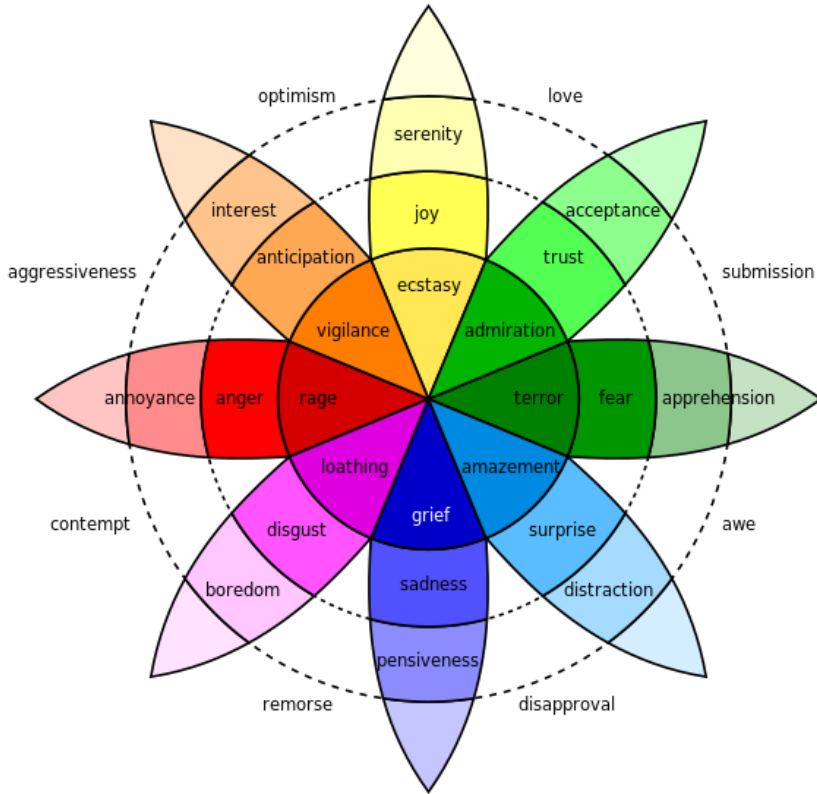


Spiritual Bypassing: The dangers of disconnecting from emotions

Caroline Winzenried

- Review
- Defining “spiritual bypassing”
- Exploring what happens when we disconnect from emotions

Overview



Plutchik's Wheel of Emotion

What are emotions?

Acute reactions to events/stimuli which involve:

- Perception
- Cognitive appraisal
- Physiological response
- Behavioural response

What is spiritual bypassing?

“Spiritual bypass occurs when a person attempts to heal psychological wounds at the spiritual level only and avoids the important (albeit often difficult and painful) work at the other levels, including the cognitive, physical, emotional, and interpersonal” (Cashwell et al, 2007).

Prayer

Suppression

Meditation

Re-framing

Sublimation

Avoidance

Spiritual bypassing

Practices that are
sometimes used to spiritual
bypass

Prayer

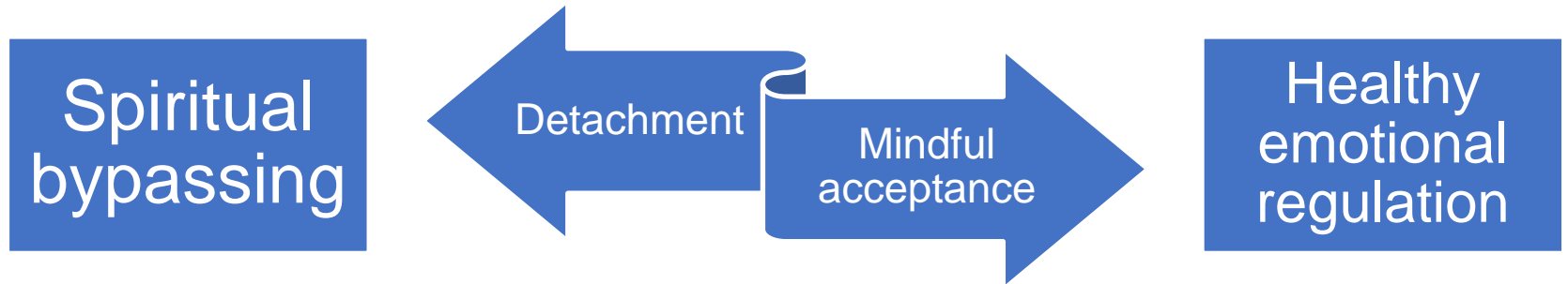
- “Giving it up to God”
- “Praying it away”



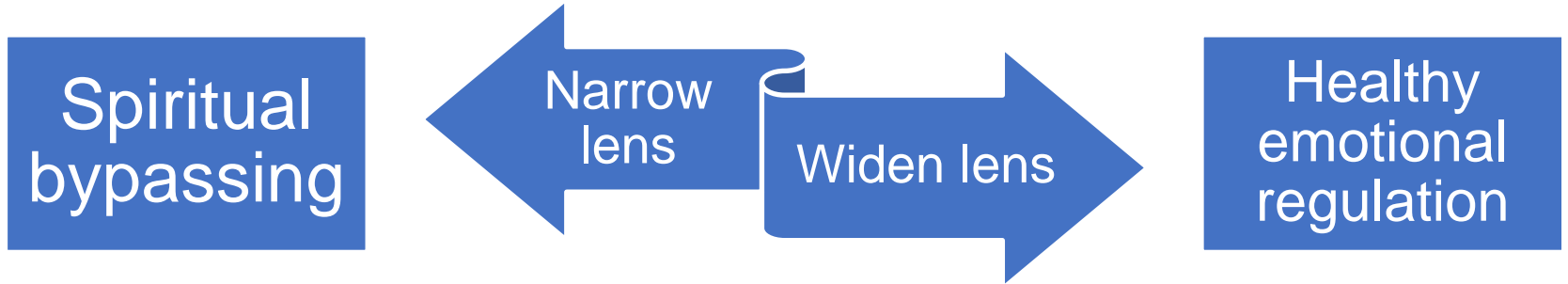
Suppression

- Denying or minimizing emotions that are deemed “inappropriate” or “unacceptable”
- Must be motivated by religious beliefs to fall under umbrella of spiritual bypassing

Meditation



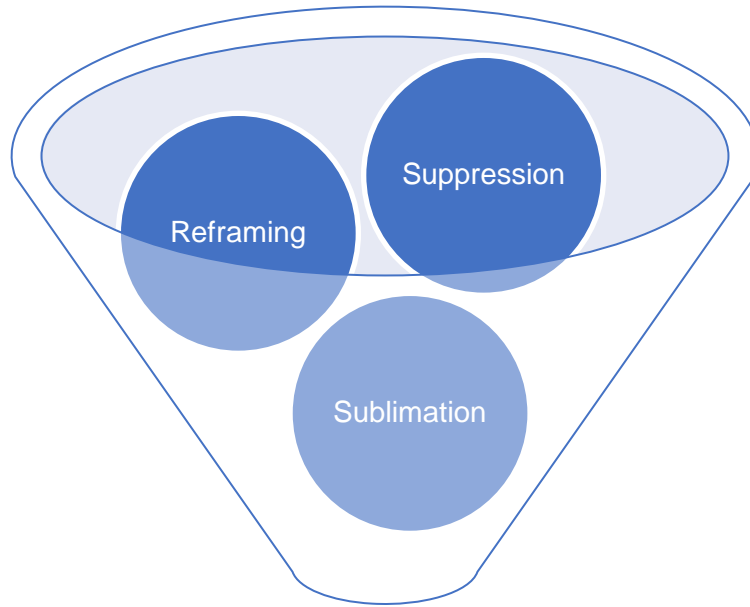
Reframing



Sublimation

- Channelling painful emotions into something we value
- Veers into spiritual bypassing territory when it's motivated by religious beliefs and used to avoid emotions





Avoidance

Why do people spiritual bypass?

Avoiding pain

- Minimizing or reframing painful emotions and experiences to make them less painful

Seeking greater meaning

- Reality doesn't feel meaningful
- Search for meaning and framework of understanding in spiritual world

Coping with challenges

- A way to navigate and cope with difficult life experiences and trauma

Spiritual leaders

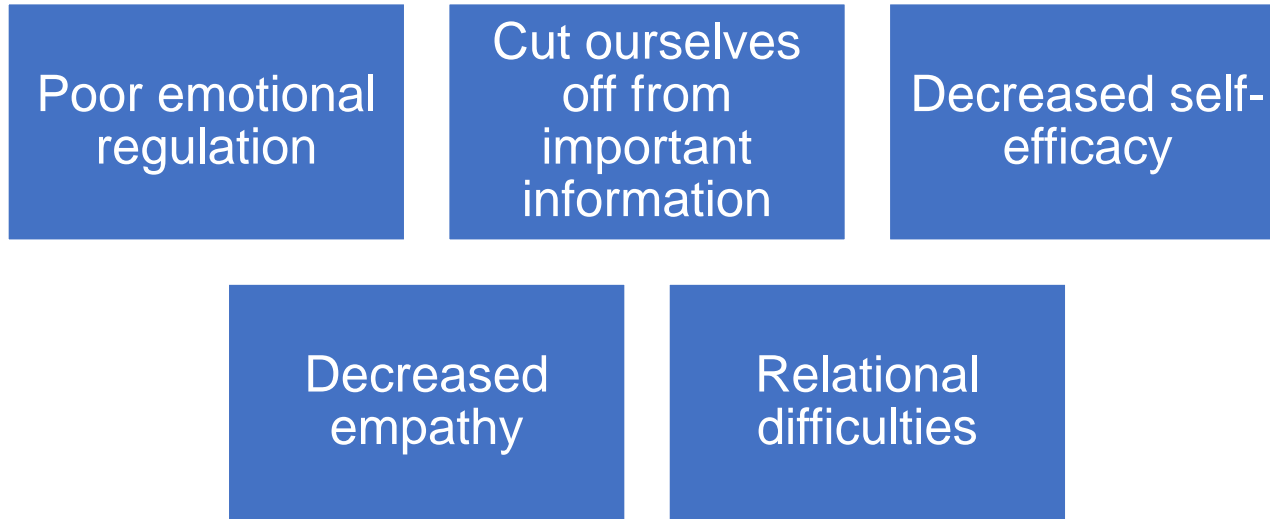
- Unhelpful spiritual practices taught by negligent leaders

Signs of spiritual bypassing

- Emotional alienation
- Exaggerated detachment
- Overemphasis on positives
- Excessive tolerance
- Seeing suffering as an illusion
- Disregarding the personal/mundane

(Masters, 2010)

What happens when we disconnect from emotions?



Emotional regulation is the use of healthy strategies to respond to and modulate an emotional experience by:

- Initiating actions
- Inhibiting actions
- Modulating reactions



Poor Emotional Regulation

- Emotions often don't go away when we suppress them; they may even amplify
- We need to be in touch with our emotions to effectively regulate them

- Tell us about what we value
- Motivate us toward action
- Help us make decisions
- Communicate our intentions

Emotions as Information

Emotions as Information

Sadness

- Signals that we need to process a loss and adjust to it
- Helps us seek support

Anger

- Indicates boundaries have been crossed
- Signals unmet needs
- Motivates us to enact change

Fear

- Alerts us to threats
- Motivates us to find safety

Emotions as Information

Pride

- Helps us recognize our strengths and values
- Builds sense of self-efficacy

Jealousy

- Signals areas that might need work in a relationship
- Tells us about our fears, hopes, and values

Desire

- Motivates us to pursue goals and relationships
- Tell us about what we find attractive and meaningful



Decreased Self-Efficacy

- Feeling “stuck” - hard to make decisions
- Feeling confused and overwhelmed by internal experience
- Sense that one “can’t cope” with big emotions, especially after learning to “give them to God” through prayer and rituals

Decreased Empathy & Relational Difficulties

- Learning about and accepting our own emotions is a key component of empathy
- Empathy and emotional awareness are central to relationships. Without them, communication and connection suffer

Case Study: Paul

- Joined AA and "turned his life over to a higher power" through prayer and reframing
- This helped with alcohol and drug use, but not with pain and anger from childhood
- Interpreted lingering pain/anger as a lack of faith → guilt, intensified emotions
- Counselling helped Paul to listen to and understand his anger so he could choose how to respond to it through emotional regulation and feel in control of his actions

What's next?

Exploring how to reconnect with our emotions and heal

Healing factors



SUPPORT GROUPS

It helps to talk to others who have been there



TELL YOUR STORY

Stories empower us and help us to understand



THERAPY

Professional support can help you navigate



LISTEN

Hearing others' stories reminds us we are not alone

Thank you

Caroline Winzenried
contact@consideredcounselling.net
www.consideredcounselling.net
0435 855 382