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Integration of paradoxes and values-based change among multicultural cancer survivors from an authentic post-modern spiritual lens

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Breast cancer survivors' experiences of paradox, as part of a change process, fostered greater values clarification and meaning-making through Psycho-Spiritual Integrative Therapy (PSIT), which is based on Sri Aurobindo's Cosmology and Philosophy. The participants are able to engage in multiple transitions, and more importantly, integrate change through paradoxes, which may involve ambiguity, inconsistency and/or uncertainty.

Previous studies examined the role of paradoxes in spiritual development without a group intervention among European-Caucasian women who had undergone cancer treatment; this study investigated paradoxes from an authentic post-modern spiritual lens based on a multicultural breast cancer population. The uncertainties that women experience after cancer treatment can be transformed as women work with paradoxes and refine what they value in their lives through an evolving aspiration. This adds a new dimension to acceptance and commitment therapy (act) through dialectical changes because cancer survivors are able to change and move towards greater values-based living through their evolving aspirations and meaning-making process.

This qualitative study examined the experience of 12 breast cancer survivors (6 culturally diverse/6 European Caucasian) who participated in an 8-week PSIT intervention and completed 1 follow-up interview which ranged from 60 - 90 minutes. Three specific research questions are asked in this research. First, which of the paradoxes identified in the previous study were experienced by breast cancer survivors in the current study? Second, what new paradoxes emerged from the 12 participants' responses? Third, how did culturally diverse women expand the range of paradoxes in the PSIT intervention? This third question aimed to contribute to an under-researched area: culturally diverse breast cancer survivors. The study used a qualitative methodology, based on a thematic analysis of 12 participant interviews, in order to identify paradox themes and subthemes among breast cancer survivors. Findings included the following: (a) the PSIT group replicated 2 paradox themes, named in the previous study including Maintaining Coherence between Old and New Ways and Identifying Spiritual Growth; (b) the PSIT participants expanded the range of paradoxes beyond a binary (either/or) construction to include an interdependent (both/and) connection in paradoxes. They extended the range of paradox with 10 new paradox themes including New Paths of Empowerment, Spiritual Edges and Tensions and Interconnection within Paradoxes; (c) the culturally diverse PSIT participants extended the range of paradoxes by focusing on balance within paradoxes and greater multidimensionality, or 3-part paradoxes.

They expanded the range of paradoxes to include subthemes that reflected their insight gained through witness consciousness (neutral-observer stance), their movement from self-criticism to self-understanding, and their experiences of moderating control and surrender. Implications of this research suggest that paradoxes are embedded in the cancer experience. Multicultural cancer survivors searched for authentic spiritual experiences and/or connection. The women benefit from psycho-spiritual group interventions that promote individualized and embodied spiritual practices through a post-modern spiritual lens. Health care professionals are in an ideal position to provide psycho-educational interventions that acknowledge and embody paradoxes, so their patients are able to work with and through paradoxes in their cancer recovery.

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