

Inner Well-Being and Meaning-Making: Toward a Theological Anthropology of Spiritual Counseling

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Abstract: This study examines the integration of humanistic principles in spiritual counseling, focusing on the lived experiences of clients and counselors as the unit of analysis. It aims to explore how empathy, unconditional acceptance, and authentic therapeutic relationships are practiced in spiritual counseling, and how these elements shape clients' inner well-being and meaning-making processes. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected from 10 clients and 5 spiritual counselors through semi-structured in-depth interviews, limited observations, and reflective documents. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns in emotional, relational, and spiritual experiences. The findings reveal that humanistic spiritual counseling facilitates a reconfiguration of inner well-being, shifting clients' perspectives from problem-centered and normative interpretations toward reflective self-understanding, acceptance of vulnerability, and spiritual connectedness. A key novelty of this study lies in demonstrating that therapeutic relationships function as the primary relational mechanism through which psychological and spiritual dimensions are integrated. The study also highlights how clients renegotiate their sense of self and meaning within contemporary contexts influenced by digital life. This research contributes to counseling scholarship by offering an empirically grounded, relational framework for integrating humanistic and spiritual approaches to promote holistic inner well-being.

Keywords: humanistic counseling; spiritual counseling; inner well-being; meaning-making; therapeutic relationship; qualitative study; lived experience

1. Introduction

In recent decades, mental well-being has emerged as a critical global concern shaped by complex social, cultural, and technological transformations. Contemporary life is characterized by rapid digitalization, social fragmentation, and increasing existential uncertainty, all of which significantly influence individuals' psychological and spiritual conditions (World Health Organization, 2022; Twenge et al., 2019; Turkle, 2017). Empirical evidence shows a global rise in anxiety, depression, and loneliness, particularly among individuals navigating technologically mediated environments (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015; Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018; OECD, 2021). In many religious and cultural contexts, mental distress is still interpreted as a failure of faith or moral weakness, leading individuals to avoid professional psychological support and rely solely on personal spiritual practices (Corrigan, 2004; Leavey, Loewenthal, & King, 2017). At the same time, studies indicate that spirituality plays a significant role in fostering resilience, hope, and life satisfaction,



particularly during crises and transitions (Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Park, 2010; Koenig, 2012). This dual reality highlights that mental well-being cannot be understood solely through psychological constructs but must also consider the spiritual dimensions of human experience (Pargament, 2011; Ryff, 1989). Therefore, a more integrative counseling approach is needed to address the interconnected emotional, relational, and spiritual needs of individuals in contemporary society.

From a scholarly perspective, humanistic psychology has long provided a foundational framework for understanding individuals as meaning-making, self-directed, and relational beings (Maslow, 1943; Rogers, 1961; Schneider et al., 2015). Core principles such as empathy, unconditional positive regard, and authenticity have been consistently associated with positive therapeutic outcomes across diverse contexts (Elliott et al., 2018; Norcross & Lambert, 2019; Wampold & Imel, 2015). Parallel to this, the integration of spirituality into counseling has gained increasing attention, with studies demonstrating the effectiveness of spiritual practices such as mindfulness, prayer, and meditation in enhancing psychological well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Tang et al., 2015; Levin, 2024). Scholars such as Pargament (2011) and Richards and Bergin (2005) have advanced frameworks for spiritually integrated psychotherapy, emphasizing the importance of aligning therapeutic processes with clients' spiritual worldviews. However, much of the existing literature tends to treat spirituality as a supplementary technique rather than an integral dimension of counseling practice (Koenig, 2023; Aten & Leach, 2009). Moreover, empirical studies often focus on intervention outcomes rather than exploring how clients and counselors experience the integration of humanistic and spiritual principles in real relational contexts (Koç, 2024; Captari et al., 2018). This indicates a gap in understanding counseling as a lived, relational, and meaning-making process.

Building on these limitations, this study addresses a critical gap by examining how humanistic principles are enacted within spiritual counseling practices and how such integration shapes clients' inner well-being and meaning-making processes. While prior research has largely employed quantitative methods or focused on technique-based interventions, there remains a lack of in-depth qualitative inquiry into the experiential and relational dimensions of spiritually integrated counseling (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, contemporary research has begun to highlight the influence of digital technologies and artificial intelligence on human identity, emotional expression, and self-evaluation, often privileging efficiency over relational depth (Floridi et al., 2018; Vallor, 2016; Verbeek, 2011). Yet, few studies have examined how these broader sociotechnical dynamics intersect with counseling processes and spiritual meaning-making. Therefore, this study aims to explore: (1) how humanistic principles are practiced in spiritual counseling, (2) how clients experience and interpret inner well-being through these practices, and (3) how therapeutic relationships function as a medium for integrating psychological and spiritual dimensions. By addressing these questions, this research seeks to provide a nuanced and contextually grounded understanding of counseling in contemporary life.

The central argument of this study is that humanistic spiritual counseling offers a relational and experiential framework through which individuals can reconstruct inner well-being in a holistic and meaningful way. Drawing on humanistic philosophy and relational theories, this study posits that therapeutic relationships characterized by empathy, authenticity, and non-judgmental presence create a safe space for clients to engage in deep emotional and spiritual reflection (Rogers, 1957; Buber, 1923; Gergen, 2015). Within this space, individuals are able to reinterpret distress not as personal failure but as part of a broader existential and spiritual journey (Frankl, 1963; Park, 2010).

Furthermore, in the context of digitally mediated life, where human value is increasingly measured through productivity and efficiency, humanistic counseling provides a counter-narrative that re-centers vulnerability, relationality, and meaning (Turkle, 2017; Floridi, 2019). Therefore, this study hypothesizes that the integration of humanistic principles into spiritual counseling facilitates a reconfiguration of inner well-being, shifting individuals from normative and problem-centered interpretations toward reflective, relational, and spiritually grounded meaning-making. This perspective not only contributes to theoretical developments in counseling but also offers practical implications for more humane and context-sensitive therapeutic practices.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Humanistic Counseling as a Relational and Experiential Framework

The humanistic approach to counseling conceptually places human beings as active, reflective, and capable subjects to build meaning in life through authentic relationships and subjective experiences (Rogers, 1961; Maslow, 1943). Humanistic counseling is rooted in the assumption that individuals have a tendency to self-actualization that develops optimally when in a supportive and non-judgmental relational environment (Rogers, 1957; Schneider et al., 2015). A number of empirical studies show that the quality of therapeutic relationships, particularly empathy, authenticity, and unconditional acceptance, are the main predictors of therapeutic success compared to specific techniques (Elliott et al., 2018; Norcross & Lambert, 2019; Wampold & Imel, 2015). Meta-analysis research even shows that therapist empathy has a significant correlation with client outcomes across therapeutic approaches (Elliott et al., 2018). In addition, the humanistic approach is also associated with increasing self-awareness, self-acceptance, and emotional regulation in various age groups and cultural contexts (Cain, 2010; Cooper, 2019; Greenberg et al., 1993). In a contemporary perspective, humanistic psychology is no longer understood as a purely individualistic approach, but as a relational framework that emphasizes human interaction in a broader social and existential context (Gergen, 2015; Schneider et al., 2015). Thus, humanistic counseling provides a strong philosophical and practical foundation for understanding counseling as a relational process that facilitates the transformation of meaning and inner well-being.

However, the literature also shows that humanistic approaches still have limitations in explicitly integrating the spiritual dimension in counseling practices (Aten & Leach, 2009; Pargament, 2011). Although Rogers (1961) acknowledged the existence of a transcendental dimension in therapeutic experience, this approach has historically developed within secular psychological frameworks that tend to separate the spiritual aspect from clinical intervention (Elkins et al., 1988; Helminiak, 2001). Recent studies have begun to show that clients often bring their spiritual experiences into the therapy space, but do not always get adequate exploration space due to the counselor's limited competence in spiritual issues (Captari et al., 2018; Oxhandler & Pargament, 2018). In addition, some studies have shown that there is an epistemological tension between psychological and theological approaches that makes it difficult to integrate the two in practice (Richards & Bergin, 2005; Vieten et al., 2013). This indicates that although humanistic counseling has the power to build deep therapeutic relationships, there is still a need for an integrative framework that is able to accommodate the spiritual dimension in a more systematic and reflective way. Therefore, an empirical exploration of

how humanistic principles are implemented in spiritual contexts becomes important to broaden the scope of this approach.

2.2 Spirituality and Inner Well-Being in Counseling Contexts

Spirituality has been widely recognized as a fundamental dimension in human life that contributes to psychological and existential well-being (Koenig, 2012; Pargament, 2011). Within the framework of positive psychology and mental health, spirituality is often associated with the meaning of life, existential purpose, and the individual's ability to cope with suffering and uncertainty (Ryff, 1989; Park, 2010). A number of empirical studies show that spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, and mindfulness have a significant impact on lowering levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, while improving quality of life and life satisfaction (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Tang et al., 2015; Garland et al., 2015). In addition, longitudinal studies show that individuals with high spiritual involvement tend to have better levels of resilience in the face of crises (Koenig, 2012; VanderWeele, 2017). In the context of counseling, spirituality is understood not only as a religious practice, but as a source of meaning and life orientation that shapes the way individuals understand their experiences (Levin, 2024; Miller & Thoresen, 2003). Thus, the integration of spirituality in counseling becomes increasingly relevant in an effort to understand inner well-being holistically.

Nonetheless, the integration of spirituality in counseling practice faces a number of significant ethical and methodological challenges (Hodge, 2001; Aten et al., 2013). Counselors are required to have sensitivity to the client's spiritual background without indoctrination or certain value biases (Sue & Sue, 2016). Research shows that a lack of training in spiritual issues often leads counselors to avoid the topic, even though clients consider it important (Oxhandler et al., 2018). In addition, there are conceptual variations in defining spirituality that lead to inconsistencies in research and practice (Zinnbauer et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2000). Other studies have shown that an insensitive approach to client spirituality can reduce the effectiveness of therapy and even worsen psychological conditions (Captari et al., 2018). Therefore, an approach that is able to integrate spirituality ethically, reflectively, and contextually in counseling is needed. In this case, a humanistic approach that emphasizes empathy and unconditional acceptance has the potential to be a bridge in accommodating the client's spiritual experience in an authentic and meaningful way.

2.3 Integrating Humanistic and Spiritual Approaches in Contemporary Counseling

The integration of humanistic and spiritual approaches in counseling is an effort to develop therapeutic practices that are more holistic and contextual (Richards & Bergin, 2005; Pargament, 2011). Philosophically, these two approaches have similarities in viewing humans as beings who have the capacity to build meaning, establish relationships, and experience transcendental dimensions (Buber, 1923; Frankl, 1963). Research shows that counseling that integrates the spiritual dimension in a sensitive and reflective manner can increase client engagement as well as strengthen the process of psychological change (Captari et al., 2018; Koç, 2024). In addition, empirical studies show that authentic therapeutic relationships are the primary medium in facilitating the spiritual exploration of clients (Elliott et al., 2018; Gergen, 2015). In this context, the humanistic approach provides a relational framework that allows clients to explore their spiritual experiences without fear of judgment (Rogers, 1957). Therefore, the integration of these two approaches not only enriches

counseling practices, but also broadens the understanding of inner well-being as a multidimensional phenomenon.

In the contemporary context marked by the development of digital technologies and artificial intelligence, this integration is becoming increasingly relevant (Floridi et al., 2018; Vallor, 2016). Studies show that human interaction with technology can affect the way individuals understand themselves, emotions, and social relationships (Turkle, 2017; Verbeek, 2011). In many cases, the logic of technological efficiency and rationality begins to dominate the way individuals assess themselves, potentially ignoring the emotional and spiritual dimensions (Floridi, 2019). Research in the field of human–technology interaction shows that individuals who are overexposed to digital systems tend to experience alienation and loss of relational meaning (Ihde, 2009; Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018). In this situation, humanistic-spiritual counseling can serve as a reflective space that restores the focus to authentic, relational, and meaningful human experiences (Gergen, 2015; Frankl, 1963). However, the literature also shows that empirical research examining this integration in the context of digital life is still very limited (Koenig, 2023). Therefore, research is needed that specifically explores how humanistic and spiritual integration is manifested in counseling practices and how it affects the construction of meaning and individual inner well-being in the digital age.

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the integration of humanistic principles into spiritual counseling and its impact on clients' inner well-being and meaning-making processes. A qualitative design was chosen because the research seeks to understand subjective experiences, relational dynamics, and interpretive processes that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). The case study approach allows for an in-depth and holistic exploration of a bounded system—in this case, humanistic-based spiritual counseling practices within a specific relational and experiential context (Yin, 2018). This design is particularly suitable for examining complex, context-dependent phenomena such as counseling interactions, where meaning is co-constructed between counselor and client (Stake, 1995).

The study adopts an interpretive paradigm, assuming that reality is socially constructed and that individuals actively interpret their emotional and spiritual experiences through relational encounters (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In this framework, the researcher's role is not to generalize findings statistically but to provide a rich, contextualized understanding of how humanistic and spiritual dimensions are integrated in counseling practice. This approach aligns with the epistemological foundations of humanistic psychology, which emphasize subjective experience, authenticity, and meaning-making as central to understanding human behavior (Rogers, 1961; Schneider et al., 2015).

3.2 Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted within the context of spiritual counseling practices that explicitly incorporate humanistic principles such as empathy, unconditional positive regard, and authenticity.

These counseling practices were situated in community-based and pastoral counseling settings where clients voluntarily sought support for emotional and spiritual concerns. The contextual focus of the study allows for an exploration of counseling as it occurs in naturalistic settings, rather than in controlled clinical environments.

Participants consisted of 15 individuals, including 10 clients and 5 spiritual counselors. Clients were selected based on the following criteria: (1) having participated in at least three sessions of humanistic-based spiritual counseling, (2) being willing to reflect on their emotional and spiritual experiences, and (3) providing informed consent to participate in the study. Counselors were selected based on their professional experience in integrating humanistic and spiritual approaches, with a minimum of three years of counseling practice. A purposive sampling strategy was used to ensure diversity in participants' backgrounds, including variations in age, gender, and spiritual orientation (Patton, 2015).

To ensure confidentiality, all participants were assigned pseudonyms, and identifying information was removed from the dataset. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional review board, and all participants provided informed consent prior to data collection. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected using three primary methods: semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. The use of multiple data sources aimed to enhance the depth and credibility of the findings through triangulation (Denzin, 1978). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants, allowing for flexibility in exploring individual experiences while maintaining consistency across key themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was conducted in a private setting to ensure participant comfort and openness.

The interview protocol included questions related to participants' experiences of counseling, perceptions of the counselor–client relationship, and interpretations of emotional and spiritual changes. Follow-up questions were used to probe deeper into participants' narratives, particularly in relation to meaning-making processes and inner well-being. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

In addition to interviews, limited non-participant observations of counseling sessions were conducted with the consent of both clients and counselors. Observations focused on relational dynamics, communication patterns, and expressions of empathy and authenticity. Furthermore, reflective documents such as personal journals or written reflections provided by clients were analyzed to capture additional insights into their internal experiences. These multiple data sources enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involves a systematic process of identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. The analysis began with familiarization, where the

researcher repeatedly read the transcripts and field notes to gain an overall understanding of the data. This was followed by initial coding, during which meaningful units of data were identified and labeled.

Subsequently, codes were organized into broader themes that captured recurring patterns related to clients' experiences, relational processes, and transformations in inner well-being. These themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and consistency across the dataset. The final stage involved interpreting the themes in relation to the research questions and theoretical framework, particularly the integration of humanistic and spiritual perspectives.

To enhance analytic rigor, the coding process was conducted iteratively, with constant comparison across participants and data sources. Reflexive memo-writing was also employed to document the researcher's interpretations and to maintain transparency in the analytic process (Charmaz, 2014). This approach ensured that the analysis remained grounded in the data while allowing for theoretical insight.

3.5 Trustworthiness and Rigor

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed, following the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with participants, triangulation of data sources (interviews, observations, and documents), and member checking, in which selected participants were invited to review and validate the interpretations of their experiences.

Transferability was addressed by providing rich, thick descriptions of the research context, participants, and findings, allowing readers to assess the applicability of the results to other settings. Dependability was ensured through a clear and systematic documentation of the research process, including data collection and analysis procedures. An audit trail was maintained to provide transparency in methodological decisions.

Confirmability was achieved through reflexivity, where the researcher critically examined their own assumptions, biases, and positionality throughout the research process (Finlay, 2002). This was supported by maintaining analytic memos and engaging in peer debriefing with colleagues familiar with qualitative research. These strategies collectively contribute to the rigor and credibility of the study, ensuring that the findings are both trustworthy and meaningful.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were central to this study, particularly given the sensitive nature of participants' emotional and spiritual experiences. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process. Pseudonyms were used in all transcripts and reports, and data were stored securely to prevent unauthorized access.

Participants were also informed that they could decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time. Given the potential for emotional distress during interviews, the researcher remained attentive to participants' well-being and provided appropriate support when needed. These ethical practices align with established guidelines for qualitative research involving human subjects (American Psychological Association, 2017).

4. Result

The findings of this study were compiled based on thematic analysis of interview data, observations, and reflective documents. The results show three main themes that directly answer the focus of the research, namely: (1) the reconstruction of the client's self-understanding and emotional experience, (2) therapeutic relationships as the main mechanism of integration of psychological and spiritual experiences, and (3) the reinterpretation of inner well-being in the context of contemporary life.

4.1 Reconstructing Clients' Self-Understanding and Emotional Experience

Data show that clients in the early stages of counseling tend to understand their emotional experiences through normative and problem-centered frameworks. Most clients describe anxiety, doubt, and emotional exhaustion as a form of personal failure or spiritual weakness. In interviews, some clients use terms like "weak," "failed," and "not good enough" to describe their condition. One of the clients stated: "I feel like what I'm going through is because I'm not strong in faith, so I'm blaming myself more than trying to understand how I'm feeling." (Client 3)

Early observations suggest that clients tend to speak briefly, defensively, and cautiously, especially when discussing personal or spiritual experiences. In some cases, clients also avoid deeper exploration of certain emotions because they are perceived as not matching the values they believe in.

As the counseling process progresses, data shows a change in the way clients articulate their experiences. Clients begin to use more reflective and descriptive language, and are able to relate emotional experiences to the broader context of life. One of the clients explained: "Now I'm starting to see that fear and doubt are not something to be avoided, but something I can understand." (Client 7)

Reflective documents show an increase in the use of words such as "understand", "realise", and "receive". This change is also seen in the way clients tell their experiences, which become more disjointed and connected between the events, emotions, and meanings they provide.

At an advanced stage, the client demonstrates the ability to integrate emotional experiences into a more complete understanding of the self. They no longer see emotions as distractions, but as part of a meaningful life journey. Some clients state that they feel "more self-aware" and "more honest with their feelings." These findings suggest that counseling facilitates a shift from self-judgment to more reflective self-understanding.

4.2 Therapeutic Relationship as the Primary Mechanism of Integration

The findings show that therapeutic relationships are the most significant element in the counseling process. All clients emphasize that the experience of feeling heard, understood, and accepted without judgment is a major factor that allows them to open up. One of the clients stated: "I feel that I can tell a story without fear of being judged. That's what makes me dare to be honest with myself." (Client 1)

Observational data showed that when counselors demonstrated full presence and empathic responses, clients became more active in speaking and more profound in expressing their

experiences. In a few sessions, clients who were initially passive began to take the initiative to explore experiences they had never previously expressed.

Interviews with counselors show that they consciously avoid a directive approach. Counselors prefer to listen, reflect, and clarify the client's experience without providing immediate assessments or solutions. One of the counselors explained: "I'm not trying to improve clients, but trying to understand their experience from their own point of view." (Counselor 2)

This approach allows clients to build their own understanding gradually. Clients respond by demonstrating more active involvement in the counseling process, as well as the ability to explore their experiences in more depth.

In addition, therapeutic relationships also influence the way clients perceive authority in understanding their spiritual experiences. Some clients state that they were previously very dependent on external views, but during the counseling process they began to feel more able to reflect on their experiences independently. One of the clients stated: "I used to feel like I had to always look for answers from the outside, now I'm starting to believe in my own process." (Client 5)

These findings suggest that therapeutic relationships serve as a dialogue space that allows clients to construct meaning in a more personal and reflective way.

4.3 Reinterpreting Inner Well-Being in Contemporary Life Contexts

Data shows that the concept of inner well-being that clients have undergoes changes during the counseling process. In the early stages, most clients define well-being as a condition without problems or without negative emotions. Some clients state that they want to "not feel anxious" or "have no more problems".

However, along with the counseling process, the definition changes to be more reflective and contextual. Clients begin to understand well-being as the ability to accept and understand life experiences, including uncomfortable ones. One of the clients explained: "I'm now no longer chasing a life without problems, but more about how I can deal with what I feel more calmly." (Client 8)

In addition, clients also begin to associate well-being with a sense of connection. They mention the importance of relationships with oneself, others, and the spiritual dimension in shaping the experience of well-being. Some clients describe feeling "calmer," "more whole," and "more connected" after going through the counseling process.

Interestingly, some clients also relate their experiences to the pressures of modern life, particularly in a digital context. They stated that in the past, they often felt like they had to be "perfect" or "always productive". One of the clients revealed: "Sometimes I feel like I have to always be strong and not be weak, like the standards I see around me." (Client 4)

Through the counseling process, the client begins to reflect back on the standard and no longer use it as the main benchmark in self-assessment. They state that they are beginning to accept limitations as part of the human experience.

These findings suggest that inner well-being is reunderstood as a dynamic process, involving self-awareness, acceptance, and connectedness, rather than simply being a problem-free state.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study show that the integration of humanistic principles in spiritual counseling plays a significant role in facilitating the reconstruction of inner well-being through a reflective and meaningful relational process. Conceptually, these results reinforce the position of the humanistic approach as a framework that focuses not only on behavioral change or symptom reduction, but also on the transformation of the meaning of life experiences (Rogers, 1961; Schneider et al., 2015). The shift that clients experience—from normative and problem-centered self-understanding to more open and integrative reflection—suggests that inner well-being is not formed through problem elimination, but rather through the individual's ability to articulate and interpret their experiences more consciously. This is in line with the concept of eudaimonic well-being which emphasizes personal growth, self-acceptance, and the meaning of life as the main indicators of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Thus, these findings expand the understanding that humanistic-spiritual counseling is not only supportive, but also transformative in shaping the way individuals understand themselves and their lives.

One of the main contributions of this research lies in the affirmation that therapeutic relationships are a core mechanism in the integration of psychological and spiritual dimensions. Data show that empathy, authentic presence, and unconditional acceptance are not just facilitative conditions, but are the primary medium through which the meaning-making process takes place. These findings reinforce the literature that places therapeutic relationships as the most consistent factor in the success of cross-approach therapies (Norcross & Lambert, 2019; Wampold & Imel, 2015), as well as expanding it into the context of spiritual counseling. In this study, relationships do not only function as a means of communication, but as a dialogical space that allows the client to reconstruct the authority of meaning from the external to the internal. This shift reflects a process of internalization of experience that is in line with the theory of self-determination, where autonomy and self-reflection are fundamental in the formation of meaning (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Therefore, this study confirms that the quality of therapeutic relationships has an epistemological dimension—not just relational—because it plays a role in shaping the way individuals know and understand themselves.

Furthermore, the findings of this study make an important contribution to the discourse of spirituality integration in counseling. In contrast to approaches that position spirituality as an additional technique or intervention, the results of this study show that spirituality is implicitly present through the client's relational and reflective experiences. This is in line with the view of Pargament (2011) who emphasizes that spirituality should be organically integrated into the therapeutic process, not imposed as a procedure. In this context, the client's spiritual experience is not directed or determined by the counselor, but emerges through the exploration of meaningful life experiences. These findings also show that the integration of spirituality is not always in the form of ritual or symbolic practices, but can be present in the form of self-awareness, acceptance, and connectedness. Thus, this study expands the understanding of spiritual counseling as a process rooted in existential experience, rather than just a formal religious practice.

This research also reveals that the construction of inner well-being is inseparable from the contemporary social context, especially in lives that are increasingly influenced by digital technology. The findings that clients compare themselves to technological efficiency standards and rationality

indicate the internalization of external values that make up self-evaluation. This is in line with the literature that shows that technological developments and artificial intelligence can influence the way individuals understand identity, emotions, and relationships (Floridi et al., 2018; Turkle, 2017). In this context, humanistic-spiritual counseling serves as a reflective space that allows clients to renegotiate those values. Clients don't reject technology, but begin to position it proportionately in their lives. These findings suggest that counseling serves not only as an individualized intervention, but also as a critical space for understanding broader social dynamics. Thus, this research expands the scope of spiritual counseling into the context of complex and digitized modern life.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes by proposing that inner well-being can be understood as a dynamic relational construct, rather than as a static condition separate from the context of individual experience. The findings show that well-being is formed through the interaction between emotional experiences, interpersonal relationships, and interrelated spiritual dimensions. This enriches the conceptual framework of well-being that has often been separated between hedonic and eudaimonic approaches (Diener et al., 2018; Ryff, 1989). In addition, this study shows that the meaning-making process is a key mechanism in shaping well-being, which is in line with the meaning-centered coping theory (Park, 2010). Thus, this research offers a conceptual framework that integrates humanistic counseling, spiritual experience, and relational processes as a basis for understanding inner well-being holistically.

Practically, the findings of this study have important implications for the development of counseling practices. Counselors need to strengthen competence in building therapeutic relationships that are empathetic and reflective, and have sensitivity to the client's spiritual dimension without normative interventions. An approach that is too directive or solution-based has the potential to hinder the process of exploring meaning, which is precisely the core of the change in this study. In addition, counselors also need to understand that clients bring life experiences that are influenced by social and technological contexts, so the approach used needs to be adaptive and contextual. Thus, counseling practices need to move from a technique-oriented approach to a relationship-oriented and meaning-oriented approach.

Although this research makes a significant contribution, there are some limitations that need to be considered. First, the relatively limited number of participants and coming from a particular context limits the generalization of the findings. Second, this study focuses on short-term experiences in the counseling process, so it has not been able to describe the long-term impact of humanistic and spiritual integration. Third, the interpretation of the data is still influenced by the perspective of the researcher, despite efforts to maintain reflexivity. Therefore, further research is recommended to involve participants from more diverse cultural and spiritual backgrounds, as well as to use longitudinal design to understand the dynamics of change more deeply.

Overall, this study confirms that humanistic-spiritual counseling is a relevant and contextual approach in understanding and facilitating inner well-being in the midst of the complexity of modern life. By placing therapeutic relationships at the center of the process and understanding spirituality as a living, reflective experience, this approach offers an important contribution to the development of counseling theories and practices that are more humanistic, holistic, and responsive to the challenges of the times.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the integration of humanistic principles within spiritual counseling provides a meaningful framework for reconstructing inner well-being through relational and reflective processes. The findings reveal that clients do not primarily experience well-being as the absence of distress, but rather as the capacity to understand, accept, and integrate emotional and spiritual experiences into a coherent sense of self. Through the counseling process, clients shift from normative and problem-centered interpretations toward more reflective and personally grounded meaning-making. This transformation highlights that inner well-being is not a static condition but an ongoing process shaped by self-awareness, relational engagement, and spiritual connectedness.

A central contribution of this study lies in its empirical identification of the therapeutic relationship as the primary mechanism through which psychological and spiritual dimensions are integrated. Empathy, authenticity, and non-judgmental presence are shown to create a dialogical space that enables clients to reconstruct meaning and reposition their sense of authority over their own experiences. In this sense, the therapeutic relationship functions not only as a supportive context but also as an epistemic space in which clients reinterpret themselves and their life experiences. This finding extends existing humanistic and spiritually integrated counseling frameworks by emphasizing the relational nature of meaning-making as a core process in achieving inner well-being.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the growing discourse on counseling in contemporary life by demonstrating that inner well-being is shaped within broader social and technological contexts. Clients' experiences reflect the influence of modern pressures, including expectations of efficiency, control, and emotional regulation shaped by digital environments. Humanistic spiritual counseling, in this context, serves as a reflective space that re-centers human vulnerability, relational depth, and existential meaning. This suggests that counseling practices must remain responsive to evolving socio-cultural conditions, particularly in increasingly technologized societies.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. The relatively small and context-specific sample limits the transferability of the findings, and the cross-sectional nature of the data does not capture long-term changes in clients' well-being. Additionally, while efforts were made to ensure rigor and reflexivity, the interpretive nature of qualitative research means that findings remain contextually situated. Future research is recommended to explore diverse cultural and spiritual settings, incorporate longitudinal designs, and examine how technological environments continue to shape individuals' meaning-making processes.

In conclusion, this study affirms that humanistic spiritual counseling offers a holistic and contextually relevant approach to understanding and fostering inner well-being. By positioning relational experience and meaning-making at the center of the counseling process, this approach provides a valuable contribution to the development of more humane, reflective, and integrative counseling practices in contemporary society.

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