Religious Fundamentals and Work: Diversity, Specific Factors, and Implications
Craig Warlick

Religion & Work

Work and religion are integrating. People desire to express their religious beliefs at work (Lips-Wiersma & Mills, 2002) and more individuals report doing so (Miller, 2007). Religious beliefs act as cornerstones to an individual’s orientation towards work (Davidson & Caddell, 1994). This impacts a variety of vocational factors, including development as a whole (Royce-Davis & Stewart, 2000), career self-efficacy (Duffy & Blustein, 2005), self-esteem, career indecision (Blustein, 1989), and belief can act as coping mechanism for work stress (Constantine, Mitville, Warren, Gainer, & Lewis-Coles, 2006). Ignoring the role of religion and spirituality at work means overlooking a process which affects both individuals and all of their surrounding cultures (Piedmont & Wilkins, 2013a).

Fundamentalism

The term fundamentalists is utilized to describe the individuals who do hold those beliefs with a very high level of salience and are convinced of the absolute validity of their beliefs (Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005).

It has been characterized as the belief that one’s religion is the “one true religion” (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2004).

Regardless of faith tradition, when religious salience is high, it spills over into work (Weaver & Agle, 2002).

To observe religiousness and spirituality in vocation, it may be easiest to see it a discernable end of a spectrum.

Fundamentalism is unique. Traits of those who are religious “do not always match well with the personality styles of individuals who are orthodox or conservative in their religious beliefs” (Piedmont & Wilkins, 2013a, p. 299).

Fundamentalism is characterized as a “deep-level” diversity variable. This is a group of individuals whose diverse characteristics are not usually visually identified, in contrast with diversity labels that are often visually identified, like race and gender.

In some cases, religion is also a “surface level” diversity variable (e.g. visible skin-markings, specific clothing like hijabs, turbans, habit; Gebert, Boerner, Kearney, King, Zhang, & Song 2013).

Research of this group has largely been deficit-focused (e.g. prejudice, perceived capabilities for lower moral reasoning and intellectual capabilities; Savage, 2011).

Science must avoid the simple binary of fundamentalists are bad, researchers are good. Researchers need to fully examine the many facets of this unique population. Counselors need literature to guide discussions and intervention strategies with this unique population.

“Religion does indeed provide moral exemplars, legislators, and healers, but other cultural adaptations (e.g. artistic interests, atheist orientations, contesting ideologies) provide entertainers, creators, rebels, and revolutionaries. Presumably, human societies need both. This may explain why, throughout history, some people are religious and others are not” (Saroglou, 2010, p.120). There is a vocational function for fundamentals.

Diversity

Specific Factors

Personality

• Religious belief and spirituality has been argued as a “superfactor” of personality (Piedmont, 1999).

• Fundamentalists typically score low on Openness to Experience (Saroglou, 2010).

• This fundamental position produces constricted views on the world (Streib, Hood, Keller, Caillf, & Silver, 2009).

Interests:

• Fundamentalists have a negative relationship to Artistic interests and no significant relationship with investigative interests. (Warlick, Ingram, Vuyk, & Multon, 2016).

Engagement:

• The more a person is engaged, the more they will be affected in making vocational decisions (Krieshok, Black, & McKay, 2009). Religion can be deeply engaging.

• Due to religious and cultural expectations, non-religious vocational exploration may be incredibly limited (Pirutinsky, 2012).

Implications

• To find work that is religiously and culturally-acceptable, intervention and assessment may be needed (Pirutinsky, 2012).

• Assess for salience of religious beliefs as being fundamental can be different, and from being religious (Piedmont & Wilkins, 2013a).

• Fundamentalism can be adaptive (e.g. strong relationships; Blogowska et al., 2013), and also maladaptive (e.g. perceived as dogmatic, judgmental; Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005).

• Congruence, “evaluated in terms of the broad work environment, not merely tasks, duties, and career-related roles,” may be essential in ascertaining and maintaining meaningful work (Warlick, Ingram, Vuyk, & Multon, 2016).

Specific Counseling Considerations:

• Utilize reflection, the client’s own words, and inclusive language (Shafranske, 2013)

• A collaborative style may help in building the relationship (Streib et al., 2009)

• Narrative may help build awareness into career characteristics and previous history with vocational goals (Savickas, 2005; Duffy, 2006)