Dialog at the edge of reason: addressing spiritual issues within treatment for psychosis

Further reading related to the presentation by: Ron Unger LCSW
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Psychosis and Spirituality: Exploring the New Frontier edited by Isabel Clarke. “Spirituality and psychosis both inhabit the region where ordinary reason ceases to function and barriers break down. The connection between them is evident – what is remarkable is how conventional thinking obscures the connection. This book challenges conventional understandings with a radical new perspective. The interface between psychosis and spirituality is explored, drawing on key research and latest developments from a wide spread of disciplines...”

Various books and papers by Isabel Clarke are either referenced or available at her website, http://www.isabelclarke.org/psychosis_spirituality/

“Mysticism and madness: Different aspects of the same human experience?” by Charles Heriot-Maitland, in Mental Health, Religion & Culture, Volume 11, Issue 3, 2008. Abstract: Associations between mysticism and madness have been made since earliest recorded history, and the striking resemblance between self-reports of both mystical and psychotic experience suggests that similar psychological processes may be involved in their occurrence. By exploring the similarities, and proposing a common element to mystical and psychotic experience (referred to here as the experience of ‘oneness’), this paper aims to place mysticism and madness onto the same experiential continuum. However, in contrast to much of the previous literature, the intention is not to pathologize mystical experience, but rather to normalize psychotic experience. The paper argues not only that the experience of oneness is entirely genuine and available to all humans, but also that it has an important psychological (and evolutionary) function. Using cognitive terminology, it then attempts to explain the processes determining whether an individual enjoys a fulfilling mystical experience, or suffers a debilitating psychotic breakdown (i.e., how 'oneness' is experienced). Finally, this paper turns to look at some of the important implications such an approach might have for clinical practice and for the mental health of people in general.
http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13674670701287680

“INTEGRATING THE SPIRIT WITHIN PSYCHOSIS: ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF PSYCHOTIC DISORDERS” by Phillips, Russell E, Lukoff, David, Stone, Mary K. “This literature review integrates theory, research, and treatment regarding spiritual experiences in persons with psychosis. The goal of this article is to further communication amongst mainstream and transpersonal psychologists regarding their approaches toward spirituality and psychosis. Perspectives presented in this paper include Anton Boisen's pastoral counseling approach, John Weir Perry's Jungian approach, Stanislav Grof's and David Lukoff's transpersonal approaches, research and treatment in mainstream psychology on religious coping and ways to incorporate religious and spiritual issues into therapy. The article also provides a framework to integrate this diverse body of knowledge, and affords some suggestions for future research.”

“Spiritual aspects of psychosis and recovery” by Dr Susan Mitchell. From the paper: “When working with people suffering from psychosis, a practical, grounded, 'recovery-oriented' spirituality that incorporates humanity and compassion while accepting the integrity of personal experience is invaluable.”

The Royal College of Psychiatry Spirituality and mental health webpage. An overview of how to bring more spirituality into mental health care. See also The Royal College of Psychiatrists Spirituality and Psychiatry Special Interest Group or their official position paper at http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/pdf/PS03_2011.pdf


Unshrinking Psychosis: Understanding and Healing the Wounded Soul by John Watkins, contains a well researched chapter on Psychosis and Spirituality.
Trials of the Visionary Mind: Spiritual Emergency and the Renewal Process by John Weir Perry. Perry writes from the unique perspective of having overseen a successful program for people experiencing early psychosis that used a spiritual perspective – the program called Diabasis. “Stress may cause highly activated mythic images to erupt from the psyche’s deepest levels in the form of turbulent visionary experience. Depending on whether the interactions between the individual and the immediate surroundings lean toward affirmation or invalidation, comprehension of these visions can turn the visionary experience into a step in growth or into a disorder, as an acute psychosis. Based on his clinical and scholarly investigations, John Weir Perry has found and formulated a mental syndrome which, though customarily regarded as acute psychosis, is in actuality a more natural effort of the psyche to mend its imbalances. If the upset is received in the spirit of empathy and understanding, and allowed to run its course, an acute episode can be found to reveal a self-organizing process that has self-healing potential.”

Also see “A CONVERSATION WITH DR. JOHN WEIR PERRY” available at http://www.global-vision.org/papers/JWP.pdf

Michael Cornwall, who once worked with John Weir Perry, wrote a great summary of how to approach someone with psychosis with spiritual openness: How to best serve clients with a psychotic/visionary experience

The Primordial Mind in Health and Illness: A Cross-Cultural Perspective by Michael Robbins. “The universal quest to create cosmologies – to comprehend the relationship between mind and world - is inevitably limited by the social, cultural and historical perspective of the observer, in this instance western psychoanalysis. In this book Michael Robbins attempts to transcend such contextual limitations by putting forward a primordial form of mental activity that co-exists alongside thought and is of equal importance in human affairs.”

The California Mental Health & Spirituality Initiative web site contains a directory to online resources, scientific literature, and books. It also incorporates web 2.0 features to allow you to participate by posting resources and contributing to online discussions.

Some resources Brian Koehler recommended – I haven’t looked at these yet:

The International Network for Philosophy and Psychiatry lists some resources that I also haven’t checked out yet, http://www.inponline.org/rbspirituality.htm

The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems by Fritjof Capra is a good introduction to complexity theory, emergence, and self organization, for those of you who may be unfamiliar with this way of thinking.

Silverstein, S. M. (2007). Integrating Jungian and Self-Psychological Perspectives Within Cognitive-Behavior Therapy for a Young Man With a Fixed Religious Delusion. Clinical Case Studies, 6(3), 263-276. From the abstract: “This article demonstrates how the Jungian technique of archetypal amplification was modified and used within the structure of CBT treatment of a young man with schizophrenia with a religious delusion who refused to engage in standard CBT. His case demonstrates that schizophrenia patients who initially refuse to question the validity of their delusional beliefs can nevertheless be successfully engaged in CBT when the focus promotes alternative understandings of the self and preserves self-esteem.”

Historical, religious and spiritual perspectives, from a Hearing Voices Network website.

In Case of Spiritual Emergency: Moving Successfully Through Your Awakening by Catherine G. Lucas, 2011  Personal stories of spiritual crises are presented alongside practical and effective guidance in this exploration of a fascinating phenomenon. When spiritual emergencies, such as mystical psychosis and dark nights of the soul, are understood, managed, and integrated, they can offer enormous potential for growth and fulfillment, and this book offers three key phases for successful navigation. Encouraging, supportive, and life-saving, this resource is essential for avoiding the mental, emotional, or spiritual paralysis or exhaustion that can result from underestimating the current age of increased individual and global emergencies.