.3					
Black	4		4.5					
Hispanic	4		4.5					
Asian	6		6.8					
Native American	2		2.3					
Other	3		3.4					
# of semesters of swk ed	88	0		4.04	1.90	4.0	1	12
# of years in social work	88	0	4.84	4.84	5.31	3.0	0	30

Characteristic	N	Miss- ing	%	Mean	SD	Me- dian	Min	Max
Faith		2						
Protestant		1						
Liberal	86							
Mainline	79		89.8					
Evangelical	7		8.0					
Other	17		19.3					
Catholic	53		60.3					
Liberal	1		1.1					
Moderate	5		5.7					
Traditional	0		0.0					
Other	1		1.1					
Jewish	4		4.5					
Reform	1		1.1					
Conservative	0		0.0					
Orthodox	0		0.0					
Other	1		1.1					
Other type of faith	1		1.1					

In addition to demographic items, the survey instrument incorporated three qualitative questions designed to tap understandings of spirituality, religion and the connection between these two constructs. More specifically, individuals were asked “how would you define spirituality?” “how would you define religion?” and “what, if any, relationship do you see between spirituality and religion?”

Data analysis of the three dependent variables was based on a grounded theory approach, in which the data was allowed to drive the construction of classification methodologies (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). The coding instruments used in this study were developed, refined, and tested in an earlier study using the NASW sample. One coding instrument was developed to classify definitions of spirituality. Two coding instruments were developed to classify definitions of religion (one to assess the type of definition and the other to assess the positive or negative valence of the definition). Two coding instruments were also developed to classify the relationship between spirituality and religion (one to assess the type and one to assess the strength of the relationship).

In keeping with the recommendations of Tinsley and Weiss (2000), Cohen’s kappa (Cohen, 1960) was used to assess interrater reliability. This statistic controls for the level of agreement that occurs by chance. A value of 0 indicates a level of agreement that would be expected based upon chance alone, while a value of 1 indicates perfect agreement. Coefficients from .61-.80 represent good

levels of agreement and coefficients above .80 represent excellent levels of agreement between researchers (Landis & Koch, 1977). The kappa coefficient for the definitions of spirituality instrument was .91 ($p < .001$). The kappa coefficients for the two religion items were, respectively, .78 ($p < .001$) and .88 ($p < .001$). The kappa coefficients for the two items on the nature of the relationship between spirituality and religion were, respectively, .78 ($p < .001$) and .82 ($p < .001$).

The kappa values indicate that the results exhibit a high degree of reliability. Instances of disagreement were discussed until agreement was reached regarding the appropriate classification of the response in question. The results of this process are discussed below.

Results

In this section, we report the results for the spirituality and religion definitions questions. We also report the findings for the item that explores the nature of the relationship between spirituality and religion as well as significant differences that emerged between NACSW and NASW respondents regarding the responses to these three items. We begin with the results for the spirituality item.

Definitions of Spirituality

Analysis of the responses to the question “how would you define spirituality?” produced 9 relatively distinct categories. These categories appear in Table 2, along with the frequency with which they were used to define spirituality.

Table 2: Definitions of Spirituality (N = 88)

Type of Relationship	Percentage (%)
Belief in/connection with God	57
Belief in/connection with a Higher power	16
Personally constructed	12
Something beyond the individual	8
Application of religion	2
Connection with others/world	1
Something we don't understand	1
Don't know/no answer	1
Unclassifiable	1

By far the most prominent definition used to define spirituality was "Belief in/connection with God." Responses were included in this category if they explicitly mentioned God/Jesus/Holy Spirit, etc. As the representative examples cited below suggest, "belief/connection" is used broadly and includes an experiential, existential component. Typical responses in this category included "the essence of the human soul which is comprised of personal experience and relationship with God," "living a life controlled by the Holy Spirit," "A relationship with Jesus," and "Seeking obedience and surrender to God as the basis for one's actions."

The second most prominent category to emerge was "Belief in/connection with a Higher power." Responses were included in this category if they overtly mentioned the concept of a higher or greater power. Typical responses included "a person's identification with a Higher power," "a unique, very personal, relationship with a high being," and "your relationship with a higher being and the world around you." As was the case with the "Belief in/connection with God" category, belief/connection was used to signify any type of cognitive or affective connection with a Higher power.

The third largest category to emerge was "Personally constructed." Inclusion in this category was marked by individualistic, personally oriented definitions that made no reference to the transcendent. Representative answers included "where one looks for meaning in life," "a person's seeking something that will provide inner peace," and "man's search for meaning."

The remaining categories, "Application of religion," "Connection with others/world," "Something we don't understand," "Don't know/no answer," and "Unclassifiable" each accounted for less than 2% of the responses. While the responses to the spirituality question fell into relatively discrete categories, classifying definitions of religion was a more complex task.

Definitions of Religion

Respondents' definitions of religion failed to fit into relatively discrete categories. Rather, analysis of the responses revealed the existence of multiple categories or themes. A description of these categories or themes is included in the discussion below.

While 58% of respondents used one theme to define religion, the remaining individuals used two and sometimes three themes to define religion. Analysis indicated that a total of 12 themes were

used to define religion, many of which were identical to those used to define spirituality. Table 3 reports the 12 themes along with the frequency with which they were used. Percentages do not add up to 100% since, as noted above, respondents often used more than one theme to define religion. Thus, the percentages indicate the frequency with which each theme was used to define religion.

Table 3: Definitions of Religion (N = 88)

Theme or Category	Percentage (%)
Practice of spirituality / faith (e.g., rituals, worship)	36
Organized beliefs or doctrines	25
Belief in / connection with God	25
Humanly constructed	17
Community	11
Belief in / connection with a Higher power	10
Institution	7
Culture / tradition	4
Personally constructed	3
Unclassifiable	2
Guidance—particularly for living	1
Don't know / no answer	0

Analysis revealed that the theme used most often to define religion was “Practice of spirituality / faith.” The central organizing factor of this category was practice or doing, often through such vehicles as rituals or worship. Responses that were representative of this theme include, “the practice of spiritual beliefs,” “the means and method of practicing my spirituality,” and “the structure through which people practice their spirituality.”

The second most frequently used theme was “Organized beliefs / doctrines.” Responses were included in this category if they referenced organized or structured beliefs or belief systems, such as doctrines. Typical responses include “beliefs that are organized [based upon] one’s spirituality,” “a specific set of beliefs one subscribes to because of [their] faith,” and “the means and method of practicing my spirituality.”

Third was “Belief in / connection with God” (described in the preceding section), followed by “Humanly constructed.” Responses were included in the “Humanly constructed” category if they defined religion in terms of being man-made or humanly constructed in some form. Typical responses included, “man made thoughts, structures, and laws to follow,” and “man’s way of finding truth.”

“Community” was a theme that appeared in 11% of definitions. To be included in this category, responses had to reference community, a group of people, etc. Illustrative responses include “the organized actions of a group of people,” “the community in which spirituality is practiced,” the “fellowship of other believers.” The remaining themes—Institution, Culture/tradition, Personally constructed, and Unclassifiable—each appeared in less than 10% of definitions.

Analysis was also conducted regarding the valence of the definitions. While definitions of spirituality were uniformly positive, this was not the case with definitions of religion. Close to 6% of the definitions of religion were assessed to be negative in character. Demonstrative responses include, “Ritualistic, bureaucratic organized view of spirituality,” and “more legalistic practices that people do when they think it’s spirituality.”

The relationship between spirituality and religion

Analysis of the question “what, if any, relationship do you see between spirituality and religion?” revealed seven relatively distinct categories. Table 4 lists the categories and the frequency with which the responses occurred.

Table 4: Relationship between Spirituality and Religion (N = 88)

Type of Relationship	Percentage (%)
A relationship exists between spirituality and religion	60
Spirituality and religion can be related, but are not necessarily related	26
No relationship exists between spirituality and religion	4
Don’t know/no answer	3
Unclassifiable	2
Spirituality and religion are identical	2
Spirituality is entity x, religion is entity y—relationship is unknown	1

The majority of respondents reported that a relationship exists between spirituality and religion. In order to be included in this category, responses had to indicate that some type of relationship existed between spirituality and religion. Examples include “there is a relationship because practice is important,” and “a strong relationship because religion can be a way to express spirituality and vice versa.” No attempt, however, was made in the study to determine the strength of the relationship.

The second most frequent type of response was the view that spirituality and religion can be related, but are not necessarily related. To be included in this category, responses had to qualify the relationship between spirituality and religion so that one could be distinct from the other. Examples include “there can be a strong relationship but [there] doesn’t necessarily have to be one,” “Religion often brings one to a realization of spirituality,” and “at best [spirituality and religion] would be integrated, at worst, totally separate.”

The last five categories each accounted for less than five percent of the responses. Although most of these categories are fairly self-explanatory, the last category—“Spirituality is entity x, religion is entity y—relationship unknown”—may need some explanation. Responses were placed in this category if they indicated that religion referred to an entity x while spirituality referred to a different entity y, and no explicit statement was made connecting the two different entities. An example is “religion is man-made, spirituality is according to the Spirit.”

Analysis revealed that, in many cases, the responses could be grouped along a continuum. At one end of the continuum no relationship exists between spirituality and religion while at the other end they are understood to be identical. Close to one third (32%) of responses could be classified in this manner. On a 7-point continuum ranging from no relationship to identical relationship, these responses broke down as follows: no relationship (14%), minimal relationship (4%), some relationship (11%), a relationship (11%), strong relationship (25%), very strong relationship (29%) and identical relationship (7%).

Comparison between NACSW and NASW

Analysis was conducted to see if significant differences existed between NACSW and NASW respondents regarding the results discussed above. Significant differences arose regarding definitions of spirituality ($\chi^2 = 77.80$, $df = 8$, $p < .001$), with NACSW respondents more likely to define spirituality in terms of “Belief in/connection with God” (57% vs. 13%) while NASW respondents were more likely to define spirituality in terms of the following categories: Belief in/connection with a Higher power (23% vs. 16%), Personally constructed (33% vs. 12%) and Don’t know/no answer (9% vs. 1%).

Significant differences also emerged regarding how religion was defined. Relative to the NASW respondents, NACSW respondents were significantly more likely to use the following themes to define religion: Practice of spirituality / faith (36% vs. 23%, $\chi^2 = 5.88$, $df = 1$, $p = .015$), Belief in / connection with God (26% vs. 12%, $\chi^2 = 10.18$, $df = 1$, $p = .001$), and Humanly constructed (17% vs. 7%, $\chi^2 = 9.13$, $df = 1$, $p = .003$). Conversely, NASW respondents were significantly more likely to use the themes: Personally constructed (13% vs. 3%, $\chi^2 = 6.68$, $df = 1$, $p = .010$), and Don't know / no answer (5% vs. 0%, $\chi^2 = 4.84$, $df = 1$, $p = .028$). Although more research is required on the correlates that are associated with spirituality and religion, these differences may reflect differing religious demographics between the NACSW and the NASW samples. No significant differences occurred regarding the use of the following themes: Organized beliefs or doctrines, Community, Belief in / connection with a Higher power, Institution, Culture / tradition, Unclassifiable, and Guidance.

No significant differences emerged regarding valence, with both samples reporting roughly similarly negative views of religion. Likewise, no significant differences existed regarding the categories used to assess the relationship between spirituality and religion. In other words, both the NACSW and the NASW respondents held similar views on the relationship between spirituality and religion.

Discussion

This study contributes to the development of a more nuanced understanding of spirituality and religion as well as the distinctions and connections between the two concepts. This understanding may help social workers be more effective in their practice with clients. The results produced a number of broadly based themes that can be summarized as follows. Spirituality was defined primarily in terms of belief in / connection with God or a Higher power. The term "belief / connection" should be understood broadly, including not just mental assent, but also existential connection or experiential relationship with a transcendent entity.

Consistent with other research (Canda & Furman, 1999; Furman, et al., 2004; Zinnbauer, et al., 1997), the categories used to define spirituality were often used to define religion as well, sug-

gesting a degree of overlap between the two constructs. However, while the definitions of spirituality tended to fit into discrete categories based on our qualitative analysis, many respondents used a number of themes to describe religion. Three themes predominated in the definitions of religion: Organized beliefs or doctrines, Belief in/connection with God, and particularly, Practice of spirituality/faith.

A number of the themes used to define religion implicitly overlap, which likely accounts for the use of multiple themes to define religion. For example, in order to develop organized beliefs or doctrines, some type of community of people or institution must exist to conduct the organizing. Organized beliefs typically address spiritual issues, such as one's belief in God or experience of the transcendent. Similarly, practicing one's spirituality or the teachings of one's faith is typically done in some type of community or institutional setting. Thus, at the risk of oversimplifying, spirituality was understood in terms of some type of belief/connection with a transcendent entity while religion was seen as a communal setting in which beliefs about this entity were organized and one's spirituality was practiced.

In keeping with this summarization, the overwhelming majority of respondents reported that some type of relationship exists between spirituality and religion, although roughly a quarter of respondents took the time to qualify the relationship, noting instances occur in which spirituality and religion are not related. Only 4% indicated that no relationship exists between spirituality and religion.

Although these broad patterns emerged from our analysis, it is important to note that significant diversity appeared in the definitions as well. Put differently, counterparts emerged for many of the definitions and conceptualizations discussed in the introduction. The findings in this study suggest that the numerous definitions and conceptualizations that have appeared in the literature likely reflect a diversity of views among social workers and other social scientists regarding spirituality and religion.

Organizational affiliation (i.e., NACSW or NASW status) appeared to influence, at least to some extent, both definitions of spirituality and religion. These differences may be due to higher levels of Protestant and evangelical affiliation among NACSW respondents, which suggests that one's faith tradition may affect

how one defines spirituality and religion. Interestingly, no difference emerged regarding perceptions of the relationship between spirituality and religion. In other words, both NACSW and NASW samples held similar views on the nature of the relationship between spirituality and religion.

The findings and subsequent discussion should be viewed within the parameters of the study's limitations. Perhaps the primary limitation is generalizability. While the results are likely representative of NACSW graduate students attending publicly funded programs, the results cannot be generalized to all social workers, all NACSW members, all NACSW students, or even all NACSW graduate students.

Further research is needed among these latter groups as well as the general population to better understand the meaning of spirituality, religion and the interconnections between the two concepts. While this paper builds and expands upon a small but growing body of work on the topic, more work is needed. As social workers seek to integrate spirituality and religion into their professional spheres, it is important to understand what these terms mean to all pertinent parties engaged in the helping process. ❖

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