

Spiritual Wellness Test

The Spiritual Wellness Inventory

Elliott Ingersoll

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The Creation of the Spiritual Wellness Inventory

The spiritual wellness inventory began as my doctoral dissertation (Ingersoll, 1995). At the time, I was very interested in developing a vocabulary for counselors to talk about spirituality with clients that wasn't necessarily religious. Throughout my career I have been inspired by figures like Joseph Campbell, Huston Smith, Ken Wilber, and Stanislav Grof all of whom have set forth the proposition that there are core spiritual values and experiences that transcend and unite religious expressions. I believed that a vocabulary that relied on such core values and experiences would facilitate an integration of spirituality into counseling sessions and counseling literature. This goal of infusion rested on the premise that, as Vaughan (1995) and others have stated, spirituality is a part of the human organism that may be nurtured in particular social institutions but, as such, does not derive from those institutions. As far as studying spirituality, there were some difficulties in operationalizing the term. As I noted in Ingersoll (1994), the etymological roots of the word spirit (including "ruach" in Hebrew, "pneuma" in Greek, and "spiritus" in Latin) all referred more to metaphors like courage, breath, wind, vigor, and life. Other researchers (Ellison, 1983; Moberg, 1971) resolved the problem through the construct spiritual well-being. Ellison noted that just as measures of physical well-being may be indices of underlying physical health, measures of spiritual well being could serve as indices of underlying spiritual health. One challenge then was to identify dimensions of spiritual well-being or what I have called spiritual wellness. Previous spiritual well-being scales (Elkins, 1986; Ellison & Paloutzian, 1982; Kass, et. al., 1991; Moberg, 1984;) suffered from various shortcomings so I tried to address these in the construction of the Spiritual Wellness Inventory (SWI). I described in Ingersoll (1998) how I refined my initial dimensions of spiritual wellness. This phase of research made use of qualitative interviews with people who were, to some extent, leaders in eleven different spiritual traditions or paths. These

interviews explored with each person how spiritual wellness would manifest in someone practicing their path. After summarizing the dimensions that came out in the interviews, I had panelists rate the dimensions and then help design items for each dimension. The result was a 10 dimensional, 88-item inventory that was given to 515 subjects and then explored through factor analysis. Based on the factor analysis, weaker items were dropped to shorten the scale that is now a 55-item scale. There are ten dimensions of spiritual wellness and a small fake-good scale derived from Reynolds (1982).

The Dimensions of Spiritual Wellness

The dimensions of spiritual wellness addressed in the inventory are:

- ❖ **Conception of the Absolute/Divine:** This may fit into the categories of monotheistic (Judaism, Islam, Christianity), deistic (belief in God on evidence of reason and nature only), atheistic, pantheistic (God in everything), or panentheistic (God in all things and transcending all things). One's conception of the divine is expressed as a person's image or experience of divinity. With spiritual maturity, one also tends to view one's images as finite; more as symbols that point to the reality of the divine. In esoteric practices, this conception may come second to experiences with what one considers being divine. Always be alert to psychological contamination of the conception that is more related to the person's issues than God per se.
- ❖ **Meaning:** This is the individual sense that life is worth living. This can become an overwhelming question in times of crisis but is not limited to crisis. Meaning can be an explicit sense of what it is that makes life meaningful or a sense of purpose. Meaning does not have to be explicit. It may be simply a sense that pervades one's experiences. Many times meaning is expressed in being at peace with the question of meaning.
- ❖ **Connectedness:** Connectedness can occur with other people, with God or that considered Divine, and with elements in the environment. Relationships could be thought of as a recognizing and celebrating connectedness, as could religious ritual or ecological awareness. Connectedness should not be stereotyped as extraversion or liking to socialize. It is a deeper sense, a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging may be to a community, to the universe, or as an integrated, whole person.
- ❖ **Mystery:** This dimension relates to how a person deals with ambiguity, the unexplained and the uncertainty of life. This may be thought of as a person's capacity for awe and wonder. In addition, this dimension should reflect a person's comfort level with awe and wonder. It is certainly a function of spiritual maturity too and may be a

direct result of esoteric practices. Some exoteric paths may actually discourage mystery in practitioners.

- ❖ **Spiritual Freedom:** This dimension is related to one's capacity for play, experience of life and the world as "safe," a sense of freedom from fear and desire in living, and one's willingness to make a commitment. It includes the ability to "forget oneself" and all types of play like sexual play. Play and freedom are sincere but not serious. They are meaningful but not necessarily purposeful.
- ❖ **Experience/Ritual:** This includes rituals that are a healthy part of a person's life and the experiences that accompany the behavior of carrying out the ritual. A healthy ritual requires that the energy involved be directed toward an experience or activity. It is proactive, not passive. This is important to differentiate meditation from something like watching television. The ritual often helps the person become present-centered, reconnect with others or the divine, and forge meaning in relation to life circumstances.
- ❖ **Forgiveness:** This dimension reflects one's attitudes toward giving and receiving forgiveness. Forgiveness is here described as a journey one embarks on with no guaranteed products/results. In total, it is willful process engaged in from both the giving and receiving ends combined with the "magic" that heals. In this sense, the process may require considerable time.
- ❖ **Hope:** This is the experience that one's suffering is not in vain or going to last forever. Like one's sense of freedom, it too is an experience of, ultimately, feeling "safe" in life. Hope is also expressed as faith that there is some reality to life that allows one to endure experiences of suffering. Some people have said that loss of hope implies loss of faith in God in that the hopeless person is feigning omniscience by assuming they *know* that things will be bad forever and always.
- ❖ **Knowledge/Learning:** A person possessing spiritual well being has an interest in increasing both knowledge of self and knowledge of things perceived as external to self. This learning need not be defined by academic standards. Learning and acquiring knowledge is welcomed despite the trials that may be experienced in the process.
- ❖ **Present-centeredness:** Being able to be present in passing moments. This is not a state that you could be in all the time. When you are in this state, you can see what is going on around you. Ritual usually helps cultivate this. In the end, it is the ability to experience what is, to experience life (as Huston Smith says) point-blank. In contemplative traditions it is experienced as the only reality. The past is a thought, a memory and the future a thought, an anticipation. The eternal present is always, everywhere, everywhen.

The Intended Use for the SWI

One dynamic I am acutely aware of is the temptation to misuse numerically scored inventories. I am always having students ask me how "spiritually well" they are based on their score. I am always tempted to say something like "Ooh, you're a 23, that's bad. If only you were a 30 or a 32 there might be hope." Obviously such an answer would be my attempt at humor but we must be careful with such humor since, in our society, people ascribe power to numerical ratings that, in many cases, the ratings simply don't have. Although I recognize that I fueled this problem by using numbers in the subscales, I want to emphasize that the scale is designed to be a starting point for dialogue around spiritual issues. I encourage people using the scale to look at the relationships between the dimensions. As with any scale, the first step is to ask yourself how well the ratings match your sense of yourself. If you were using the inventory with a client, you may find the results deviate a great deal from the client's sense of their own spiritual wellness. If that is the case it is far more productive to begin the discussion along the lines of the client's sense of self rather than how the inventory reflected that sense of self. When I have used the SWI with clients, I usually ask them "what stands out the most for you?" Most of the time they will comment on a dimension where their score is particularly low. We are usually able to dialogue a bit about what that means to them. If the client doesn't mention the dimensions where their score is high, I will bring those up. Typically they reflect significant aspects of the client's support system that can be used throughout the counseling relationship. Following is a case summary using the SWI dimensions so readers can get a sense of how these could be used in their own explorations and, if the reader is a clinician, in exploration with clients.

Ed was a 29-year-old, single, Caucasian male seeking counseling for what appeared to be Dysthymia. Ed seems to recall always having a low-grade depression that he was more aware of since his last relationship ended with his partner calling him "a constant downer." Ed visited his primary care physician who prescribed a regimen of antidepressant medication (Paroxetine, 20mg a day) and recommended he supplement that with counseling. In our initial sessions Ed described how his life felt "cardboard" and how he rarely felt any enthusiasm. During our first three sessions Ed revealed how in college he had abandoned an early interest in philosophy for "a more pragmatic" major in business. Although Ed held a good job (managing marketing for an industrial supply firm) his heart wasn't in it (but as noted, he felt his heart wasn't in anything). Ed was also interested in theology and comparative religion. He said he had been questioning the meaning of life pretty intensely since his girlfriend left him early that year. He said if he were a religious person, he might be said to be having a crisis of faith. I recalled how Scott Peck (1978) once wrote how therapists should find out their client's religion - even if the client said they didn't have one and asked Ed if he would take the SWI. He actually showed enthusiasm for the idea and took the inventory. The first thing Ed noticed about his results is that the

"meaning" and "mystery" dimensions were quite low while the others hovered around 20 points. In exploring the inventory, Ed conspicuously avoided discussing the mystery dimension and kept directing the dialogue to the meaning dimension. Toward the end of the session, I commented that I was curious about this dynamic since he had also commented on the "mystery" dimension as a low score. To this Ed became perturbed and asked if I had any expert insights he should be privy to. Sensing I had "touched a nerve" I backed off and said "no, I was just curious." In our next session Ed noted that he really was upset by the low score on "mystery." He went on to explain that all the fights with his ex-girlfriend had been because she thought he didn't take enough risks in life. He was beginning to think she was right. The next two months were spent exploring various periods of Ed's life where he had "taken the safe route" including his college major. Key to the events were the irrational thoughts Ed cultivated about himself because of the choices he had made. We realized that a great deal of his mood disturbance was fueled by these thoughts ("I'm a loser," "I'm not an alpha male - I'm an omega male"). Since Ed experienced some relief from the antidepressant, he had more energy to begin re-making his self-concept through learning how to dispute his irrational thoughts and reexamining the role of mystery and ambiguity in taking risks.

Following is the actual SWI. You may take it if you wish and self score it with the materials provided here. The demographics and descriptive statistics are included toward the end of the appendix if you wish to compare your scores to a samples' scores. Remember that the main goal of the inventory is to begin dialogue around spiritual issues with a trans-traditional vocabulary. There is still much research that needs to be done on the reliability and validity of the inventory in order to make it psychometrically sound.

The Spiritual Wellness Inventory

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Please respond to the following items choosing a number from the scale provided that indicates the degree to which you agree or disagree with each item. Mark the number you select in the blank beside each item number.

RESPONSE SCALE

Strongly Disagree			Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.						_____	1
2.						_____	2
3.						_____	3
4.						_____	4
5.						_____	5
6.						_____	6
7.						_____	7
8.						_____	8
9.						_____	9
10.						_____	10
11.						_____	11
12.						_____	12
13.						_____	13
14.						_____	14
15.						_____	15
16.						_____	16
17.						_____	17
18.						_____	18
19.						_____	19
20.						_____	20
21.						_____	

correctly as possible.	_____	21
22. I experience playful moments daily	_____	22
23. I never experience a strong inner sense of God's presence.	_____	23
24. I always reflect on the meaning of my life experiences	_____	24
25. I don't feel a part of any real community.	_____	25
26. I often feel fully present in each passing moment.	_____	26
27. I am afraid to question my spiritual beliefs.	_____	27
28. I see everyday life as sacred.	_____	28
29. I have little faith that on some level my life will work out.	_____	29
30. I have often been forgiven by others in my life.	_____	30
31. I don't investigate questions that arise in my life.	_____	31
32. I have periods where it is hard to stop self-pity.	_____	32
33. I feel coerced by images of what life should be about.	_____	33
34. I am conscious of the divine in my daily activities	_____	34
35. I don't get much meaning out of my life experiences	_____	35
36. I often notice things in nature while I am riding or walking from place to place.	_____	36
37. When I attain a goal I don't savor it before moving on to the next goal.	_____	37
38. Ambiguity and uncertainty are healthy parts of life.	_____	38
39. I have not developed new spiritual rituals as I have grown.	_____	39
40. Every moment offers potential for hope.	_____	40
41. I have resentments about past injuries	_____	41
42. The more I learn about myself the more I have to give	_____	42
43. I would rather mix with polite people than rebellious types.	_____	43
44. I feel free to make strong commitments to things.	_____	44
45. My sense of God decreases my sense of connectedness to nature.	_____	45
46. My spirituality is very meaningful to me.	_____	46
47. My spiritual community isn't much help in celebrating life.	_____	47
48. I don't get tense thinking of things that lie ahead.	_____	48
49. It is important to be in control of the situations in which I find myself.	_____	49
50. I have rituals that help me integrate the spiritual into my life.	_____	50

51. I have not had difficult situations change for the better	_____	51
52. I am able to forgive anything a person may do.	_____	52
53. I value knowledge except when it conflicts with my beliefs.	_____	53
54. I wait until I am sure that my views are correct before speaking up.	_____	54
55. I feel great pressure to live up to a social image.	_____	55

Scoring the SWI

- Reverse the ratings for all odd-numbered items so the new numerals match the following key: 8=1, 7=2, 6=3, 5=4, 4=5, 3=6, 2=7, 1=8

Example: Your rating for an odd-numbered item is a "4." According to the key, the rating would be transformed to a "5."

- Enter corrected odd-numbered values on the blanks next to each item on the inventory.
- Enter all response values, even-numbered and corrected odd-numbered, on the response grid below. Next, total the numbers across each row for the dimension totals.

1. _____	12. _____	23. _____	34. _____	45. _____	TOTAL _____	Conception of Divinity
2. _____	13. _____	24. _____	35. _____	46. _____	TOTAL _____	Meaning
3. _____	14. _____	25. _____	36. _____	47. _____	TOTAL _____	Connectedness
4. _____	15. _____	26. _____	37. _____	48. _____	TOTAL _____	Present-Centeredness
5. _____	16. _____	27. _____	38. _____	49. _____	TOTAL _____	Mystery
6. _____	17. _____	28. _____	39. _____	50. _____	TOTAL _____	Ritual
7. _____	18. _____	29. _____	40. _____	51. _____	TOTAL _____	Hope
8. _____	19. _____	30. _____	41. _____	52. _____	TOTAL _____	Forgiveness

9. ____ 20. ____ 31. ____ 42. ____ 53. ____ TOTAL ____ Knowledge/
Learning

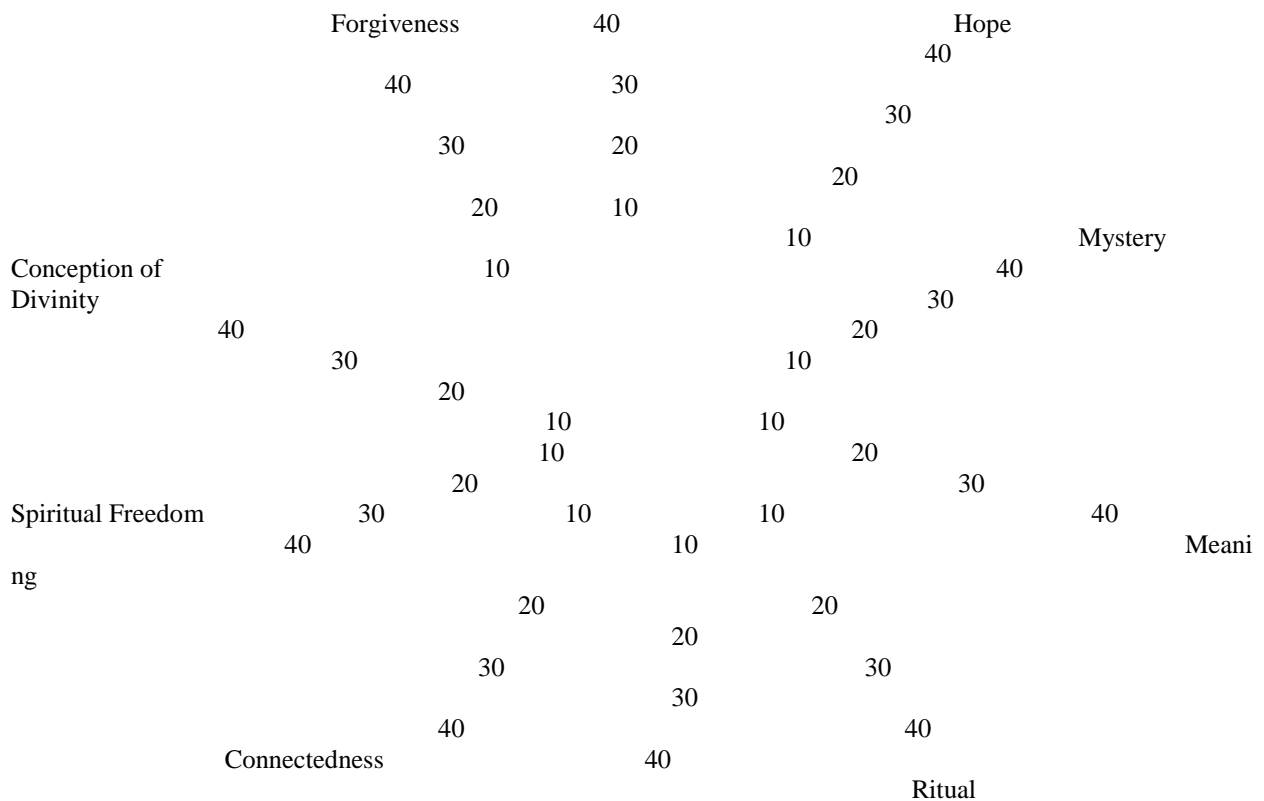
10. ____ 21. ____ 32. ____ 43. ____ 54. ____ TOTAL ____ Fake Good

11. ____ 22. ____ 33. ____ 44. ____ 55 ____ TOTAL ____ Spiritual Freedom

Now, using the SWI profile sheet, enter the dimension totals (row totals) on the profile sheet line matching the dimension total you are recording. There is no "total" score since the dimensions overlap quite a bit.

Spiritual Wellness Inventory Profile Sheet - Elliott Ingersoll, Ph.D., PCC

Knowledge/Learning



SPIRITUAL WELLNESS INVENTORY MEANS & DEMOGRAPHICS (Revised)

N=515

AGE:	18-21=12%
	22-26=18%
	27-33=15%
	34-40=13%
	41-49=20%
	50-59=12%
	60-65=2%
	70-75=2%
	76 and over=1%

SPIRITUAL TRADITION

Reform Jewish	2%
Orthodox Jewish	1%
Catholic Christian	32%
Protestant Christian	34%
Other Christian	1%
Pagan	0%
Buddhist	4%
Baha'i	1%
Latter Day Saints	2%
Transpersonal	10%
Yoga practitioner	3%
Marital Artist	3%
Dead Head	3%
Sufi/Muslim	1%
Native American	1%

CULTURAL BACKGROUND

African-American	4%
Asian-American	1%
European-American	90%
Latino/Latina	1%
Native-American	2%

EDUCATION: Highest Level Attained

High school	5%
2 year college	2%
some college	18%
bachelor's degree	40%
master's degree	28%
doctoral degree	3%
post-doctoral degree	1%

Weekly Estimated Hours of TV Watched:

0-5	37%
6-10	28%
11-15	14%
16-20	7%
21-25	2%
26-30	2%
31-35	2%
36 +	1%

DIMENSION	Revised Mean (rounded)
Conception of Divinity	17
Meaning	20
Connectedness	19
Present- Centeredness	18
Mystery	22
Ritual	18
Hope	20
Forgiveness	21
Knowledge/ Learning	21
Spiritual Freedom	16

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