



Spiritual Self-Care: An exploration of how spirituality shapes holistic self-care practice

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INTRODUCTION

Recent literature highlights the importance of tending holistically to the body, the mind, and the spirit as a means of cultivating good health and wellbeing (Chan et al, 2014; Ho, Sing, & Wong, 2016; Maté, 2004; Northrup, 2016; Rankin, 2013). Outside of traditional spiritual self-care practices, such as prayer, there can be ambiguity about what spirituality means and how individuals can practice spiritual self-care. Since an increasing number of Canadians are reportedly identifying as spiritual rather than religious, it seems pertinent to explore the ways individuals uniquely understand spirituality and practice spiritual self-care (Carlson, 2012).

This inquiry explores the ways individuals uniquely understand spirituality and practice spiritual self-care as part of a holistic approach to health and wellbeing. The two specific questions guiding this inquiry were as follows: **1) What is the meaning of spirituality for those who practice holistic self-care? 2) How is this understanding of spirituality incorporated into a spiritual self-care practice?** This research aims to expand conceptions of spirituality and enhance motivation for engaging in spiritual self-care practices.

TERMINOLOGY & KEY FACTORS

Current literature serves to mitigate ambiguity by establishing a common understanding of terminology. **Holistic self-care** is defined as an individual's personalized, mindful effort to tend to the multifaceted dimensions of their humanness.

Spirituality is defined as a sensing deep connection to self, others, and/or a higher power or nature. It is also related to a sense of meaning in life that transcends beyond daily life. **Spiritual self-care practices** are defined as the evolving and intentional integration of spiritually informed practices to promote personal health and wellbeing. Four factors that appear to influence an individual's ability to engage in spiritual self-care practices: **spiritual intelligence, spiritual self-agency, motivation, and compassion.**

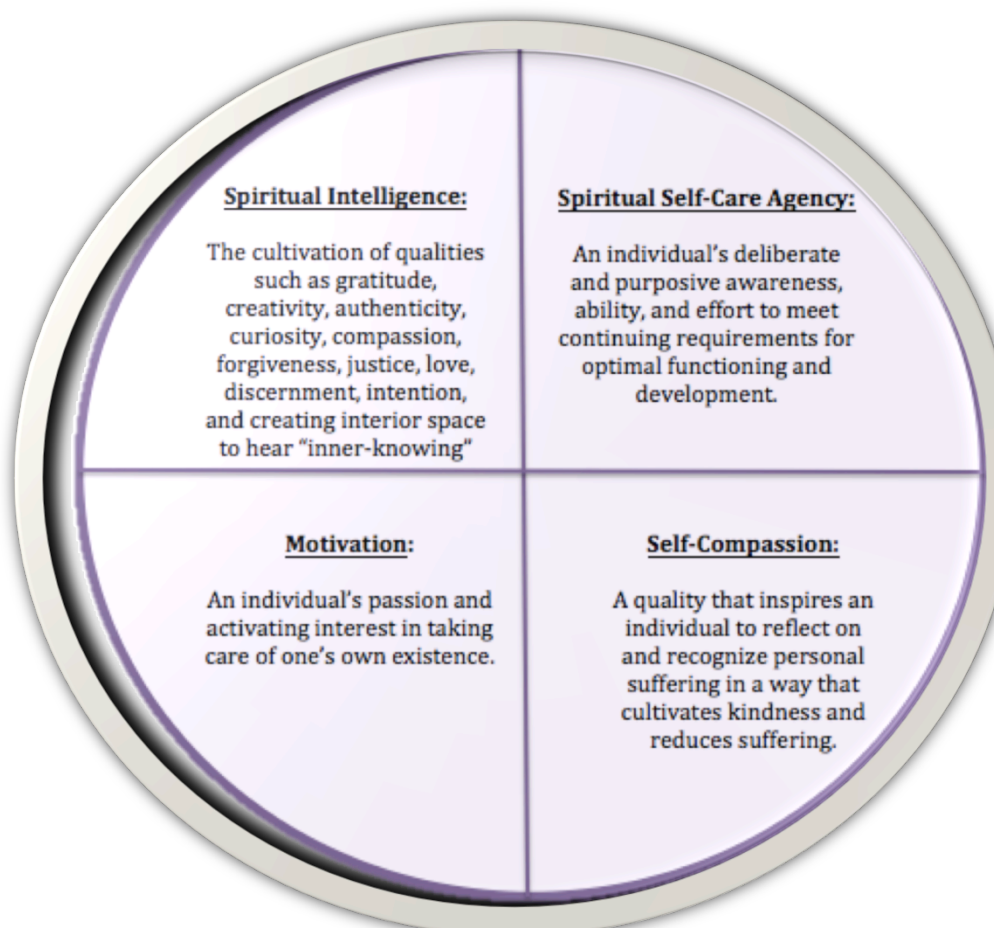


Figure 1. Four Influential Factors that impact an individual's ability to engage in spiritual self-care practices.

METHOD

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative research methodology, was selected to explore this inquiry into spiritual self-care practices. This research lens invites participants to reflect on, make meaning of, and articulate personal lived experiences of spirituality and spiritual self-care practices (Smith, Flower, & Larkin, 2009). The researcher's role is to make meaning of an individual's meaning-making of the particular life experience of each participant. Four female participants, all 18+ years of age, and all self-reporting the active engagement of holistic and spiritual self-care practices were recruited for one 60-90minute semi-structured interview. Interviews were transcribed for data analysis and interpretation. Yardley's (2000) Four principles for assessing validity were utilized and an ethics review was conducted and approved.



Health rests on three pillars: body, psyche, and spiritual connection.

To ignore any of them is to invite imbalance and dis-ease
- Dr. Gabor Maté

FINDINGS

Each participant reflected on their unique conceptions of spirituality and described their personalized spiritual self-care practices. One participant conceived of spiritual self-care practices as a means of **'retreating to transform'**, another found **'pause in the wilderness'**, the third described her practices as building **'mycelial architecture'**, and the final participant articulated the ways her spiritual self-care practice enabled her to find **'emergence through emergencies'**.

After analyzing each participant's experience with spiritual self-care practices, commonalities were noted, and nine overarching themes emerged from the data analysis. The reported **pre-requisites to spiritual self-care** included **childhood exposure to spirituality, creating space for practice, finding effective mentors, and reducing barriers to practice.** The described **unique features of spiritual self-care** included **recognition of this practice being in a perpetual state of fluidity and evolution, as well as having a mycelial, or deeply interwoven, quality.** The data **suggests the impact of spiritual self-care practice** includes **generating a sense of groundedness and clarity, an ability to serve the self and others well, the cultivation of a humble posture of offering, as well as generating the ability to develop trust and endure suffering.**

Overarching Themes	
Pre-Requisites to Spiritual Self-Care	Childhood exposure to a spiritual framework
	Carving space for practice
	The importance of mentors
Unique Features of Spiritual Self-Care	Mitigating barriers to practice
	The nature of an evolving practice
	The mycelial essence of spiritual practice
The Impact of Spiritual Self-Care Practice	Generating groundedness and clarity
	Serving the self and others well
	The cultivation of a spiritual posture of offering
	The growing audacity to trust and endure suffering

Figure 2. Overarching themes emerging from the data analysis

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

The findings in this inquiry are an extension of the current literature's call for individuals to both recognize a personalized sense of spirituality and practice spiritual self-care as a means of cultivating holistic, integrated health and wellbeing. The findings also support the importance of integrating discussions about spirituality and spiritual self-care practices into the therapeutic setting **for clients and practitioners** (Johnson, 2013; Koltko-Rivera, 2006; Pargament, 2007; Post & Wade, 2009; Sperry, 2016). The findings suggest that spirituality supports an individual's response to the struggles inherent in life by serving as **a distinct resource for living** and by **making the implicit explicit.**

Implications for holistic self-care practitioners & for psychotherapists: ~Spiritual self-care serves to support an individual's response to the struggles inherent in life~	
A resource for living	Spirituality serves as a source of hope, inspiration, and strategy to respond to life's challenges and endure (and even transcend) suffering.
Making the implicit explicit	Spirituality is often an internalized, implicit dimension of an individual's life. Creating space for sacred dialogue helps create awareness and insight into practical ways to consciously integrate spirituality into holistic self-care to cultivate health and wellbeing.

Figure 3. Implications for practitioners and psychotherapists

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