

2022

HARM IN THE BIOPSYCHOSOCIAL-SPIRITUAL MODEL: HONORING NONRELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES

Helen Dempsey-Henofer MBA, MSW, LCSW, LISW-CP

The bottom right corner of the slide features two overlapping geometric shapes. The first is a teal-colored trapezoid, and the second is a darker purple trapezoid that overlaps the top right corner of the teal one.



HELEN DEMPSEY-HENOFLER
COLLABORATIVE COUNSELING

2022

Introduction

Helen Dempsey-Henofler MBA, MSW, LCSW, LISW-CP

- Therapist in Private Practice
- Consulting Services
- Clinical Supervision

Member of:

- Association for Contextual Behavioral Science
- Secular Therapy Project



Helen



HELEN DEMPSEY-HENOFLER
COLLABORATIVE COUNSELING

2022

Today's Agenda

- Working competently with nonreligious experiences
- Reconsidering the biopsychosocial-spiritual model of assessment
- Caring for the clinician through values & worldview conflicts
- Considering systems in advocacy and allyship

Opening Exercise

01

Think of a time where you didn't belong

02

How does that feel in your body?

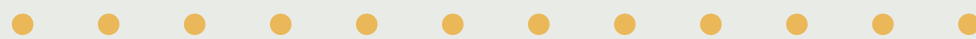
03

What impact does that have on getting your needs met?

Intention-Setting

To be open to ideas and experiences that inform the ability to practice with integrity

How are you feeling?



HONORING NONRELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES:

INCLUSION AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Honoring nonreligious experiences: inclusion & cultural competence



Let's get acquainted!

Nonreligious Americans

- 29% of Americans religious unaffiliated

(Pew Research Center, 2021)

- Diverse descriptions of nonreligious identity (atheist, agnostic, humanist...)

- Atheist-identified largest subset

(Dempsey-Henofer, 2019; Frazer, El-Shafei & Gill, 2020)

- 14.3% raised by nonreligious parents
- 14.3% raised with strict religious expectations
 - Higher risk of depression and loneliness for people without family support

(Frazer et al. 2020)

Honoring nonreligious experiences: inclusion & cultural competence



Challenges faced by Nonreligious Americans:

- General distrust/discrimination due to association between religion and morality

(Thiel & Robinson, 2015)

- Microaggressions commonly reported:
 - Pressure to pretend to be religious
 - Assumed to not know right from wrong (Frazer et al, 2020)
- Status as an "invisible minority" compounds isolation (Dempsey-Henofer, 2019)
- Mental health disparities associated with
 - Isolation & loneliness (Frazer et al, 2020)

"I was told by my counselor at a state-run mental health office that my problems were due to leaving church, and I needed to go back to church."

FEMALE, UTAH

PARTICIPANT IN U.S. SECULAR SURVEY

(FRAZER ET AL, 2020)



"I am terrified for my children if their daycare teachers find out we are an atheist family. I am scared that they will no longer receive equal or adequate care."

FEMALE, MICHIGAN

PARTICIPANT IN U.S. SECULAR SURVEY

(FRAZER ET AL, 2020)

"There is a privilege that religion has in this society. This means that any religious interaction is deemed as charitable or beneficial. The corollary is that any rejection of religion is deemed as rude or crass. This puts atheists in a sensitive spot when it comes to dealing with these (end-of-life) topics."

MALE, VIRGINIA

PARTICIPANT IN SURVEY ON NONRELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES
ON END-OF-LIFE CARE (DEMPSEY-HENOFER, 2019)

"It has been my experience that during significant life events, religious people often put more pressure on the nonreligious to embrace religion. It can feel predatory."

FEMALE, NEBRASKA

PARTICIPANT IN SURVEY ON NONRELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES
ON END-OF-LIFE CARE (DEMPSEY-HENOFER, 2019)

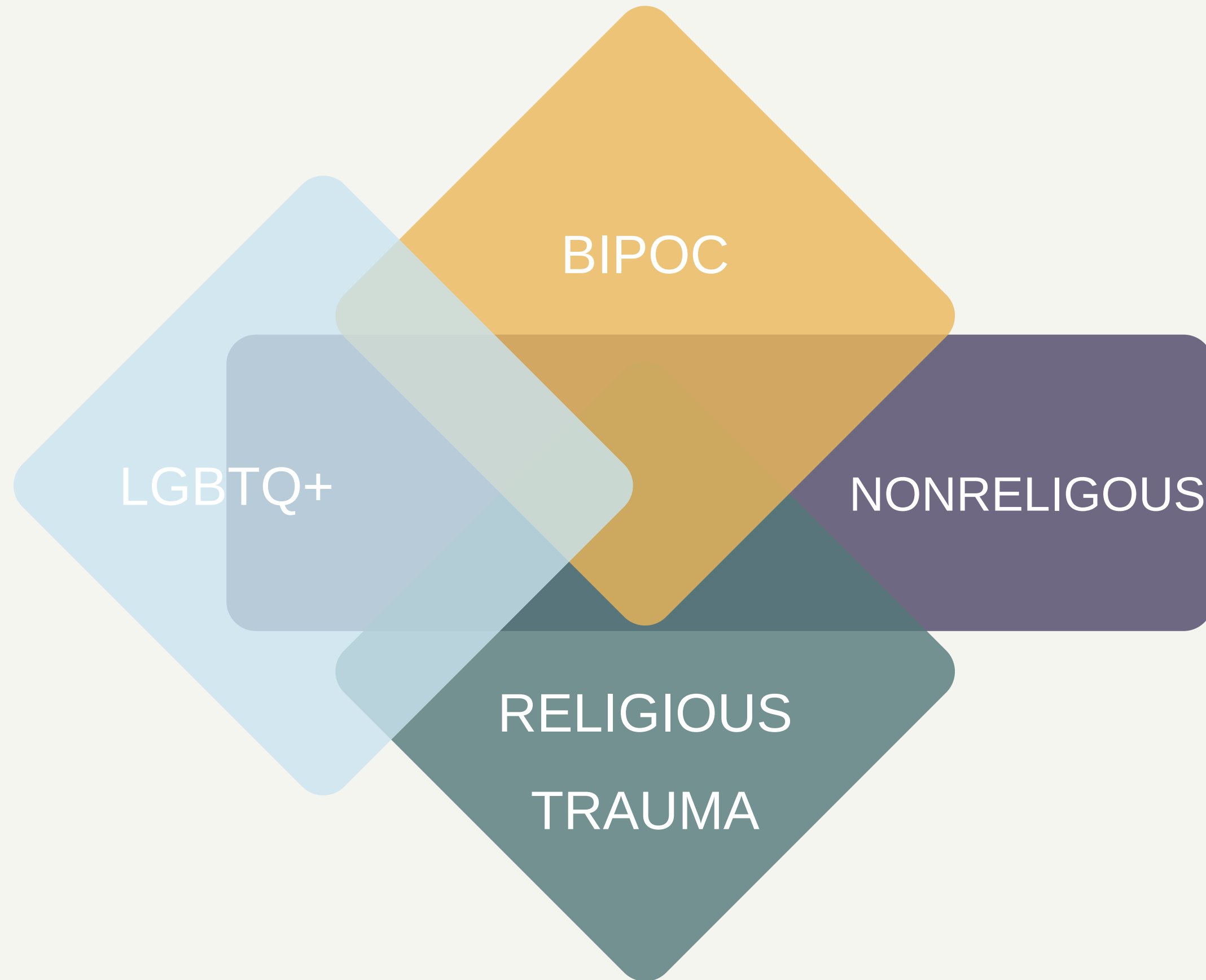
"Going through infertility and IVF as an atheist was heart wrenching. People said the cruelest things about how it was God's plan, and I was being punished."

FEMALE, KANSAS

PARTICIPANT IN U.S. SECULAR SURVEY

(FRAZER ET AL, 2020)

Honoring nonreligious experiences: inclusion & cultural competence



Intersectionality

Resources

BIPOC

- Black Non-Believers

Religious Trauma

- Recovering From Religion

LGBTQ+ specific

- ????

"I had a Black supervisor I really liked who casually say she believed atheists lacked morals and good sense in front of me and my coworker/friend (who is Christian).... It was the first time I faced something like that at work, but it's even harder to deal with Black folks in the community who can't fathom that there are other Black people who don't subscribe to Christianity. If she knew I was a nonbeliever, I know she would have treated me poorly and try to change me."

FEMALE, MARYLAND

PARTICIPANT IN U.S. SECULAR SURVEY

(FRAZIER ET AL, 2020)

"I experience discrimination in the form of silencing. I'm a black, ex-Muslim, immigrant woman. So I face a layered complex form of discrimination."

FEMALE, DC

PARTICIPANT IN U.S. SECULAR SURVEY
(FRAZIER ET AL, 2020)

"Oftentimes my bisexuality is lumped in as being the reason I am atheist, so that I can 'continue to live in sin without facing consequences.' This makes no sense to me and I can fairly easily shrug it off, but it's so disheartening to know how comfortable some people are with degrading who a person loves."

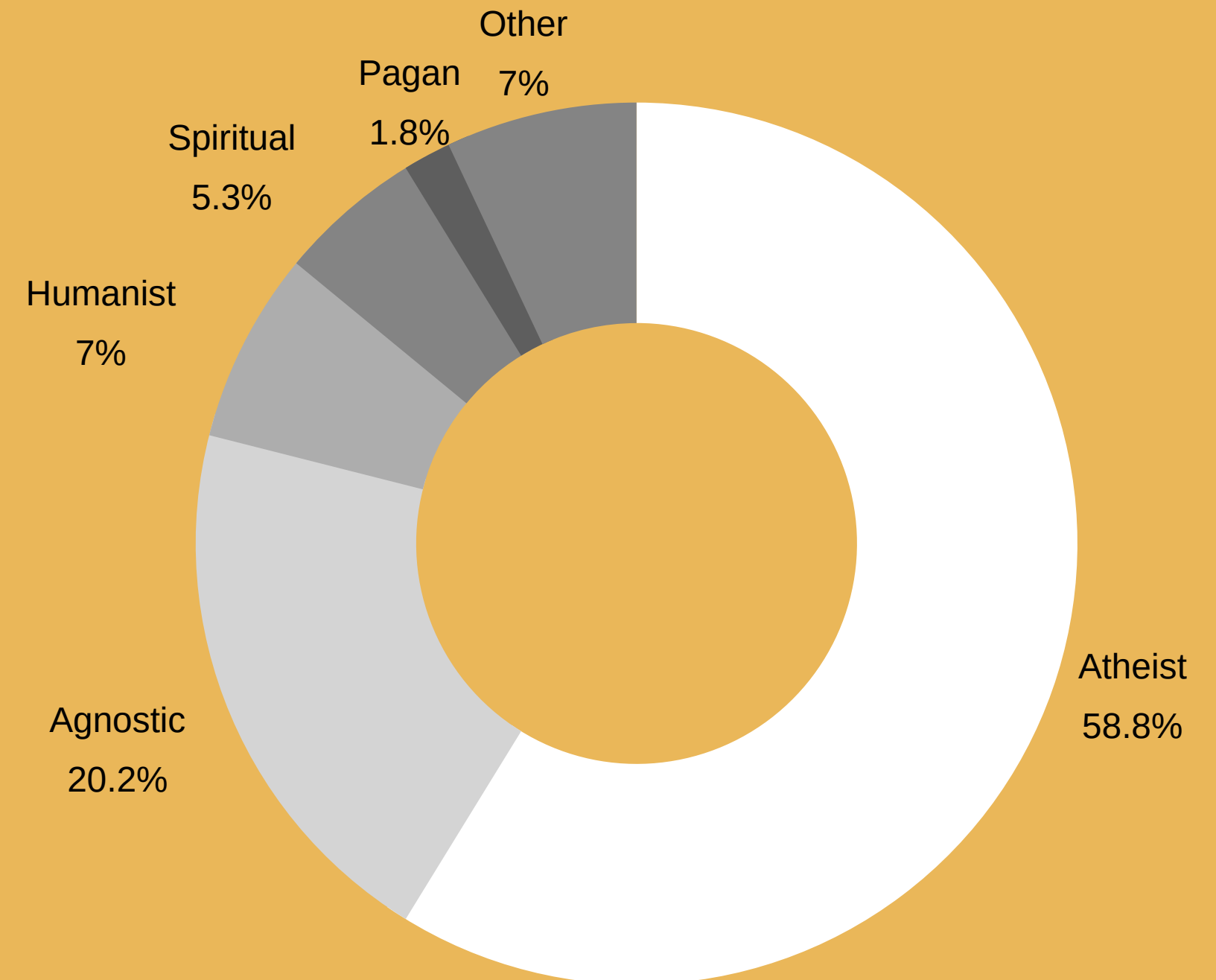
FEMALE, MAINE

PARTICIPANT IN U.S. SECULAR SURVEY
(FRAZIER ET AL, 2020)

Spirituality is culture-bound

Less than 6% of nonreligious survey participants described themselves as spiritual. (Dempsey-Henofer, 2019)

Having experiences conceptualized as "spiritual," can be a micro-aggression and create a disruption to the service relationship. (Thiel & Robinson, 2015)



How do nonreligious people describe their belief system?

HARM IN THE BIOPSYCHOSOCIAL-SPIRITUAL MODEL THE IMPACT ON INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

Harm in the biopsychosocial-spiritual model



Biopsychosocial-Spiritual Assessment

- Standard of social work practice
- Intended as a holistic approach to understanding client's experiences
- Social work training recommends "non-specific language," i.e. asking about "spiritual practices," as preferable to asking about specific religious practices, i.e. church attendance (Gale, 2019).

Harm in the biopsychosocial-spiritual model

Considered a “holistic approach to understanding” the model suggests: . . .

- A body (bio)
- mind (psycho)
- environment (social)



Spiritual?

.
Conceptualizing spirituality in an inclusive way may mean not using the word "spirituality" if social workers are to meet the client where the client is.

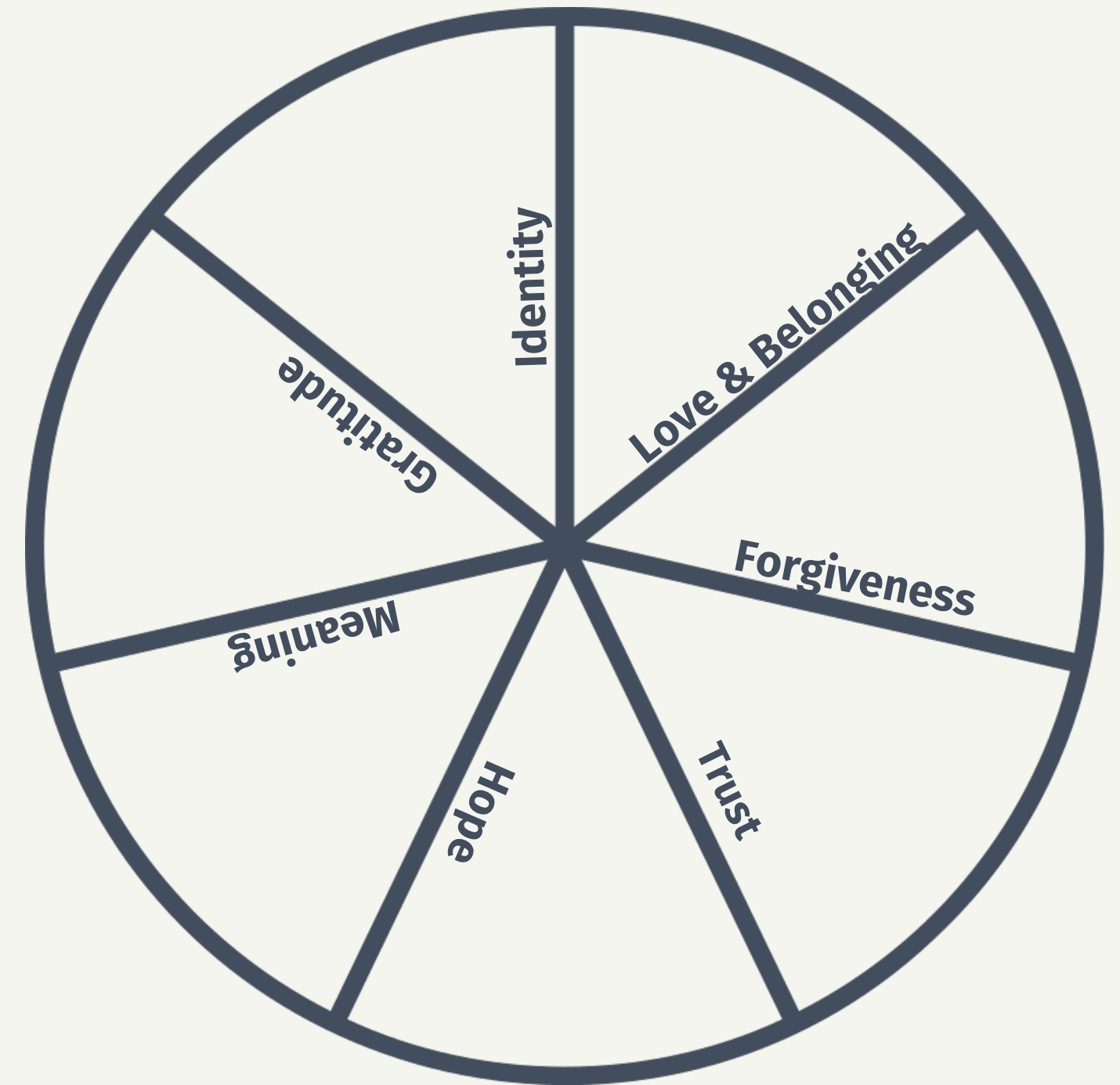
Harm in the biopsychosocial-spiritual model

What are we asking when we ask
about “spirituality”?

Harm in the biopsychosocial-spiritual model

An inclusive model of assessment

(Thiel & Robinson, 2015)



The 3-Co Cope

Assessment:

- Core beliefs
- Connection/ Community
- Comfort
- Personal values
- Existential questions

How would you describe yourself?

Tell me about your moral code. How do you know if something is right or wrong?

What gets you through hard times?

Who are your go-to people?

If this chapter of your life were coming to an end, how would you want to have spent this time?



HELEN DEMPSEY-HENOFER
COLLABORATIVE COUNSELING

2022

Long, long ago in a galaxy _____

Relational Frame Theory: We derive meaning from words (thoughts)
relationships

Spirituality $\neq$ Religion

but the word can be related to...

Trauma

When trauma is the water you swim in, it's difficult to recognize it.



Event-centered trauma

"Big T trauma"

- Family rejection
- Loss of community
- Loss of bodily autonomy

Contextual trauma

"Little t trauma"

- Microaggressions
- Emotional labor
- Chronic isolation

Harm in the biopsychosocial-spiritual model

Professional Ethics



(National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2021)

CARING FOR THE CLINICIAN

THROUGH VALUES AND
WORLDVIEW CONFLICTS

Caring for the clinician through worldview and values conflicts

Helplessness
Discomfort
Caring



Spirituality



Core beliefs
Connection/ Community
Comfort
Personal Values
Existential questions

Caring for the clinician through worldview and values conflicts



Caring for the clinician through worldview and values conflicts

Self-Compassion Break!



Caring for the clinician through worldview and values conflicts

What if this isn't for
me?



It is OKAY to provide care
from a spiritual lens

While not inclusive practice,
this approach can create a designated space
in your area of cultural competence

- +Informed consent
- +Self-Determination
- +Competence

CONSIDERING SYSTEMS

IN ADVOCACY & ALLYSHIP

Considering systems in advocacy and allyship

Does assessment include:

Core beliefs

Connection/ Community

Comfort

Personal Values

Existential fears/needs



Considering systems in advocacy and allyship

Are we creating

Inclusive — or — **Designated**
Spaces



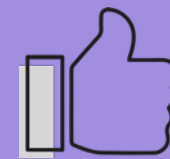
Considering systems in advocacy and allyship

Diversity & Inclusion Audit



Materials

References to culturally-specific spiritual beliefs and practices?



Leadership / Culture Messages

Organizational norms and standards



Team Approach

Shared accountability to center the client's cultural experience



Broader Inclusion Advocacy

Being an advocate/ally beyond your organization or practice to address systemic inequities

Thank You

FOR BEING OPEN TO IDEAS AND EXPERIENCES
THAT INFORM THE ABILITY TO PRACTICE WITH INTEGRITY

Client Resources

- American Humanist Association
[https:// americanhumanist.org](https://americanhumanist.org)
- Black Nonbelievers
[https:// blacknonbelievers.org/](https://blacknonbelievers.org/)
- Recovering from Religion
[https:// www.recoveringfromreligion.org/](https://www.recoveringfromreligion.org/)
- Secular Therapy Project
[https:// seculartherapy.org/](https://seculartherapy.org/)

References

List

- Cardona, N. D., Madigan, R. J., & Sauer-Zavala, S. (2021). How minority stress becomes traumatic invalidation: An emotion-focused conceptualization of minority stress in sexual and gender minority people. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cps0000054>
- Dempsey-Henofer, H. (2019). Death without god: Nonreligious perspectives on end-of-life care. *Diversity and Equality in Health and Care*, 16 (3), 74-79. <https://diversityhealthcare.imedpub.com/death-without-god-nonreligious-perspectives-on-endoflife-care.pdf>
- Frazer, S., El-Shafei, A., Gill, A.M. (2020). *Reality Check: Being Nonreligious in America*. Cranford, NJ: American Atheists.
- Gale, L. (2019). Biopsychosocial-spiritual assessment: An overview. EBSCO.<https://www.ebsco.com/sites/g/files/nabnos191/files/acquiadam-assets/Social-Work-Reference-Center-Skill-Biopsychosocial-Spiritual-Assessment.pdf>
- Millar, Krystina and Eastman, Jason, "Double Jeopardy: Minority Stress and the Influence of Transgender Identity and Race/Ethnicity" (2019). Honors Theses. 327. <https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/honors-theses/327>

References

List

- National Association of Social Workers. (2021). NASW code of ethics.
<https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>
- Pew Research Center. (2021). About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated
- Theil, M and Robinson M. (2015). Spiritual Care of the Non-Religious. PlainViews. HealthCare Chaplaincy Network, 12 (7)
<http://www.plainviews.healthcarechaplaincy.org>

Thank You

Helen Dempsey-Henofer MBA, MSW, LCSW, LISW-CP

helen@helendempsey-henofer.com