

Editorial

Introduction to the Special Issue ‘Spirituality, Resilience, and Posttraumatic Growth’

Jo-Ann Vis ^{1,*}  and Heather Marie Boynton ^{2,*} ¹ School of Social Work, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, ON P7B 5E1, Canada² Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary, Calgary, AB T5J 4P6, Canada

* Correspondence: jvis@lakeheadu.ca (J.-A.V.); hmboynto@ucalgary.ca (H.M.B.)

Spirituality is increasingly recognized as a vital aspect of human experience across the lifespan, contributing to positive development, well-being, resilience, and strength, and uniquely facilitating posttraumatic growth (PTG). Cook (2004) defined spirituality as

“a distinctive, potentially creative and universal dimension of human experience arising both within the inner subjective experience of individuals and within communities, social groups and traditions. It may be experienced as a relationship with that which is intimately ‘inner’, immanent and personal within the self and others, and/or as a relationship with that which is wholly ‘other’, transcendent and beyond the self. It is experienced as being of fundamental or ultimate importance and is thus concerned with meaning and purpose in life, truth and values”. (pp. 548–49)

Spiritual growth and development are closely tied to the reconstruction of meanings, values, beliefs, self-conception, identity, roles, relationships, life philosophy, and worldview.

Trauma can profoundly disrupt a person’s personal meanings, values, and beliefs, as well as their sense of self. Traumatic events can shatter previously held assumptions about safety and connection and lead to questions and struggles around a sense of purpose. Research continues to emerge that supports the interconnectedness between trauma, spirituality, resilience, and posttraumatic growth (PTG) (Boynton and Vis 2022; De Vynck et al. 2023; Manning et al. 2019).

Resilience enables individuals to endure trauma and turmoil, allowing them to lead meaningful lives (Linklater and Mehl-Madrona 2014). Resilience and spirituality are deeply interconnected, increasing one’s capacity to adapt and thrive through adversity and recover with more profound meaning and purpose. Individuals who have a stronger sense of spirituality have fewer mental health struggles, lower substance use, and lower suicidality. Güleç (2025) found that higher rates of intrinsic spirituality were correlated with higher rates of resilience and lower rates of PTSD after trauma. They further illuminated that spirituality plays “an elaborate role in emotion regulation processes by closely aligning emotional goals with religious values, influencing internal processes such as self-regulatory abilities, and influencing external processes that facilitate emotion regulation” (p. 6). Elam and Taku (2022) distinguished the differences between resilience and PTG, stating that “resilience focuses on adapting and adjusting to adversity with or without struggling, whereas PTG focuses on transformative changes resulting from psychological struggle caused by shattered beliefs or worldview” (p. 2).

Posttraumatic growth often unfolds as a genuinely spiritual process of finding meaning, connection, developing an expanded sense of self, and transcendence beyond trauma.



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The five domains of PTG were recently revised by [Tedeschi et al. \(2017\)](#) to include existential aspects and broaden the category of spiritual change. The five domains of PTG are as follows: appreciation of life, new possibilities, personal strength, relating to others, and spiritual/existential change. However, we contend that spirituality is not merely a separate domain, but is intricately woven across the five domains of PTG.

For example, we conceive how spirituality can deepen one's *appreciation of life* by cultivating a sense of awe, gratitude, and sacredness in everyday experiences. It encourages mindfulness of the present moment and awareness of one's interconnectedness with others and the natural world. Through a spiritual lens, even ordinary moments become imbued with meaning, fostering a profound respect and reverence for life's mystery, beauty, impermanence, and continual unfurling. Moreover, spirituality can help individuals recognize life as a sacred gift or journey, where challenges and struggles—as well as joy and triumphs—contribute to personal and collective growth. Spirituality invites reflection on purpose, compassion, and wonder, nurturing a sustained sense of gratitude that enriches daily life.

Spirituality can inspire *new possibilities* by renewing a sense of purpose and calling, propelling individuals to reimagine their lives in the wake of adversity or transformation. It invites reflection on what is most important, guiding people toward the actions and goals that align with their deepest values and sense of meaning. Through spiritual insight or awakening, individuals may discover previously unseen pathways for creativity, service, or connection, often feeling called to contribute to something larger than themselves. This renewed purpose can foster hope, motivation, and vitality, empowering individuals to move forward with intention, authenticity, and a sense of sacred direction in their personal and communal lives.

Spirituality and one's spiritual resources often contribute to an individual's *personal strength*. Spirituality can strengthen one's personal resilience after trauma by fostering inner resilience and developing and activating resources such as courage, patience, flexibility, and adaptability. Individuals often rely on spiritual relationships with a higher power, angels, or other spiritual beings to keep them strong, persevere, and seek support and guidance that foster personal strength. These relationships along with spiritual activities rituals, and practices can deepen one's faith in a higher purpose and power, and stimulate self-reflection, the creation of a new and authentic worldview, and the development of a guiding set of values. They can create a sense of grounding, calm, peace, and presence in the here and now, and provide a strong spiritual foundation for personal strength which can support a person through emotional strife and offer a sense of hope, meaning, and perseverance. Furthermore, spirituality can support one in navigating difficult circumstances and uncertainty with confidence in the future. Additionally, a spiritual community can foster an individual's personal strength.

Regarding *relating to others*, spirituality can strengthen relationships with others through compassion and empathy, and it can cultivate a deep awareness of our shared humanity and interdependence. Relationships can be approached with openness and understanding of another's suffering, without judgment, and with kindness and care. Through spiritual practices such as forgiveness, gratitude, and loving-kindness, people may develop greater emotional and spiritual attunement ([Boynton and Margolin 2025](#)) and the capacity to hold space for others' experiences. This spiritual orientation can transform relationships into spaces of mutual growth, healing, and authenticity, where love and respect transcend differences and foster a sense of belonging and community. Individuals also depend on relationships with animals and nature, and Indigenous cultures speak of the interconnectedness with all one's relations, including the natural and spiritual worlds.

Lastly, *spiritual and existential change* occur through existential questioning, reflection, examination of previously held assumptions and beliefs, and deliberate transcendent meaning-making (Vis and Boynton 2008). These processes facilitate the reshaping of values and purpose, and push the boundaries of conceptions, bringing new understandings and an expansive worldview. They also lead to a more integrated and resilient sense of self and identity. These spiritual and existential changes enable a richer, more meaningful engagement with life and a profound alignment between inner convictions and outward actions.

Ultimately, the interwoven fabric of spirituality is both the context and catalyst for posttraumatic growth. Spirituality weaves through every facet of posttraumatic growth as a vital force that infuses meaning and coherence and transmutes suffering into wisdom, separation into connection, and adversity into awakening, expansion, and transformation. Through a spiritual lens, adversity can become a sacred teacher, allowing one to live in relation to their deepest values and authentic way of being. It offers a unifying conduit through which individuals come to see their trauma not as an end in itself, but as a pathway to greater wholeness, authenticity, and transcendence.

Scholars agree that spirituality is significant in psychological trauma growth work and can be a catalyst for transcendent meaning-making, transformation, healing, and new ways of being, making it essential to adopt holistic approaches when working with individuals, families, and communities (Boynton 2016; Carrington 2017; Gardner 2017; Vis and Boynton 2008). Dyrud Furman and Canda (2010) argued that spiritually sensitive practice is a strength-oriented approach. Practitioners who are more attuned to the explicit and implicit spiritually themed content are better positioned to offer approaches that foster resilience and PTG (Boynton and Mellan 2021; Boynton and Margolin 2025). Practitioners supporting those exposed to traumatic events can cultivate spiritual post-trauma growth through knowledge-sharing, psycho-education, skill development, attending and attuning to implicit or explicit spiritual narratives, and embracing inclusive attitudes. Supporting individuals through these complex and interrelated aspects of trauma, spirituality, and PTG can be significant for holistic treatment and interventions.

This Special Issue aims to enhance the discourse on the interconnectedness of spirituality, resilience, and posttraumatic growth and foster future development. This Special Issue brings together scholars presenting research, theory, education, practice, and lived experiences. The publications in this Special Issue offer research and theoretical and practice perspectives from social work, psychology, theology, and marriage and family therapy. This Special Issue presents academic work that converges on five interconnected themes, promoting spirituality as a critical yet often neglected dimension of resilience in trauma recovery. Specifically, the themes noted across the publications demonstrate how narrative, reflection, and meaning-making practices foster resilience and PTG, how trauma can be both a site of wounding and a pathway for spiritual renewal, and the need for spiritually competent professionals in spiritual trauma care to navigate these processes.

Spirituality as a Pathway to Meaning-Making and Healing: This first theme features publications that explore the importance of introducing spirituality for individuals working through trauma experience. The included articles support the clinical benefit of using a spirituality framework to enhance meaning-making exploration and resilience and highlight barriers that can arise when clinicians neglect spiritual exploration.

Gardner (2022) focuses on critical reflection rooted in spirituality, proposing that reflection helps individuals reframe traumatic experiences, uncover limiting assumptions, and develop new, freeing perspectives. Wilmshurst, Hovey, and Brownlee (2022) propose that clinical social work sometimes neglects spiritual struggles in trauma recovery, arguing that addressing identity, meaning, and faith crises could strengthen the healing process. While

the article primarily focuses on social work, its thesis and content can provide valuable insights for consideration across various helping professions. Lala (2023) argues that trauma is not inherently transformative, but reveals latent spiritual potential; scriptural examples (Moses, Jonah) show growth through self-preservation and the preservation of others. Vis and Boynton (2024) present content that suggests that spiritually informed approaches help survivors (and professionals) co-create meaning, foster hope, and encourage growth beyond trauma narratives. Finally, Rogers (2024) offers an autoethnographic study of childhood sexual abuse that highlights the role of compassion, spirituality, and soul work in long-term recovery, as well as the guideposts that are important for counsellors working with others suffering from soul injuries resulting from trauma.

Narrative and Expressive Approaches to Trauma and Resilience: This theme focuses on the importance of one's narrative after a traumatic event and how spiritual reflection can promote the reclaiming of an alternate narrative for posttraumatic resilience. Béres and Perera (2024) present an interesting concept for a narrative writing group ("Journey through Words"). The authors argue that narrative-writing can foster resilience by emphasizing personal values and hopes, thereby unintentionally evoking spiritual reflection. Perry (2024) also ties into the narrative theme as a tool for building resilience. The author outlines how survivors of religious/spiritual abuse find healing through narrative sharing, reclaiming agency, and redefining spirituality in more flexible ways. Through narrative meaning-making, rigid frameworks are shifted to encompass flexible, nuanced conceptions of the Divine and the self. Like Rogers (2024), as mentioned above, the spiritual journey through abuse and narrative storytelling is followed by a profound reconstruction of one's personal spirituality.

Collective Trauma, Resilience, and Spiritual Resources: This theme examines various aspects of religious spirituality, providing religious examples that illustrate the impact of assessing individuals' religious meaning-making before and after a traumatic event. These articles offer a diverse religious perspective with clinical implications that can be transferable and challenge clinicians' consideration during times of collective trauma. Jankowski, Sandage, and Wang (2023) examine religion as an aspect of spirituality during a time of collective psychological stress. In their article, they describe how clergy and emerging leaders during COVID-19 demonstrated resilience through transformative experiences that clarified emotional struggles and fostered meaning. Yong (2024) adds to the theme of spiritual resources through Christian spirituality. Specifically, Yong suggests how Christian spirituality, when rooted in social action and the Holy Spirit, offers resources for addressing trauma and despair in the Anthropocene and pandemic contexts. Finally, Gokani, Wiebe, Sherzad, and Akesson (2023) draw on the resources of Islamic faith, focusing on Afghan refugees in Canada who turned to Islamic faith and rituals as coping mechanisms amidst displacement trauma. Regardless of one's religious beliefs or attitudes, practitioners will gain important insights from these articles. These diverse religious perspectives offer vital examples and education on the value of religion as a spiritual resource, instilling an appreciation for the need for spiritual discussion and assessment in trauma work.

Professional Competence and Spiritually Sensitive Care: As alluded to in the publications, this theme is significant for the practice realm. These publications challenge practitioners involved in working with those experiencing psychological trauma to engage in self-reflection on spiritual competence, offering suggestions for clinical enhancement and competency. Wilmshurst et al. (2022) highlight a gap in trauma care in which clinicians overlook spiritual crises, reinforcing the need for spiritual competency. Supporting this perspective and building on spiritual intelligence theory, Vis and Boynton (2024) propose a developmental framework (exposure → immersion → mastery) for professional

helpers to build spiritual competence and aptitude and support PTG in trauma counselling and practice.

Trauma, Abuse, and Spiritual Transformation: This final theme closely aligns with the aim of this Special Issue—the idea that one can not only heal, but also grow and transform by applying a spiritually informed approach to trauma healing. Perry (2024) highlights, in her article, that, through narrative work, survivors of spiritual/religious abuse experience growth by confronting abuse, telling their story, and redefining faith. Rogers (2024), from a personal perspective, reinforces that recovery from childhood sexual abuse can be accomplished when strengths and resilience are framed through spiritual resources. Finally, Vis and Boynton (2024) propose that, when practitioners are spiritually competent to assess, treat, and evaluate clients using a spiritual lens, it helps both the clients and helpers transcend trauma, highlighting the potential for mutual growth.

As part of best practice, we believe that addressing psychological trauma and facilitating PTG requires a spiritually attuned, responsive, and competent approach. These articles examine spiritually integrated approaches that promote competence, ways to redefine and broaden one's understanding of spirituality and its role in PTG, and the use and development of spiritual resources and strategies for resilience and transcendence. They also reaffirm the importance of meaning-making in connection to spirituality, trauma, and growth. The authors emphasize the significance of transitioning from trauma to growth by exploring the spiritual potential that facilitates this transformation. We anticipate that this Special Issue will be a vital contribution and resource for practitioners, researchers, and educators.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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