THE IMPACT OF THE EXPLICIT INTEGRATION OF ISLAM IN COUNSELING: IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT THEORY

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of the inclusion of Islam in counseling, on the perceptions of a sample of Jordanian college students (n = 290). This article employed an analogue format that compared three counselor descriptions: one that explicitly included religion in counseling; one that explicitly did not include religion in counseling; and a control condition in which no statement about religion was made. Planned comparisons found that the participants viewed the clinician who explicitly did not include religion as being less socially attractive and less trustworthy. These results offer support for Rosenbaum’s Repulsion Hypothesis within the theoretical framework of Interpersonal Relationship Development.

Keywords: Counselor preferences, Islam, Repulsion Hypothesis.

There are two primary manners in which religion can be integrated into the clinical practice of psychotherapy and the distinction can be made between implicit and explicit approaches. An implicit approach focuses on the clinician’s values. An example of this could be a psychologist who is a Christian, bringing his or her value of agape into the session. The clinician’s own embracing of this value could lead him or her to show more compassion toward clients (Priester, Khalili, & Eluvathingal, 2008).

Explicit approaches to the integration of religion and counseling include religion as an active force in the helping process. Two lines of research have evolved related to this explicit approach: client preferences for explicitly religious clinicians and the impact of explicitly including religion in counseling on clinical outcomes.

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There is a considerable amount of research that explores the influence of pre-therapy information about the clinician on client perceptions of the clinician. In a typical analogue study assessing the influence of pre-therapy information, information about a mock counselor is given to research participants who rate the clinician on perceived attributes or their anticipated counseling experience with this clinician. Half of the participants would be given a description that identifies the clinician as being religious. The other half receives information that describes the counselor as being secular.

This line of research has demonstrated contradictory results regarding the influence of information about a clinician’s religious identity on client perceptions; still, a few cautious summary statements are warranted. It seems that degree of religiosity is a significant potential moderator. Highly religious Jews, Mormons, Protestants, and Roman Catholics typically prefer clinicians with similar religious values (Worthington, Kurusu, McCullough & Sandage, 1996). Individuals in the western culture with low levels of religiosity do not differ in their preferences for a Christian versus non-Christian clinician (Keating & Fretz, 1990). Christians rate all counselors, regardless of being identified as religious or not, more favorably than do agnostic participants (Godwin & Crouch, 1989). The content of what may be disclosed by the client can be altered by the explicit religious identification of the clinician. For individuals with low to moderate levels of religiosity, the participants disclose less intimate material to explicitly identified religious counselors, when compared to disclosures to counselors who are not explicitly identified as religious. On the other hand highly religious Christian participants chose more intimate topics to disclose to the religiously identified clinician (Wyatt & Johnson, 1990).

**Methodological Limitations**

There are numerous methodological flaws in some of the research that addresses this topic. Some of the studies fail to stand up to acceptable standards of analogue research. For example, one study (Lewis & Epperson, 1991) used undergraduate students reading a newspaper advertisement for a counseling clinic that is described as either being feminist or Christian in its orientation. Another limitation is that research examining