Chapter 8
Aaron: Exploring the Intersection of Religion and Identity With an LDS Client

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the integration of the existentialist counseling approach and MSJCC as it relates to the case study of Aaron. Authors review the case of Aaron, a college student, who identifies within the LDS faith, struggling with symptoms of depression and anxiety. The authors include a review of the foundation and history of the LDS church, as well as the modern structure and implications for counseling. The authors also describe their own cultural backgrounds and counseling approaches when working with Aaron. Following this review is a case conceptualization through an existential theoretical lens with the inclusion of short-term and long-term goals alongside a treatment plan.

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AARON: EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF RELIGION AND IDENTITY WITH AN LDS CLIENT

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) reports having over 16 million members worldwide with over 6.5 million members in the United States (LDS Church, n.d. -d). Individuals within the LDS faith who identify as either an active, inactive, or an ex-member (no longer affiliated with the LDS church) may benefit from addressing their relationship with religion in counseling. Counselors and counselor educators may be hesitant to address spirituality and religion with clients or counselors-in-training due to personal biases or lack of training.

Counselors and counselor educators have an ethical duty to evaluate potential personal biases when working with a client or counselor-in-training that identifies as LDS. Active/Inactive or ex-members of the LDS faith are an underrepresented and underserved population facing stereotypes and personal biases that may negatively impact the counseling relationship. Culturally sensitive counselors engage in self-reflection on personal biases and explore the application of the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) in their work with clients.

The intent of this chapter is to explore the case of Aaron and the struggles he faces with his developing identity within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The authors provide a brief case study to introduce the reader to Aaron, followed by the history and formation of the LDS church, and the current structure of the LDS church. The authors provide implications for counseling, as well as, an in-depth description of the main author’s cultural background as it relates to this case. The authors detail an existential conceptualization and approach used when working with Aaron, including a conceptualization of Aaron and the counseling relationship using the MSJCC. The authors conclude by detailing Aaron’s treatment, goals, and his current progress.

Aaron is a fictional client created for the purposes of exploring the use of MSJCC and existentialism within a counseling session. Aaron was created to represent common struggles to some members of the LDS faith, as identified by the research literature. Any similarities to any of the author’s current or previous clients are purely coincidental.

CASE DESCRIPTION

Aaron is a 20 year old, heterosexual, Caucasian male enrolled in his second semester of a local college after returning from a mission served for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. He sought out individual counseling to address feelings of depression, anxiety, and isolation. He reported struggling to focus in class, feelings of irritability, and inability to fall and stay asleep during the night. Aaron identified