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This study examined the self-reported value of spirituality, types of spiritual practices, and values of 69 counselor education students. It also examined counseling students' ideas for how to increase their comfort with incorporating spirituality into counseling practice. Implications for implementing spirituality training in counselor education programs are addressed.

The need to address spirituality issues with clients and to train counselors in effective counseling methods for exploring these client issues has been acknowledged by the counseling profession (Belaire & Young, 2000; Belaire, Young, & Elder, 2005; Burke et al., 1999; Curtis & Davis, 1999; Ingersoll, 1997; Matthews, 1998; Miller, 1999; Pate & High, 1995; Schaffner & Dixon, 2003). Myers and Truluck (1998) suggested that "it is both appropriate and timely for counselor education training programs to ensure that the religious beliefs of clients, and perhaps also of counselor trainees, are included in counselor training" (p. 121). Burke et al. (1999) recommended that "a balanced inclusion of the spiritual and religious aspects of life at appropriate points in the CACREP [Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs] curriculum is a reasonable step in helping counselor trainees acquire competencies necessary for incorporating the spiritual/religion dimension into the counseling process" (p. 256). They further suggested inclusion approaches for the eight CACREP common core areas of study.

Kelly (1995) found that 45% of surveyed counselors were active in organized religion, and 61% reported attending religious services regularly. Although studies have demonstrated a high level of interest in spirituality by many counseling professionals (e.g., Burke et al., 1999; Holt, Houg, & Romano, 1999; Ingersoll, 1997), few studies have addressed the issue of spirituality with counselor education students, as did Souza's (2002) groundbreaking study. This current study surveyed students' expression of their spirituality and spiritual values.

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The first purpose of the study was to assess the significance of spirituality in the lives of master's-level counseling students and its current meaning/practice in their lives. To address this issue, we asked the following questions:

> *Research Question 1*: What spirituality practices do counselor education students observe?
> *Research Question 2*: What are the values counselor education students identify as most important?

The second purpose of this study was to ascertain what might increase students' confidence in integrating spirituality into their counseling approaches when appropriate. To address this issue, we asked the following question:

> *Research Question 3*: What strategies would increase students' comfort level for integrating spiritual issues into the counseling process?

METHOD

Participants

Counselor education students at a large southeastern university were invited to participate in a research study designed to examine the role of spirituality in their lives. Sixty-eight students (51 women, 17 men) participated in the study, ranging in age from 22 to 55 years (women: M = 32.34 years, SD = 9.64; men: M = 30.79 years, SD = 8.11), and were Caucasian (82%), Black (10%), Hispanic (6%), and other (2%). The majority of participants classified their religious preference as either Christian/Protestant (56%) or Catholic (24%). Other religious preferences (agnostic, atheist, Jewish, and New Age) each had 3% representation, and the category "none of the above" captured 8% of the students. When asked if they had experienced a spiritual crisis, 50% of participants (n = 34) responded yes.

Instrumentation

Students were asked to complete a survey we designed to address specific research questions outlined for this study. The following definition was written on the survey: "Spirituality is a search for meaning and purpose in life" (Koch, 1998, p. 20). The items on the survey consisted of open- and close-ended questions. For Research Question 1, to determine the spirituality practices of the students, we included four questions about the extent spirituality plays a part in their lives, what spiritual practices they engage in, how important various spiritual practices are, and which are most and least important.

Research Question 2 was to determine the values the students identify as most important. Students were asked to prioritize their five most important values from a list of 98 values that were identified by students in a previous semester

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in response to the question, "What is important to you?" Research Question 3 was designed as an open-ended question and focused on what specific strategies might help to increase students' confidence for integrating spiritual issues into the counseling process. Specifically, students were asked, "What would increase your confidence in discussing spirituality with your clients?"

Procedure

Professors distributed survey copies to participants who completed them outside of class time. Students had the choice of turning in the surveys during the following class or to the program secretary, to further assure anonymity. Participation was voluntary, and students were informed that they could discontinue their participation at any time without penalty.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were calculated for responses to Research Question 1. For Research Question 2, values prioritization was calculated by assigning 1 point to each chosen value and tallying the points. The five values with the most points were identified.

Emerging themes in students' responses to the open-ended question (Research Question 3) were identified using the inductive approach described by Abrahamsom (1983), in which researchers immerse themselves in the narrative material to identify the dimensions that seem important to the writers. Berg (1998) advocated reliance on this method with consistent application of an objective coding scheme utilizing explicit rules called *criteria of selection*. Drawing on the work of earlier researchers (e.g., Denzin, 1978), Berg explained that inductive category development must emanate from emerging patterns within the data, thereby grounding these categories in the data from which they derive. In the present study, the two researchers (first and second author) independently constructed categories, following the sorting of responses. Upon arriving at agreed-upon categories, the two researchers and a graduate student (third author) then independently sorted student responses into these categories, with a 100% agreement rate.

RESULTS

Three research questions guided this study. The purpose of Research Question 1 was to identify the spirituality practices the counselor education students observed. Four questions about spiritual practices were asked, and responses were analyzed through examination of percentages and rankings. Table 1 shows the responses to the first and second practices questions. The first practices question asked was, "To what extent does spirituality play a part in your life?" Approximately 60% of students indicated that spirituality was very important (pervades/influences everything they do or is a big part of everything they do),

TABLE 1

Percentage of Counselor Education Student Responses When Asked About the Role of Spirituality in Their Lives

Question	Response	%
1. To what extent does spirituality play a part in your life?	Pervades and influences everything I do	25
	Is a big part of everything I do	35
	I consider it along with other priorities/options	31
	It is occasionally relevant	6
	Is not particularly relevant to my thinking and decision making	3
2. How do you observe spiritual events?	I follow a mixture of traditional activities and personal rituals	46
	I engage in my church's traditional services	34
	I personally create most of my own rituals	10
	I do not observe spiritual events with any regularity	10

Note. Percentages are whole numbers because of rounding.

with 31% of students indicating that they consider it along with other priorities/options, and the remaining students stating that either it was occasionally relevant (6%) or that it was not particularly relevant (3%) to them. The second practices question asked how students observe religious events, with the largest responding group preferring a combination of traditional observations and personal rituals (46%). Other responses included engaging in their church's traditional services (34%), personally creating most of their own rituals (10%), and not observing spiritual events with any regularity (10%).

The third practices question examined how important specific activities were for counselor education students in expressing their spiritual ideals. Students were asked to rate the importance of specific activities in their lives on a 5-point scale from 0 = *not important* to 4 = *very important*. The three activities rated very important by most respondents included engaging in spiritual/religious rituals such as holidays and special events (75% of students), adhering to one's own set of values (74%), and praying (60%), whereas the activities that received the most frequent ratings of not important by students were reading religious books (71% of students) and serving at their church/synagogue/religious service (44%). The fourth practices question specifically asked students to identify the most and least important activity from the list of activities associated with the third practices question. Praying was the activity rated as most important by the largest group of students (41%), and journaling was rated as least important by the largest group of students (35%).

Research Question 2 sought to identify those values that counselor education students consider most important from a list of 98 values. The most commonly listed values for the entire group were family (*n* = 26), loving (*n* = 21), spirituality (*n* = 20), compassion (*n* = 20), and honesty (*n* = 14). When values were tabulated by gender, women (*n* = 52) and men (*n* = 17) appeared to have different priorities. Women's five most frequently chosen values were

consistent with the total group's highest values. However, men's values varied from these somewhat; the two values most highly prized were integrity ($n = 6$) and happiness ($n = 6$), which were not included in women's most frequent choices ($n = 5$ and $n = 6$, respectively). Both genders included family, loving, and honesty among their highest five values. Chi-square analyses revealed significance gender differences for happiness, $\chi^2(1, N = 69) = 5.03$, $p < .05$, and for integrity, $\chi^2(1, N = 69) = 6.30$, $p < .05$.

The response of the largest group of students (34%) to a question concerning Research Question 3 ("What would increase your confidence in discussing spirituality with your clients?") was being comfortable if the client initiated the topic. A sample statement reflecting this sentiment was "I would not unless they brought it up." The second largest group of students (22%) indicated that as knowledge increased, so would their comfort. Sample comments included "More knowledge of other religions—especially nontraditional" or "Possibly a basic course in spirituality." The students' sentiment in the third group (16%) was that confidence would increase if they knew that they would not be imposing their beliefs on the client or that no punishment would occur. A sample statement was "If I was sure I would not lose my job or be reprimanded in some way." A fourth group of students (10%) reported feeling confident, as evidenced by statements such as "I am comfortable now." A fifth group of students (9%) stated that they would feel more comfortable if they effected some spiritual growth of their own, such as "I think that trusting my faith more consistently."

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to examine how spirituality is expressed in the lives of counselor education students, to identify the values counselor education students see as most important, and to learn what would increase student confidence in discussing spirituality with their clients. Findings from this study suggest that spirituality is clearly valued and practiced among the counselor education students surveyed. In response to Research Question 1, 60% of the students reported that spirituality either pervades and influences everything they do or is a big part of their lives, with an additional 31% stating that spirituality is considered along with other priorities in their lives. Ninety percent of the students reported they observe significant religious events in personal and/or traditional ways. Almost one third of responding students prioritized spirituality as one of their most important out of 98 values. The finding that spirituality is valued among many counselor education students is consistent with a growing body of research finding that spirituality is highly valued among counseling professionals (Bergin & Jensen, 1990; Frame, 2000; Hickson, Housley, & Wages, 2000; Myers & Truluck, 1998).

Responses to Research Question 1 revealed a great deal about the spiritual practice of the surveyed program's counselor education students. These students

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ranked observation of religious and spiritual events, adherence to their own set of values, and prayer as the most important activities in which they engage to nurture their spirituality. It is not surprising that 75% of students identified participation in the observation of religious and spiritual events as meaningful in their lives; furthermore, the fact that 56% reported they observed these significant events through a combination of personal ritual and traditional observation of spiritual events suggests that students are initiating their own spiritual practices. Students may be seeking their own meaning of religious events, which would imply that they actively seek personal spiritual answers. Seventy-four percent of students saw adherence to their personal values systems as an equally important expression of their spirituality. Thus, students express their spiritual values in observance of very specific events, such as traditional holidays, yet see themselves living their values in everyday events and making choices and decisions based on a value system that is apparently imbued with their own spiritual beliefs about right and wrong, good and bad. These students are adherents to spirituality in the truest sense of the word; they live it.

Students also highly valued the practice of prayer. Studies on prayer in the lives of counselors have revealed two main findings. First, a study of seven counselor trainers from British universities revealed that covert (as opposed to overt) prayer by the counselor can serve to help the counselor feel grounded, provide a different reference point from which to view the client and the client's situation, and can be seen as a way of supporting the client (Gubi, 2001). Gubi (2001) also identified potential benefits of overt prayer with clients but raised issues about the ethical dilemmas associated with overtly praying with clients. Second, Nyman and Daugherty (2001) found that when a counselor self-disclosed about using prayer following client self-disclosure about use of prayer, the counselor received higher overall ratings and higher attractiveness ratings and were more likely to be chosen by 67 college student clients compared with counselors who self-disclosed about personal prayer usage without client self-disclosure. The relationship of prayer to counseling still merits much research and discussion.

Myers and Truluck (1998) suggested it might be time to examine the spiritual values of counselor trainees, and through our second research question, we attempted to do this. Responses to Research Question 2 showed consistency for these counselor education students' highest preferences, specifically with family, spirituality and loving, and respect and happiness being the most frequent choices. However, although 75% of these students reported expressing their spirituality through their value system, only recently have counseling texts discussed how counselor values are an integral, inseparable factor in effective counseling (Egan, 1998). According to Egan (1998, p. 42), counselor values "permeate" and "drive" the counseling relationship by providing the counselor with a framework from which decisions about how to proceed are based. Given this, and the pervading fear among students of imposing beliefs,

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perhaps students need assistance acknowledging that helping clients explore spiritual beliefs is not the same as forcing the counselor's spiritual beliefs on the client. This acknowledgment may result in a higher awareness of potential countertransference issues related to spirituality (Hayes & Cowie, 2005; Mack, 1994). At the same time, it must be acknowledged that although spirituality was highly prized by this group, it seems to be more highly valued by female than male counselor education students. Two male students (12%) identified spirituality among their five highest values, whereas 18 female students (36%) identified it among their five highest. Further research may elucidate differences between women and men who are drawn to the counseling field.

Although no other studies of counselor values to date have found the most highly prized values to be family and spirituality, studies did find loving/benevolence as highly valued for counselors (Kelly, 1995) and for substance abuse counselors (Brooks & Matthews, 2000). In addition, psychologists who perceive spirituality as relevant in their own lives were more likely to perceive it as relevant within their clinical work (Shafranske & Gorsuch, 1984). Future research questions should examine how these values, and in particular, the value of spirituality, affect students' philosophy and practice of counseling.

Responses to Research Question 3 indicated that although approximately 90% of these counselor education students personally value spirituality, only 10% expressed the confidence to initiate discussions in that direction in their counseling relationships. The most common strategy for increasing counselor education students' confidence for integrating spiritual issues into the counseling process was client initiation of the topic. Souza (2002) reported the same belief among some of the counselor education students she surveyed. The second most common strategy was some type of an educational component, such as taking religion courses, exploring their beliefs with others, and Bible study. In her study, Souza noted that counseling students had mixed reactions to taking a world religion course outside of the counselor education program, although many supported counselor training focused on spirituality. Findings related to students' confidence in counseling clients in the area of their spiritual beliefs indicated that most students maintain a clear separation of personal values and counseling practice.

Yet values are an important variable in the counseling relationship (Capuzzi & Gross, 1999; Cormier & Cormier, 1998; Okun, 1997; Seligman, 2001) for both counselor and client. The significance of values to individuals' choices, beliefs, actions, and paradigms that structure their perceptions of their environment and their relationships has been repeatedly noted over the years. Values play a particularly salient role in the counseling relationship because of their role in effecting behavior change as well as personal growth. Whereas some counseling may involve assisting a client in initiating behaviors that are consistent with her or his expressed values, other changes and personal growth may involve values changes, or at least shifts in the relative priority of some

values to others. Capuzzi and Gross (1999) traced the evolution of thinking within the counseling profession in relation to the role of counselors' values. Traditionally, the influence of psychodynamic philosophy has been evident in the traditional counseling injunction to counselors to present themselves as value-free in the counseling relationship (Capuzzi & Gross, 1999). However, in recent years a number of professionals have asserted that it is not possible to remain value-free in counseling; they noted that as early as 1958, Williamson had asserted that counselors should be open about their values. Samler (1960) concurred, suggesting that assisting clients to change their values is an appropriate goal and, in fact, could be a requirement for counseling to be effective.

Counselor educators have observed that counselors cannot keep their values out of counseling (e.g., Cormier & Cormier, 1998; Okun, 1997) but seem uncertain whether counselors should actually assist clients in changing values. The counseling profession does agree that counselors assist clients in changing their behavior, which frequently also signals a change in values. It is clearly legitimate to assist clients in acting on their own values; confrontation in counseling is often about a client who says she or he values one attribute but practices another. There seems to be little dissension within the profession that it is legitimate to help clients change actions to match values. But what about the woman who is involved in counseling, and has suffered from domestic abuse for years, expressing the value that a woman should submit to her husband? Obviously there could be many variations on this theme. Alternatively, a woman who determines that she must get out of an abusive situation is clearly expressing a different self-value. Has the counselor facilitated change in the woman's values or just her behavior? Although we do not talk about it in that framework, it is clear the counselor is involved in advocating more self-preserving values. Do we as counselors have the right to assist clients in self-preservation? In self-acceptance? In self-valuing? For the client who comes to us very much in need of healing, or gripped by indecision, self-doubt, even self-loathing, we are often involved in changing values. Is it possible that we prefer not to talk about it because there are so many gray areas and so many uncertainties involved? It may be safer to be value-free as a counselor, but, as Samler (1960) pointed out, it may not always be effective.

We do not mean to imply that it is legitimate for counselors to try to change clients' spiritual values, but exploration of values is a legitimate topic in the counseling relationship (Seligman, 2001). What happens when a counselor initiates a discussion of the client's values and the client's values are very much integrated with her or his spiritual beliefs? How is this any different from exploring the range of client values? In fact, this may be what one third of this study sample of counselor education students meant when they said they would only discuss spiritual values if the client initiated that direction. What if the counselor believes in the relevance of the client's spiritual values to the issue under discussion? Should the counselor feel comfortable in initiating that direction?

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The professional literature implies five possible levels of counselor–client interaction related to values: exploring and discussing client values (Capuzzi & Gross, 1999); sharing of counselor values (Capuzzi & Gross, 1999); counselor indirectly influencing client values (Cormier & Cormier, 1998; Okun, 1997); counselor working collaboratively with the client to change client values (Capuzzi & Gross, 1999); and counselor encouraging the client to change values in the direction of those espoused by the counselor (Cormier & Cormier, 1998). It would seem that student counselors should learn the skills of exploring client spiritual values, no matter who initiates that discussion (Belaire & Young, 2000; Burke et al., 1999; Curtis & Davis, 1999; Ingersoll, 1997; Matthews, 1998; Miller, 1999; Pate & High, 1995). There may be some disagreement about whether counselors should disclose their own values, but it seems reasonable that students could learn how to do this in a noncoercive way, whether the values relate to spirituality, politics, or any other domain. Changing spiritual values is not what this study and/or we are suggesting. Yet research does indicate that clients want to explore values (Kelly, 1997; Rose, Westefeld, & Ansley, 2001), and they will have questions. Astute counselors would recognize personal spiritual values and address these professionally and nonjudgmentally in the counseling relationship.

Counselor education programs have several options if they want to pursue this area. Facilitating development of skills counselors can use to help clients explore spiritual values may involve thinking about the framework and dimensions of exploration and practicing the skills. That is, students may need to understand that the major skills involved in exploration of client spiritual values do not lie in knowing exact details about the practices and philosophy of world religions; the framework students would learn relates to assisting clients in self-exploration along general avenues common to all religions (e.g., values, right and wrong, meaning attributed to doing something wrong, how they communicate with their deity, and the balance between love and duty).

Pedagogical strategies for enhancing student skills and confidence in initiating or discussing spirituality might be gleaned from research findings for increasing student competence and confidence in general. Some of these strategies have included specialized skill training that provides time for practice (McClanahan et al., 1998; Wilbur, Roberts-Wilbur, Hart, & Morris, 1994), use of students' imagery (Hazler & Hipple, 1981), structured group supervision (Wilbur et al., 1994), fieldwork experience (Lutwak & Scheffler, 1991); role-playing/modeling (Froehle, Robinson, & Kurpius, 1983), and providing feedback (Erwin & Toth, 1998; Mohammed & Piercy, 1983). Other possibilities include the incorporation of spirituality into case studies, disclosures, class assignments, role plays, ethical dilemmas, and general discussions, the effectiveness of which should be systematically examined through empirical research.

A further step would involve additions to the curriculum, such as the creation of a spirituality and counseling course (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1997; Ingersoll,

1997), as well as integrating spirituality into existing courses, such as "Special Populations," or creating a certificate program. Such integration is supported by Burke et al. (1999) as a way to facilitate students' confidence in exploring and using spirituality in counseling. Although Corveleyn (2000) argued against having such a spiritual strategy or specified approach to discussing spirituality in counseling, addressing spirituality allows an inquiry into a potentially powerful component of client support systems, and teaching how to initiate and discuss this topic is a responsibility that belongs uniquely to counselor educators and supervisors. Thus, it may be in the best interest of both clients and students for counselor education programs to address this issue.

This exploratory study examined the spiritual practices and values of counselor education students. Limitations include a mostly Caucasian female sample at one southeastern university and the voluntary survey completion, which may have resulted in the most interested students choosing to respond. This study has provided a springboard for additional studies on this topic that can be extended to include a more diverse sample size and diverse campuses.

Findings from this study may suggest several further research efforts: (a) additional data about the spiritual beliefs and values of counselor education students; (b) the counseling needs of diverse clientele and the role spirituality plays in clients' culture and lives; (c) exploration into the area of values in general, as well as how they affect the counseling relationship; (d) identification of counseling models and paradigms that espouse ethical and exploration of spirituality issues; (e) inquiry into the role of prayer and spiritual rituals in the lives of counselors and clients; and (f) examination of the effectiveness of pedagogical strategies to enhance confidence with initiating and discussing spirituality.

The counseling profession needs to pursue and provide clarity about this issue and encourage programs to provide guidelines, ethics, and fundamental premises of counseling into the spirituality realm. Counselor education programs need to promote the developmental model of human functioning, which includes spirituality as a vital part of an interrelated system. As researchers and educators, some of us may find ourselves braving a path of integrating spirituality into counseling approaches and teaching paradigms.

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