



Religious Affiliation and Distress Among Treatment-Seeking University Students

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Introduction

- Matching the demographic features between clients and therapists is beneficial for establishing therapeutic alliance (Taber, Leibert, & Agaskar, 2011).
- Results from gender and racial/ethnic matching are ambiguous (Cabral & Smith, 2011; Bhati, 2014).
- Client-therapist dyads paired based on shared values may produce greater changes (Walker, Worthington, Garter, Gorsuch, & Hanshew, 2011).

Relevance of Religiosity

- 26% of university students report experiencing spirituality and/or religion-related (R/S) distress (Johnson & Hayes, 2003).
- Majority of therapists are not inclined to discuss religion with the clients (Post & Wade, 2009).
- R/S psychotherapy produced greater outcome among religious students compared to secular psychotherapy (Worthington, Hook, David, & McDaniel, 2011).

Religiosity Affiliation and Distress

- Religion tends to buffer against mental illness with 72% of studies suggesting a positive relationship between religiosity/spirituality and mental health (Bonelli & Koenig, 2013).

Hypotheses

- **H1:** Religious students will report less distress than non-religious students
- **H2:** Religious students will fare better in therapy compared to non-religious students.



Methods

- Data set from the Center for Collegiate Mental Health (CCMH)
- Data from 140 institutions across US
- Interaction between religion/spirituality, sexual orientation, and religiosity of the institution
- 3 level hierarchical linear model

Results

- Religious students and students at religious institutions report lower levels of distress at baseline.
- Non-religious students improved more quickly in therapy.
- Most interactions were not significant.

Conclusion

- Religious students experienced less distress initially because religion really does buffer against psychological distress.
- The greater improvement in non-religious students is due higher level of initial distress.
- Nonreligious students improved more quickly because most therapists are not religiously affiliated.