ABSTRACT

CONLEY, ABIGAIL HOLLAND. Exploring College Counselor Spiritual Competency in Relation to Training and Professional Practice. (Under the direction of Sylvia Nassar-McMillan).

The purpose of this mixed methods sequential explanatory study was to explore factors contributing to college counselors’ spiritual competency by obtaining quantitative results from surveying 199 current members of the American College Counseling Association (ACCA) and then following up with 32 purposefully selected respondents based on high and low spiritual competency scores to explore those results in more depth. In the first quantitative phase, training exposure explained 15% of the variance in professional exposure. And professional exposure explained 40% of the variance in spiritual competency. An unexpected result was that there was no significant relationship between training exposure and spiritual competence. In second qualitative phase, follow up interview questions were used to explore what aspects of participants’ training program were barriers or strategies to integrating spiritual competencies into their current practice, what aspects of professional exposure contributed to current practice, and what motivated counselors to integrate spiritual competencies into their current practice. In response the following themes emerged: (1) the role of faculty; (2) the role of counselor training program structure; (3) the role of personal worldview; (4) the role of honoring the client’s worldview; (5) the role of supervision, consultation, and practice; and (6) the role of client needs. The results of this study inform a deeper understanding of the relationship between college counselor background factors and current counseling practice with regards to religious and spiritual issues. Implications and recommendations for college counselors are provided.
Exploring College Counselor Spiritual Competency in Relation to Training and Professional Practice

by
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12 October, 2002

In the shadow of our sorrow
We find a light,
With the dawn comes hope,
With the setting sun, time to heal.

The Bali Memorial
Perth, Western Australia
BIOGRAPHY

Abigail Holland Conley was born and raised in Salisbury, Maryland. She received a Bachelor’s degree in both Psychology and Comparative Religions from Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. As an undergraduate, she studied abroad at Murdoch University in Perth, Western Australia. It was during this time that Abigail’s passion for exploring religious diversity and open dialogue began. Abigail received her Master’s degree in Counseling Psychology from Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon where she was a counseling intern at Portland Community College.

As a doctoral student in Counselor Education at North Carolina State University, Abigail further developed her teaching, research, and clinical skills. She worked as a teaching assistant in the Educational Psychology department, a research assistant on a NASA/NIA funded grant project, and a graduate assistant of Interpersonal Violence Services at the Women’s Center. Abigail has been active publishing and presenting research at the state, national, and international levels. In addition, she serves on the editorial board for the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) journal, Counseling and Values.

In her free time Abigail enjoys spending time with her family, friends and rescue-beagle Lucy, traveling the world with her partner Joe, and working toward equality and peace for all.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The growing religious and spiritual pluralism in America has resulted in the separation of students’ spiritual growth from their academic growth in higher education. In response, researchers have shown college student’s growing demand to incorporate issues of faith, meaning, and purpose into their college experience (Astin, 2004; Astin, Astin & Lindholm, 2011; Love & Estanek, 2004; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010). The following sequential exploratory mixed methods study was designed to examine the relationship between training and professional exposure to religious and spiritual issues and college counselor spiritual competency. The results of this study inform a deeper understanding of the relationship between counselor background factors and current college counseling practice with regards to religious and spiritual issues. Implications and recommendations for the practice of college counseling as well as counselor education will be discussed.

Purpose

The majority of Americans consider themselves to be religious or spiritual to some degree. According to the Princeton Religion Research Center (2000), 96% of persons living in the United States believe in God; over 90% pray; and 69% belong to a church. In addition, 78.4% of American adults belong to various forms of Christianity, 5% belong to other major faith traditions (1.7% Judaism, 0.7% Buddhism, 0.6% Islam, 0.4% Hinduism, and 0.3% other world religions), and 16.1% report not being affiliated with any particular religion (Pew Research Center, 2006). As the plurality of religious life in the United States continues to increase, so will the diversity of religious and spiritual issues that students struggle with on college campuses across the nation. College is a time for self-exploration and questioning,
and it is imperative that college counselors are prepared to work with a diverse student population with a broad range of spiritual and religious backgrounds. The American Counseling Association (ACA) supports the inclusion of religious and spiritual beliefs in counseling and dictates that religious and spiritual beliefs are aspects of diversity that demand the same level of attention as any other diversity factor such as ethnicity, race, and sexual orientation (ACA, 2005). To practice ethically, counselors must examine their own values and beliefs so as not to impose those values on the client (ACA, 2005, A.4.b) and are mandated to gain knowledge, personal insight, and training relevant to working with diverse client populations (ACA, 2005, C.2.a.) Therefore, counselor educators must work to shape their practices, policies, and programs to mirror the growing interest students have in questioning and exploring issues of faith, meaning, and purpose.

Need for the Study

In recent decades, the focus of higher education in America has been shifting from the traditional liberal arts emphasis on the interior lives of students that included self-reflection, self-awareness, open dialogue, and citizenship to the exterior lives of students that emphasizes competitiveness, individual achievement, and material success (Astin, 2004; Astin, Astin & Lindholm, 2011; Love & Estanek, 2004; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010). In a national study of entering first year college students, 69% of students identified that it was “very important” to go to college “to be able to make more money”, and 66.5% reported that “the chief benefit of a college education is that it increases one’s earning power” (Pryor, Hurtado, Saenz, Santos & Korn, 2006). Exploring this paradigm shift, there has been increasing interest on both the part of students and scholars in issues of purpose, authenticity,
equanimity, and spirituality (Cherry, DeBerg & Porterfield, 2001; Chickering, Dalton & Stamm, 2006; Lindholm, 2006; Nash, 2001).

In 2003 the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California at Los Angeles launched a national study entitled “Spirituality in Higher Education: A National Study of College Students’ Search for Meaning and Purpose” that included a pilot survey completed by 3,700 third year college students, a revised survey administered to more than 112,000 entering freshmen at 236 colleges and universities nationwide, and a survey of more than 65,000 faculty at 511 colleges and universities nationwide. Of the students surveyed, 84% reported they “believed in the sacredness of life” and 81% reported they “have an interest in spirituality,” however, 53% reported that their classroom experiences have had no impact on the spiritual dimension of their lives (HERI, 2005).

In addition, college students are frequently experiencing spiritual struggles and trying to come to terms not only with such existential concepts as the purpose of suffering and death in the world but also questioning their own personal spiritual and religious beliefs (Bryant & Astin, 2008). Of the students surveyed 76% have “struggled to understand evil, suffering, and death”, 68% are “feeling unsettled about spiritual and religious matters” at least “to some extent”, and 65% question their religious/spiritual beliefs “at least occasionally” (HERI, 2005). Spiritual struggles can negatively impact a student’s physical health, mental health, self-esteem, and spiritual growth. Furthermore, minority students, including women (Bryant, 2007), spiritual and religious minorities (Bryant & Astin, 2008), and sexual minorities (Love, Bock, Jannarone, & Richardson, 2005), may be more likely to experience spiritual struggles than non-minority students.
Given the struggles associated with a search for meaning that college students encounter, it is important that they can find a supportive environment to examine their spiritual questions and spiritual growth. Of the students surveyed in the HERI study, 56% acknowledged that their professors did not provide opportunities to discuss the meaning and purpose of life and 62% reported faculty did not encourage discussions of spiritual or religious matters (HERI, 2005). In addition, a significant number of faculty members are reluctant to support students’ quest for spiritual growth and introspection due to their self-perceived lack of expertise in that field (Lindholm, 2007). However, faculty who self-identified as spiritual and valued spiritual integration into their lives are more likely to use student-centered pedagogical methods when teaching that encourage intrinsic motivation, enhanced intellectual curiosity, leadership skills, and open-mindedness (Lindholm & Astin, 2008).

**Statement of the Problem**

As previously stated, we know that many college students experience spiritual struggles and often do not receive adequate support from their college environment. What is of note is that experiencing spiritual struggles positively impacts students’ perceptions of their acceptance of others of different faiths (Bryant & Astin, 2008), health outcomes (Nelms, Hutchins, Hutchings, & Pursley, 2007), growth in spiritual development (Love et al, 2005), equanimity (Astin & Keen, 2006), and socially responsible leadership (Gehrke, 2008). Therefore, the need for college students to feel comfortable in exploring their spiritual struggles and growth is great. It is imperative that college counseling centers are prepared and willing to meet this growing demand.
Accordingly, counselor educators need to be preparing future counselors with the skills and competence to address religious and spiritual issues with their clients. In response to this need the Association for Spiritual, Ethical and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC), a division of the American Counseling Association (ACA), published Competencies for Addressing Spiritual and Religious Issues in Counseling (ASERVIC, 2009). While these 14 competencies offer guidelines that counselor educators should address as they prepare counselors in training to grow in their own spiritual development in addition to working effectively with client’s diverse religious and spiritual issues, the extent to which these competencies are successfully incorporated into counselor training programs is, at this point, mostly unknown (Cashwell & Young, 2011).

In sum, college students have a desire to, and can benefit from, exploring issues of religion and spirituality. The extent to which college counselors are familiar with the suggested competencies and their ability to incorporate them into their counseling practice should be explored. Counselor education programs must integrate into their curriculum content that explores issues of diversity, including religion and spirituality (CACREP, 2009). To do so, counselor educators must understand what factors influence counselor competence and comfort in addressing these issues and what types of training have positively impacted counseling students’ ability to explore religious and spiritual issues with their clients. The following research questions were explored in the current research study: What is the relationship between counselor preparation and counselor competence addressing diverse religious and spiritual issues with college students? How does counselor training exposure relate to counselor spiritual competence in counseling? How does counselor professional
exposure relate to counselor spiritual competence in counseling? The current study that answered these questions will be outlined in chapter three.

**Overview and Organization of the Study**

In this study, Cashwell and Young’s (2011) definitions of the constructs religion and spirituality were used as their work specifically focuses on these terms in a counseling context. They state that “Spirituality is the universal human capacity to experience self-transcendence and awareness of sacred immanence, with resulting increases in greater self-other compassion and love” (p. 7). While spirituality is both internal and universal, religion is external and creedal. “Religion provides a structure for human spirituality, including narratives, symbols, beliefs, and practices, which are embedded in ancestral traditions, cultural traditions, or both” (p. 9). When talking about identity development, spirituality was used to indicate the assumption that this is a universal phenomenon. When referring to one’s own specific beliefs or issues both religion and spirituality were used to be inclusive of all worldviews.

The following literature review in chapter two will explore spirituality in higher education, spiritual development theory, and the preparedness of college counselors to engage in effective multicultural counseling. In addition, the applicability of using a constructivist lens to research spiritual development and identity and counselor competence will be highlighted.

The current research study outlined in chapter three examined background factors related to counselor competence exploring diverse religious and spiritual issues with college students. To answer the previously stated research questions an explanatory sequential mixed
methods design was used (QUANT→qual), and it involved collecting quantitative data first and then explaining the quantitative results with in-depth qualitative data (Creswell & Clark, 2011). In the first, quantitative phase of the study, survey data was collected from college counselors who are current members of the American College Counseling Association (ACCA). The survey examined what training and professional factors contribute to college counselor competence engaging in student issues related to diverse religious and spiritual beliefs. The second, qualitative phase was conducted as a follow-up to the quantitative survey to help explain the results. In this exploratory follow up, factors that most impacted counselor competence, comfort, and motivation to explore diverse religious and spiritual issues were explored through interviews with key informants identified during the initial survey phase. Chapter four describes the results of the study, and chapter five discusses the results and examines the implications for college counselors’ practices and competencies as well as the research, training, and curriculum requirements in the field of counselor education.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction and Overview

In the following literature review James Fowler’s (1981) Faith Development Theory and Sharon Parks’ model of faith development as presented in her book Big Questions, Worth Dreams (Parks, 2000) will be examined, with specific focus on their applicability to working with religious and spiritual issues in the college counseling setting. In addition, the philosophical theory of the constructivist paradigm will be delineated and examples will be identified of how this paradigm is well matched for research in the field of counselor education. Finally, research related to spirituality in higher education and the preparedness of college counselors to engage in effective multicultural counseling will be explored.

Theoretical Framework

James Fowler (1981) was the first to address faith from a developmental perspective. According to Fowler, “faith is a person’s way of seeing him- or herself in relation to others against a background or shared meaning and purpose” (pg. 4). Faith is not necessarily religious in content, but rather is a universal experience in the journey of human development. He proposed seven stages (one pre-stage, and six stages) that drew from the models of development proposed by Kohlberg (1963) and Piaget (1932/1960).

Fowler’s developmental stages of faith start with a pre-stage called Primal Faith (1981). This pre-stage occurs in the first, pre-verbal year of life and provides a foundation for the following stages. They are: (1) Intuitive-Projective Faith, (2) Mythic-Literal Faith, (3) Synthetic-Conventional Faith, (4) Individuative-Reflective Faith, (5) Conjunctive Faith, and (6) Universalizing Faith.
Stage one, Intuitive-Projective Faith, is typically experienced from ages two to seven. Powerful narratives characterize this stage, where a child may think of God as a superhero or magic. The child’s imagination is unrestrained, and they are experiencing self-awareness for the first time. Concrete operational thinking and the child’s ability to understand what is real and what is imaginary marks transition to the next stage.

Stage two, Mythic-Literal Faith, occurs in grade school. This stage is marked by the development of the ability to think logically. Stories and symbols become important ways for the child to belong to their community. Transition to the next stage occurs when a conflict arises between the stories one has been told and reality. For example, one may begin to question the story of Genesis versus evolution.

Stage three, Synthetic-Conventional Faith, often occurs in adolescence. This stage is characterized by conformity and the authority is external. A person’s beliefs and values are solidified into identity, and often they have not spent much time examining or challenging their beliefs. Transition into the next stage occurs when there are contradictions between authority sources, and one begins to critically reflect on their beliefs.

Stage four, Individuative-Reflective Faith, often occurs in the mid-twenties to late-thirties. This stage is characterized by angst and struggle as the individual begins to see themselves as the authority of their own beliefs. The person begins to take responsibility for his or her own values, beliefs, and lifestyle. Transition into the next stage occurs when the person begins to “press on toward a more dialectical and multileveled approach to life truth” (Fowler, 1981, p. 183).
Stage five, Conjunctive faith, usually comes in mid-life and often brings a more reflective recognition of multiple forms of knowing. In this stage symbols regain power and the person recognizes the power of their culture, ritual, and privilege. In this stage the person is able to find meaning in his or her own truth, while simultaneously comprehending its relative nature. Transition to the next stage rarely occurs.

Finally, stage six, Universalizing Faith, is characterized by a movement toward inclusiveness while still maintaining firm commitments to values of universal love and justice. This stage is very rare and occurs when people “embody in radical ways this leaning into the future of God for all beings” (Fowler, 1981, p.211).

Through interviews with over six hundred people, Fowler created seven structures, or constructs, to use in the analysis of faith stages (1981). In this way, faith is not considered a set of beliefs, but rather made of structures that constitute one’s way of knowing in the world (Parker, 2006). It is through analysis of these seven structures that one’s faith stage is determined. They are: (1) Form of logic, (2) Perspective taking, (3) Form of moral judgment, (4) Bounds of social awareness, (5) Locus of authority, (6) Form of world coherence, and (7) Symbolic function. It is transformations in each structure that move a person from stage to stage (Fowler, 1981).

Fowler’s faith stage theory has great usefulness in understanding human development. While many developmental theories are criticized for their reductionist and often linear nature, Fowler’s theory combines Piaget’s (1932/1960) model of cognitive development with Kohlberg’s (1963) model of moral development in a dynamic way that allows for a very inclusive, holistic view of development. Although age approximations are
offered, stage progression is not necessarily correlated with age progression and movement involves greater complexity and comprehensiveness in each of the seven structures. The seven structural aspects are present in varying degrees in each of the seven stages, and therefore are meant to encompass the multifaceted nature of faith present in each unique individual (Parker, 2006). Progression through the stages is not inevitable, but rather is a result of individual experiences that deepen reflective complexity of cognitive, affective, and relational aspects of faith. Adults can be considered stabilized at any stage two through six.

In addition, the very assumptions of Fowler’s theory are rooted in the idea that faith development occurs in all populations. The first assumption is that faith is a universal meaning-making activity (Fowler, 1981). According to Fowler, faith is “so fundamental that none of us can live well for very long without it, so universal that when we move beneath the symbols, rituals and ethical patterns that express it, faith is recognizably the same phenomenon” (pg. xiii). This leads to the next assumption, which is that faith is not necessarily religious in context or content. While religion can often be a compartmentalized aspect of life, faith is an orientation or world-view that is not a separate dimension of one’s being. Finally, the last assumption is that faith is a relational enterprise. The pre-stage of Primal Faith assumes that we all start on our faith development in the womb through infancy relating and learning to have faith in our parents or caregivers. As with our identity, faith continues to be shaped by our experiences and relationships with others (Fowler, 1981).

In the more than 30 years since Fowler’s (1981) theory of faith development there have been more than 100 empirical studies and countless dissertations that have utilized his theory (Streib, 2005). The most common instrument used in these studies (and what Fowler
used himself in constructing the faith stages) is the Faith Development Interview (FDI). This instrument is a “semi-clinical” interview that focuses on significant life events and the meaning we attribute to them (Fowler, 1981).

The FDI has four parts that cover four broad topics: (1) Life Review, (2) Life-shaping Experiences and Relationships, (3) Present Values and Commitments, and (4) Religion. Specific questions about an individual’s religion are intentionally asked at the end of the interview to allow for meaningful responses in the first three parts without the imposition of religious categories (Fowler, 1981). The intent of the FDI is to provide insight into the structural aspects of faith, as well as the cognitive, affective, and relational dimensions of faith (Parker, 2006).

The interview is scored based on comparison of the respondent’s answers to stage descriptions and stage-level guidelines for each of the seven structures aspects outlined in the Manual for Faith Development Research (Moseley, Jarvis, & Fowler, 1993). The final stage determination is made finding the arithmetic average of each individual response stage level and location among the structure aspects (Fowler, 1981). While interpretation of the numerical stage result is fairly straightforward, the main limitation of the FDI is the large amount of time needed to both learn to administer it and actually administer it (Parker, 2006).

As stated above, the intent of the FDI is to examine the cognitive, affective, and relational dimensions of faith. However, Streib (2005) argues the nature of the instrument focuses too heavily on a structural analysis that is cognitive, often neglecting the affective and relational dimensions. While faith development theory looks at factors other than structure, the coding procedures in faith development research do not. As a result, Streib
proposed three readings of the interview for three sets of codes that look at structural
analysis, content analysis, and narrative analysis (2005). While the suggestion for including
content and narrative diversity into the faith development research is warranted, the
limitation of time becomes an even bigger issue.

When considering cultural applicability, Fowler’s faith development stages are
limitless in terms of relevance to personalized beliefs. The theory is centered on human
faith, not religious faith or even spiritual faith. However, the majority of research utilizing
Fowler’s faith stages examines a population that is representative only of the dominant
Western culture. There is an abundance of faith contexts still to explore, specifically the
applicability the faith development stages to diverse populations. Much of Fowler’s theory is
grounded in the work of Kohlberg’s moral development model. With the insight of Carol
Gilligan and others into alternative perspectives on moral development it is appropriate topic
to further explore.

Fowler’s (1981) theory of faith development has immense usefulness in
understanding human development across diverse populations, diverse (non) religious
beliefs, and diverse personal narratives. The faith development interview is a reliable, valid,
and widely used instrument in faith development research. However, it is always important
to be cognizant of time and training limitations, personal biases, and individual differences.
Fowler himself stated that his theory has “a kind of double faith – faith that we can in some
measure grasp, clarify and work effectively with the most vital processes of our lives, but
also faith that the reality of any such complex process will not be exhaustively contained in
our theoretical frameworks” (pg xiii).
Fowler’s theory of faith development is certainly relevant in today’s society. Indeed, in the last decade there has been a resurgence of focus on issues of meaning and purpose not only in adults, but in younger generations as well. It has been noted that the focus of higher education in America has been shifting from the traditional liberal arts emphasis on the interior lives of students that included self-reflection, open dialogue, and citizenship to the exterior lives of students that emphasizes competitiveness, individual achievement, and material success (Astin, 2004). As a result of this paradigm shift there has been increasing interest on both the part of students and scholars in issues of purpose, authenticity, equanimity, and spirituality (Lindholm, 2006).

Parks. Sharon Parks applied one application of Fowler’s theory to the young adult population. In Fowler’s theory, stage three is characterized by conformity and the authority is external while stage four is characterized by angst and struggle as the individual begins to see themselves as their own authority of their own beliefs (Fowler, 1981).

Building on Fowler’s theory, Parks (1993) states:

Faith is the prior and composing activity by means of which we apprehend and participate in the ultimate, unfathomable mystery that is the matrix of life itself. In this most deeply human sense, faith is, then, not merely a matter of belief understood as dogma or the superego (though both dogma and the superego may contribute to the composition of faith); nor is faith simply the activity of those who identify themselves as religious (though faith seeks religion). Rather, faith is meaning-making at the level of ultimacy, something that all human beings do, whether they express it in secular or religious terms (pg. 139).

In addition, she argued for an additional ‘Young Adult’ stage in between the adolescent stage (stage 3) and the tested adult stage (stage 4) (Parks, 2000). She states that in considering the young adult stage “we may recognize with new strength how young adults and their mentors serve to fuel the power and promise of cultural renewal, seeding the imagination of a worthy
adulthood and the promise of our common future” (p. 13). Higher education serves to cultivate inquiry, reflection and knowledge in the young adult life. Therefore it is the role of college counselors, among other mentors, to encourage this growth in human development that requires asking the big questions of meaning and purpose during the pivotal time of the college years (Parks, 2000).

Parks understands faith “in its broadest, most inclusive form as the activity of meaning that all human beings share.” (p. xi). The assumptions and basic stage structure of this model are based in Fowler’s faith development theory. Parks delineated a stage theory model made up of 4 eras in the developmental process: adolescence or conventional, young adult, tested adult, and mature faith. In addition, the 3 dimensions of faith development in each era are forms of knowing, forms of dependence, and forms of community. Movement through this linear model is conceptualized as transformations though each structure (Parks, 2000).

**Forms of Knowing.** In the development of cognition, Parks (2000) refers to the first stage (or form of knowing) as Authority-bound. This stage is characterized by a dualistic, unexamined, assumed faith in authority. Knowledge is received from an outside authority, which is uncritically assumed as truth. In this developmental era, a person is unable to thoughtfully engage in either self-reflective thought or hold other’s differing opinions against his or her own. While Parks refers to this stage as characteristic of adolescents, she notes that “further development beyond this conformist way of knowing does not occur inevitably” (p. 56), therefore some people will remain throughout their biological adulthood.
Moving from the adolescent to young adult developmental era, previous theorists considered this stage to be movement of locus of authority from outside the self to inside the self as one singular step. Parks argues that this stage should be broken into two parts, unqualified relativism and probing commitment. In this model the awareness that knowledge is relative and shaped by context constitutes the hallmark of unqualified relativism, and the previously considered ‘transition’ this initiates is a separate stage in it of itself, what she calls probing commitment. Building off of Erikson’s adolescent task of self-identity, the achievement of both self-awareness and successfully integrated social roles is a two part task.

Unqualified relativism is similar to Piaget’s concept of disequilibrium in that “Whenever one undergoes experience that does not fit the assumptions of one’s conventional, assumed world, there is an invitation to develop critical thinking: the ability to stand outside one’s own thought.” (p. 57). In unqualified relativism there is the benefit of new knowledge, understanding, and freedom at the price of an earlier, often more simplistic, certainty. Therefore the cognitive effort required of this stage becomes difficult to sustain over time.

In the probing commitment stage, the struggle for identity and knowledge felt in unqualified relativism leads to a goal to not only explore new knowledge, but to assume responsibility for the choices and consequences from that knowledge. Parks states that a person “may begin to value those ways of composing truth and making moral choices that are more adequate than other options. This is a search for a place of commitment within relativism.” (p. 59). Parks considers this stage the gap in previous developmental theories. Not simply a transition, this young adult period is where one not only explores faith and
meaning-making, but begins to shape their identity in career roles, relationships, lifestyles, and as a citizen of the world. Unlike the search for identity that adolescents “try on” in what can be a daily basis, the young adult probing is a purposeful search for commitment to knowledge, truth, and meaning.

Once critical reflective thought is developed in the young adult, a more mature faith comes about in the tested commitment stage. The tested adult develops deep feelings of comfort in one’s own skin. While a person in this stage knows that knowledge is relative, they purposefully join other adults in pursuing what they deem trustworthy and valuable. Parks notes that “one’s form of knowing and being takes on a tested quality, a sense of fittingness, recognition that one is willing to make one’s peace and to affirm one’s place in the scheme of things.” (p. 69). No longer struggling with feelings of dividedness, the tested adult is secure in their commitment to knowledge and faith.

Finally, the developmental era of mature adult comes in the stage of convictional commitment. In this stage, a person can fully engage in the complexity of knowledge without the previous worry of changing ‘life as you know it’. Speaking of Carl Jung, Parks states that “he knew that what he knew on any given day could be radically altered by something he might learn the next day. Yet he embodied a deep conviction of truth, a quality of knowing that we recognize as wisdom.” (p. 60). On the other side of a tested commitment, lies the certainty in knowing that while there may be infinite ideas, opinions, and truths – faith comes from engaging the unknown with commitment, rather than escaping it with relativism.
Forms of Dependence. While the forms of knowing described above focus on how a person’s faith develops cognitively, the second layer of development Parks identified are forms of dependence, which focus on how a person’s faith develops affectively. Parks explains that “to undergo the loss of assumed certainty, to have to reorder what was presumed to be dependably real, involves emotion as well as cognition.” (p. 71). As we mature in ability to make meaning in this world, who and what we depend on also undergoes a transition from the outside in.

The first stage of dependence includes two phases, dependent and counterdependent. In the dependent stage one primarily depends on an outside authority that determines one's dualistic feelings of assurance and alarm, loyalty and disdain, hope and fear. Fowler uses the term conventional to describe this stage because a person assumes the conventions of their group norms. Parks notes that “the person's sense of reality and what is fitting and true is dependent upon a sense of felt relationship to a shared ethos of assumed Authority and remains unaware of the prevailing ideology that shapes it.” (p. 74). In addition, Parks argues that this basic need for dependence based on an outside authority is a lens to understand the allure that fundamentalist religion has for many people.

The natural progression after dependence is counterdependence. This involves a desire to explore what to depend on based on either curiosity for a more suitably way of being, or necessity as the concept of relative truth is forcefully pushed into your awareness. “Counterdependence is the move in opposition to Authority; it provides momentum for the expansion of self into the still unknown horizon. It is a dimension of the earlier dependence, because the person can push against the pattern of meaning-making that is familiar, but she is
not yet able to perceive or create a new one.” (p. 75). This development can occur in a safe environment where counterdependence is embraced and encouraged, or it can occur in a more challenging environment where this development is misunderstood as rebellion. We begin to see the importance of mentors in this stage, as they can serve as guides of the exploration inherent in dependence.

In the next stage, fragile inner-dependence, the dependent source begins to shift from external to internal. One starts to put faith in their own intuition, or gut feeling, as they begin to recognize themselves as a credible source of authority. “The developmental movement into inner-dependence occurs when one is able self-consciously to include the self within the arena of authority. In other words, other sources of authority may still hold credible power, but now one can also recognize and value the authority of one’s own voice.” (p. 77). In this stage a person may begin to question institutions and organizations, and seek out a spiritual, rather than a religious, connection to the world. The challenge of this stage is that one becomes susceptible to burnout as they try to balance the competing demands of the inner and outer world. Mentors can play a key role in helping a person find a place of commitment within relativism. While a mentor is still an external form of dependence, their counsel is sought out and critically examined. The individual begins to seek dependable knowledge sources that fit with their definition of self.

The next stage is confident inner-dependence, and this occurs when the fragile inner-dependence begins to solidify as the young adult’s choices and experiences are encouraged and confirmed. A goal of this stage is the development of an authoritative inner dialogue that is paramount in the development of conscience and ethical living. “If it does not occur or is
limited to discrete domains, the conscience is blunted. If interiority is well cultivated, the capacity for responsible adulthood and faithful citizenship is enlarged.” (p. 85). In addition to the development of a mindful, inner dialogue the role of mentor transitions into that of a peer. There is interest in other’s knowledge, but the knowledge and faith from the self can stand on its own.

The final form of dependence is inter-dependence. If the transitions of development lead to transformation, then one moves into this stage (often in midlife). “After inner-dependence is established and the trustworthiness of the inner self is confirmed, there is the potential for yet another movement toward further awareness of trust and responsibility.” (p. 86). In this final stage, one can embrace the conviction of interdependence without fear of losing the authority of inner-dependence. The challenge of this stage is functioning in a world full of people who do not share the notion of embracing the authority in others. “One now becomes increasingly angered and saddened by assertions of truth that exclude the authority of the experience of others.” (p. 87).

**Forms of Community.** The third and final developmental dimension Parks identifies is forms of community. An essential assumption in this framework is that faith is composed within a social context. She states that, “Faith is a patterning, connective, relational activity embodied and shaped not within the individual alone but in the comfort and challenges of the company we keep.” (p. 89). In the adolescent stage the form of community is conventional. This consists of conventional groupings that are characterized by conformity to the grouping characteristic such as cultural norms or interests. This stage lends itself to the cognitive dichotomy of *us* and *them*. The second phase in adolescent era is diffuse community. The
transition into this form of community is often the result of encountering an ‘us’ or ‘them’ that contradicts previous assumptions and begins to process of questioning self and group membership with a relativistic lens.

In the young adult faith developmental era, the corresponding form of community is a mentoring community. Parks states that “it is the combination of the emerging development stance of the young adult with the challenge and encouragement of the mentor, grounded in the experience of a compatible social group, that ignites the transforming power of the young adult era. A mentoring community can confirm the faith that there will be a new home.” (p. 93). For the young adult, participating in a community that serves as an alternative to earlier assumed knowing gives credence to their journey. Parks points out that a single mentor is not sufficient for faith transformation, the hallmark of this stage is finding “a network of belonging in which young adults feel recognized as who they really are, and as who they are becoming.” (p. 95). In addition, this stage tends to be ideological as the young adult firmly holds onto their newly formed truth.

In tested adult faith era, the corresponding form of community is a self-selected group. The previous need to find an ideologically compatible mentoring community shifts into a focus on inner authority of the tested adult, who finds belonging in a self-selected class or group. “Adult faith can sustain respectful awareness of communities other than its own; and it can tolerate, if not embrace, the felt tensions between inevitable choices.” (p. 100). While the tested adult can comfortably engage diverse communities, Parks notes that often their self-selected group is composed of like-minded folks.
While the critical awareness that propels one into a self-selected community may not extend to embracing inclusivity, the transition into the final form of community, open to other, yields a more profound development of faith that embraces interconnectedness. Parks describes this form of community as generally occurring in midlife, “characterized by a longing for communion with those who are profoundly other than the self, not as a matter of mere political correctness, or ideology, or ethnical commitment, but as a longing in the soul for an embodied faithfulness to the interdependence that we are.” (p. 102).

In Parks’ model the forms of knowing, dependence, and community combine to describe the developmental process of faith. The unique contribution of the young adult stage is extremely relevant in today’s society, as the time between adolescence and adulthood is progressively getting stretched out by today’s 20 something’s. The 3 separate dimensions are helpful in organizing the complex nature of faith development, however, as in Fowler’s theory, the implication that faith development corresponds to chronological age is limiting. In addition, the structure of 3 different dimensions spanning 4 developmental eras is confusing. Her description of this dynamic process may have been clearer if the dimensions were compared within each developmental era, rather than across each dimension. The inherent problem however, is that it is unclear if the presence of the 3 dimensions must be aligned together, or if movement could occur through each dimension at different rates.

This model is most useful for student affairs professionals that work mainly with traditionally aged college and graduate students (like Parks herself), as her model is based on extensive interactions with people that fit that young adult description. However, there does
not seem to be generalizability to people who have not attended college (at least not in a traditional way); therefore, the young adult era is only applicable to those with the privilege of attending college. In addition, the progression through faith development places value on a mature faith that values the ‘other’. While Parks briefly notes that development does not automatically occur, the fact that the development era titles align with chronological development makes progression seem inherent. There are certainly plenty of people who have chronologically developed in age, yet do not meet the criteria for stages past adolescence, and many adolescents who are ‘wise beyond their years’ in faith development.

Parks’ theory is grounded in Fowler’s work, and successfully calls attention to the emerging spiritual needs of young adults. However, empirical research is needed to adequately generalize her anecdotal experiences to a comprehensive theory. For instance, do college students who commute or remain in their pre-college social circles have the same opportunity for new knowledge, dependence, and communities? How do young adults who take on mature responsibilities like parenthood and careers instead of college differ in their examination of faith? Does religious fundamentalism that has an inherently absolutist lens inhibit movement towards the relativist adult faith? As faith development is undoubtedly a complex and dynamic process, a major limitation to this theory is the linear conceptualization of a stage model. Parks notes that a spiral model may be more appropriate. However, even a spiral indicates a beginning and an end. It seems possible that one’s lived experience could create a development progression that to moves backwards, skip forwards, is cyclical or simply remains stagnant.
As previously indicated there is definite need to focus on spirituality within the emerging young adult, and this model is a good starting place. Parks’ emphasis on social context and relativist thinking could clearly be investigated through a constructivist lens. Future research should explore the forms of knowing, dependence, and community empirically to determine internal consistency and potential generalizability. Scales to determine where a person is situated in the stages could be developed, which would create an opportunity to validate the 3 separate dimensions of faith. In addition, alternate paths of faith development within diverse groups of young adults should be explored to conceptualize what factors of experience lead to progression, transition, and transformation. As Parks’ herself acknowledged, “This portrayal is, of course, but one way of telling a story that could be woven with other elements, other perspectives, and in other proportions – each conveying additional facets of human meaning-making.” (p. 102).

Taken together, these two theories of faith development lay the foundation for exploring religious and spiritual issues with counseling students and clients. Following the assumptions that faith is an essential component of the human experience and that young adults particularly are struggling with their spiritual development, to not explore such issues with students would ignore a crucial piece of their identity development. And, not incorporating these issues into counseling would ignore and fundamental aspect of the client’s life.

**Constructivist Theory and Counselor Education**

Historically, postmodern paradigms such as constructivism and critical theory have been viewed as less scientifically rigorous and therefore less intellectually substantial than
conventional positivist and postpositivist paradigms (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). However, in
the social sciences there has been a growing epistemological shift toward postmodern
paradigms driven by questions concerning the underlying assumptions that guide research
questions and methodology, the role of the researcher, and the reasons for conducting
research. Detailed comparison between the conventional and alternative paradigms is
beyond the scope of this discussion (See Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2000; Guba & Lincoln,
1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Ponterotto, 2005), therefore in the following sections I will
specifically explore the constructivist paradigm (as outlined by Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1994,
2000) by examining the theoretical criteria of ontology, epistemology, axiology,
methodology, rhetoric. In addition, I will suggest that these aspects of the constructivist
paradigm have a natural congruence with counseling theory, practice, and research. As the
linear movement of the counseling profession begins with a clinically focused counselor
identity, moving into an academically focused researcher identity, a chasm of opportunity
exists to further integrate the two.

Lincoln and Guba (2000) loosely defined a constructivist lens for viewing social
phenomena that is a relativist stance on the activity of meaning-making. “The meaning-
making activities themselves are of central interest to social constructionists/constructivists,
simply because it is the meaning-making/sense-making/attributional activities that shape
action (or inaction). The meaning-making activities themselves can be changed when they
are found to be incomplete, faulty (e.g. discriminatory, oppressive, or nonliberatory), or
malformed (created from data that can be shown to be false).” (p. 167). The following
sections examine the specific criteria that define constructivism, explore how they relate
specifically to counselor education, and consider strength and weaknesses of specific paradigmatic issues.

**Ontology.** Ontological questions explore the nature of reality and what can be known about reality. Constructivism differentiates itself from other inquiry paradigms by asserting that there is no true reality in an absolute sense. Rather, relativism in the form of multiple, socially-based realities, exists and depends on the people and groups that construct it. Reality is subjective and influenced by context. The underlying constructivist ontological assumption is that phenomena exist *in* the social world and *in* human experience, not outside of it.

This relativist stance on the nature of reality is akin to the counselor mantra ‘meet the client where they are’. While diagnostic criteria and profiles exist to create a common framework to view emotions, feelings, and behavior, each client should be viewed as an individual who’s lived experience is the version of reality that bears truth for them. Similarly with a constructivist lens in supervision, the supervisor is cognizant of the multiple perceptions of reality and works with the supervisee to see multiple viewpoints and expand the story to explore other possibilities for therapeutic interventions with the client. There is a natural limit to knowledge gained from a twice removed story; therefore it is important that the supervisor is tentative in making pronouncements. The supervisor should engage the supervisee in thought-provoking questions to help expand rather than reduce the client’s stories.

**Epistemology.** Epistemological questions ask what the nature of the relationship between the knower (participant) and the would-be knower (researcher) and what can be
known about that relationship. Constructivism views this relationship as transactional rather than dualistic. Subjective knowledge is co-created through the inquiry process, thereby blurring the line between ontology and epistemology (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Research that highly manipulates the research environment may be reductionist and unable to capture (and possibly distort) the complex lived experience of participants. The research and participant are undoubtedly changed by the dialogic interaction.

Similarly the therapeutic relationship is a unique, co-constructed process through which knowledge and transformation are facilitated. In addition, the supervisor/supervisee relationship serves as an isomorphic model for the supervisee’s counselor/client relationship. Therefore it is important for the supervisor to maintain an accepting, encouraging, and open-minded atmosphere of discovery in supervision to model what should extend to the counselor/client relationship. It is also important to keep in mind the reverse is true as well – the way in which a supervisee presents the client’s story can influence the supervisor’s perceptions (Whiting, 2007).

**Axiology.** Questions of axiology address the role of values in the research process. While conventional paradigms place great emphasis on attempting to eliminate the researcher from the research process, constructivists maintain an essential assumption that the researcher’s values, feelings, bias, and expectations are inextricably linked to the research process. By accepting this assumption the researcher can acknowledge, describe, and catalogue the effect they have on the research and vice versa. The practice of reflexivity in research “forces us to come to terms not only with our choice of research problem and with those with whom we engage in the research process, but with our selves and with the
multiple identities that represent the fluid self in the research setting.” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 183)

In counseling, the concepts of transference and counter-transference give a framework for identifying and examining the dynamic impact counselor and client have on one another. Counselors are encouraged to continually be mindful of their own values, feelings, biases, and expectations toward clients and their counseling issues. By doing so, one is better equipped to appropriately handle and manage their inevitable “humanness” that occurs in the co-construction of knowledge, experience, and meaning-making. In the counseling session we bring our personal self, our counselor self, and our situational self. All of which impact the client and the co-constructed meaning-making that occurs.

**Methodology.** Methodological questions examine how the would-be knower can find out about what s/he believes to be known. Constructivist methodology identifies the interaction between researcher and participant as an important factor for collecting data. To take the researcher out of the research is to ignore the co-construction process. Information is obtained through a hermeneutical approach, stimulated by a dialogic relationship between researcher-participant (would-be knower, and knower). Meaning, the exchange of potentially differing viewpoints, and inherently relative truths, that construct knowledge through interpretation are inherent in all research. Rather than simply focusing on verifying or falsifying hypotheses, the aim of research is to reconstruct previously held constructions and situate them within the phenomena under study. The results of research have “two dangers inherent in the conventional texts of scientific method: that they may lead us to believe the world is rather simpler than it is, and that they may reinscribe enduring forms of
historical oppression.” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 184). An emic perspective informs the participant selection; participants are seen as the “knowers” and therefore research studies are designed to highlight their insider point of view.

In the counseling setting, conventional research gives us a lot of information that shapes diagnostic information in the DSM and best practices for particular therapies and interventions. But it is more constructivist approaches that shape treatment plans for specific clients. Regardless of how reliable and valid research is, if a certain intervention or diagnosis does not fit with a certain client you have to explore and get to know them and their unique contextual factors to make an effective treatment plan. Information from positivist research gives a wonderful knowledge foundation for certain populations, but you need to take a constructivist approach to begin to understand an individual’s lived experience.

**Rhetoric.** Rhetorical structure refers to the language and presentation of the research. Constructivists personalize research reports by purposefully situating themselves within the research context by using first person language to describe their interpretation of the phenomena under study. In line with the axiological assumption identified above, the researcher’s self-reflective experience is fully discussed in reporting the study. In addition to the researcher voice, great attention is given to accurately reflect the participant’s voice in the findings. Member checking as a means to authenticity is an important practice in constructivist research to let the research participant speak for themselves and remain in control of their own lived experience. The focus on representing the participants’ voice authentically gives power to their story.
In counseling, the constructivist approach of narrative helps serve as an important vehicle through which the client can communicate their lived experience. The underlying assumption is that the reality we construct is subjective and that knowledge is shared and created in social interaction, therefore language through stories help create meaning (Whiting, 2007). Using narratives in counseling helps to empower the client by highlighting the knowledge, skills, ideas, beliefs, and lived experiences that they already posses and bring to the counseling experience. In addition, the use of narrative in counseling helps to equalize the power differential that inherently exists, particularly in the direction of empowering the clients. Similarly, the practice of narrative can be applied to a constructivist approach to supervision (Speedy, 2000). The narrative situates the client (or supervisee) as the knowledge holder by allowing them to be the narrator of their own experience, using their own language as a vehicle to communicate their experience. In addition, specific counseling skills of paraphrasing and summarizing, reflection of feeling and reflection of meaning are used to accurately reflect the client’s voice.

In sum, constructivist goals are both idiographic and emic, meaning research is trying to understand the individual’s lived experience rather than universal laws and behaviors that can apply to people generally. Just as the goal of counseling is to “meet people where they are”, the relativist stance of constructivism allows for individual difference and diversity of experience to not only be heard, but validated as construction of reality.

**Multicultural Training in Spiritual Diversity**

Spirituality is one of the many areas of individual difference, diversity, and multiculturalism that needs to be addressed in counselor education and training (Bishop,
Avila-Juarbe, & Thumme, 2003). It has been shown that religious and spiritual diversity is not thought of as important in multicultural counseling training as other types of diversity, such as race, ethnicity, or gender (Hage, Hopson, Siegel, Payton, & DeFanti, 2006). A person’s spiritual or religious values and practices are intricately intertwined with their ethnic and cultural experiences; therefore, it is important for counselors, and supervisors to address issues of spirituality in the counseling and supervision process (Bishop, et al., 2003). Just as it is in counseling therapy, it is important in counseling supervision for those involved to have, at the very least, a similar understanding and openness to spirituality for the process to be effective (Bishop, et al., 2003).

In addition, the ACA Code of Ethics (ACA, 2005) highlights the importance of counselors competently meeting the spiritual needs of their clients (A.9.a.) and the importance of counselors exploring their own worldview (C.2.a). Religious and spiritual diversity is an important aspect of multiculturalism that needs a seat at the table in counselor education, discussion, and training.

Kelly (1994) surveyed program heads at 307 counselor education programs about the role of religion and spiritually in their departments. In response to the question, ‘Are interns supervised in dealing with their own religious/spiritual content in the counseling process?’ 56% responded ‘not much/not at all’. And when asked, ‘Do interns receive supervision on the impact of the client’s religious/spiritual content in the counseling process?’ 58% responded ‘not much/not at all’ (Kelly, 1994). In a similar study of 94 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) accredited counselor education programs, only 46% viewed themselves as prepared or very prepared to
integrate spiritual and religious competencies into their teaching and supervision of counselors (Young, Cashwell, Wiggins-Frame, & Belaire, 2002). Counseling students need to develop language through which to identify and communicate the spiritual dimensions of their lives and their client’s lives (Rogers & Love, 2007) and supervisors need to examine clients’ needs relative to spiritual issues and address supervisees’ knowledge and skills as appropriate (Polanski, 2003).

Adams, Puig, Baggs, and Wolf (2011, March) used a Delphi study method to examine potential barriers and strategies for integrating religion and spirituality (RS) in counselor education and supervision. Using a panel of experts, they identified the following five barriers: 1) lack of faculty knowledge, preparation, and competence to address RS issues, 2) a lack of understanding among faculty regarding RS and their importance to clients, 3) faculty disinterest, 4) faculty seeing RS issues as simply another “cultural” issues, and 5) faculty possessing a poor understanding of RS and the differences between them. The 12 strategies for overcoming these barriers identified included infusing RS issues into each course, including RS in multicultural courses, contextualizing RS as aspects of human development and culture, and faculty recognition of the inherent spiritual nature of meaning and value systems (Adams et al., 2011, March).

Hage et al. (2006) recommend incorporating a class activity that encourages students to carefully examine their own values, beliefs, attitudes, and prejudices regarding their own and other’s spiritual or religious orientations (or lack thereof). Issues of spirituality and religion tend to be very personal and unique and therefore, inherently everybody’s experience will be different. Highlighting similarities and differences between student’s
experiences and beliefs, in addition to exploring spiritual and religious traditions throughout the world, is an important step in preparing effective, multicultural counselors. In sum, counseling students need the knowledge and language through which to identify and communicate the spiritual dimensions of their lives and their client’s lives (Rogers & Love, 2007), and counselor education faculty need to facilitate these spiritual competencies in the classroom.

**Counseling and Supervision Interventions**

Despite the clear need to address student’s spiritual needs, there are relatively few studies that look at possible counseling interventions to address those needs. One notable exception is a study that explored women’s spiritual exploration and development (Soet & Martin, 2007). This study formed an experiential group of female graduate students and was set up as a 4 session workshop. The sessions included activities and discussion related to various aspects of their spiritual journey. In the final session the group member’s reported a deleterious effect in spiritual struggles related to their relationships with family, friends, and professional environments and a greater sense of well-being and empowerment. The student’s feedback of a multitude of positive outcomes confirmed the need for college counseling centers to address issues of spiritual exploration and development that may not be addressed anywhere else on campus (Soet & Martin, 2007).

For college counseling centers to be equipped to handle this need, counseling interventions with a spiritual focus must be included in counselor training (education and supervision). The isomorphic nature of both the therapeutic relationship and the supervisory relationship suggests that the supervisor’s attitude toward spirituality and spiritual struggles
can dictate how these issues are viewed in supervision, the way the supervisees handle these issues with their clients, and how comfortable the clients in turn feel about bringing them up in counseling (Polanski, 2003). Therefore, many techniques dealing with spiritual issues that are used in counseling should be modeled in supervision.

Kelly (1995) encourages an assessment of the client’s spiritual and religious beliefs during the intake process so the counselor can begin to understand if and how the spiritual views of the client affect issues in counseling and how they can be helpful in developing the client’s self-understanding. By adding a spiritual dimension in the beginning of the therapeutic relationship, the client receives the message that talking about spirituality is an acceptable part of the counseling process. In addition, supervisors should help supervisees gain an understanding of both psychopathology and beliefs and behaviors that are considered normative and healthy within a client’s religious or spiritual traditions (Kelly, 1995). Modeling this practice in supervision sets the tone that spiritual issues are an applicable and important part of client care and supervisee professional development.

When dealing with spiritual issues in the counseling process it is important to direct the supervisee to (a) explore past personal experiences that could potentially contribute to countertransference in the counseling session; (b) engage in self-exploration about their personal beliefs about the role of spirituality in counseling and supervision; and (c) self-reflect and contemplate their personal experiences and beliefs about spiritual matters (Bishop, et al., 2003). A suggested way to explore spirituality through a narrative lens in supervision is to have the supervisee complete a spiritual genogram to increase self-awareness of spiritual traditions within their own life (Miller & Ivey, 2006). This tool is a
great way to generate conversation about spirituality and its role in supervision and in therapy.

Rogers and Love (2007) interviewed thirty-two master’s students from 3 different institutions about their conceptualization of spirituality, the role of spirituality in their professional training, and their preparedness to work with undergraduates’ spiritual issues. Their responses were analyzed qualitatively for common themes. Their results indicated that many students are lacking the language to discuss issues of spirituality, feel that self-knowledge is a critical component in preparedness for helping undergraduates working through spiritual issues, and think the graduate faculty and program environment are important mediators of spiritual exploration. The themes that emerged highlighted the importance of faculty role modeling, faculty and student relationships, and faculty creating contexts for discussing questions of spirituality (Rogers & Love, 2007).

Clearly spiritual competencies need to be addressed in counselor education training and supervision. In addition, more needs to be known about how religious and spiritual (RS) issues are being addressed in college counseling settings. One of the only studies to date that examine this issue, Kellems, Hill, Crook-Lyon, and Freitas (2010) surveyed 220 therapists working at university counseling centers with predoctoral internship programs approved by the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers (APPIC). The purpose of this study was to examine how RS issues are involved in therapy, explore how therapist and student RS identities impact the therapeutic relationship, and assess how RS commitment training impact therapist self-efficacy in utilizing RS interventions. Results indicate that RS issues are common in college counseling centers, congruent therapist/client RS identity is not
related to the strength of the therapeutic relationship, and therapists with more RS training had higher self-efficacy working with RS issues (Kellems, Hill, Crook-Lyon & Freitas, 2010). This study has clear implications for the importance of exploring RS issues within the college counseling environment, however the authors stated that responders considered RS issues to be of more importance than non-responders. Therefore the results are limited to university counseling center therapists who value RS issues. More research needs to be done on this topic, specifically within the counseling field.

**Conclusion and Synthesis**

It is clear that more emphasis needs to be placed in counselor education, training, and supervision on spiritual and religious diversity to effectively work with college students dealing with spiritual struggles. The following research study examined the relationship between counselor training and professional experiences and current counseling practices regarding college student spiritual development and spiritual and religious multicultural competencies.

What stands out to me the most from this examination is the applicability of using a constructivist lens to research spiritual development and identity, and the necessity of further exploring the role of spirituality in higher education. Parks (2000) noted that “our location, social context, and general surroundings play a central role in the formation of meaning and faith. One of the distortions of many psychological, developmental, economic, and religious models is a focus on the individual that obscures the power of the social context in shaping personal reality.” (p. 88). The primary assumption of constructivism is that multiple mental realities exist, and the primary goal is to explore the mean-making process of individual lived
experience. Similarly spiritual development theory primarily assumes that mean-making is an essential human process, and that it is based in our individual concepts of faith and spirituality. In addition, Lincoln and Guba (2000) note:

We may also be entering an age of greater spirituality within research efforts. The emphasis on inquiry that reflects ecological values, on inquiry that respects communal forms of living that are not Western, on inquiry involving intense reflexivity regarding how our inquiries are shaped by our own historical and gendered locations, and on inquiry into ‘human flourishing,’ as Heron and Reason (1997) call it, may yet reintegrate the sacred with the secular in ways that promote freedom and self-determination (p. 185).

The growing research in the field of spirituality, spiritual identity, and spiritual development showcase this idea that faith is a viable topic to explore as an essential component of the human condition. In addition, the desire of young adults to explore and define themselves within issues of faith, meaning, and purpose create fertile grounds of knowledge and experience to consider.

The recent research focused on religious and spiritual issues in counseling and counselor education highlight the many different areas of spirituality in higher education, and dynamic relationships involved. The diverse range of methodologies indicates that there are a range of questions that require a range of research skills to adequately be addressed. In many cases, the complex construct of spirituality can best be addressed using a mixed method approach. Rigorous research design, procedures, and statistical techniques must be grounded in theory, literature, and research questions. In addition, exploration of individual lived experience must be fully described in the research context, give an authentic voice to participants, and continually be focused on action and social justice. The combination of
these criteria provides a better understanding of the phenomena under study than either approach alone.

Green (2007) stated that mixed methods is a way of looking at the social world “that actively invites us to participate in dialogue about multiple ways of seeing and hearing, multiple ways of making sense of the social world, and multiple standpoints on what is important and to be valued and cherished. (p. 20). The research study that follows is grounded in a constructivist perspective, utilizing mixed methods as a way to gain a deeper understanding of the multiple ways of viewing the role of spirituality in college counseling and counselor education.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Overview

The growing religious and spiritual pluralism in America has resulted in the separation between students’ spiritual growth from their academic growth in higher education. In response, researchers have shown college student’s growing demand to incorporate issues of faith, meaning, and purpose into their college experience. The current study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to examine background factors related to counselor competence exploring diverse religious and spiritual issues with college students. In the quantitative phase (phase 1), college counselors completed a survey about their training and professional background with religious and spiritual issues as well as their current spiritual competency integrating these issues into their counseling practice. Data from the quantitative section was used to inform the second qualitative phase (phase 2) that involved follow-up interviews with survey participants to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between counselor background factors and current counseling practices. The study results have implications for college counselors’ practices and competencies as well as the research, training, and curriculum requirements in the field of counselor education.

Role of the researcher. As described in chapter two, a constructivist lens informed the current research study. As a researcher and a counselor, one of the main reasons I am drawn to the constructivist approach is the role of action in research. The idea that researchers can invalidate results by collaborating with the participants and outcomes is inconsistent with the counseling framework of advocacy and social justice. Lincoln and Guba (2000) state that the “mandate for social action, especially action designed and created
by and for research participants with the aid and cooperation of the researchers, can be most sharply delineated between positivist/postpositivist and new-paradigm inquirers.” (p. 175). Inquiry is undertaken with the goals of connecting outcomes to program evaluation, policy change, and social deconstruction. It is naive to assume that results can be separated from action. An extreme example is the now infamous autism study (originally published and later retracted by The Lancet journal) by Wakefield et al. (1998) that had unprecedented effects on decreasing Western MRR vaccine rates, even though the results were heavily criticized and not linked to policy change.

Similarly, the issue of who is in control of the research in the constructivist paradigm is consistent with the counseling framework of advocacy and social justice. Research participants play a crucial role in identifying questions and interpreting data. According to Lincoln and Guba (2000), “constructivists desire participants to take an increasingly active role in nominating questions of interest for any inquiry and in designing outlets for finds to be shared more widely and outside the community.” (p. 175). Research designs that seek out members of the population of study to inform survey questions and research directions seek to give control to the participant (knower), rather than the researcher (would-be knower).

I think a mistaken assumption is to explicitly link post modernist paradigms, including the constructivist perspective to qualitative, naturalistic inquiry methods while ascribing conventional paradigms to solely objective, statistical, quantitative methods. When people become staunch supporters of one method versus another, the fluid connections between paradigm and methodology are suddenly made of steel. It is important in the constructivist paradigm, just as it is in the conventional paradigms, to take responsibility for
understanding theory and becoming proficient in diverse types of methodology. Without adequate knowledge and developing expertise in the different research paradigms and variety of methodologies, there is a potential to alter the nature of the intended study. “My concern is that though counseling psychologists may express verbal support and enthusiasm for qualitative methods, their research lens is still heavily influenced by their postpositivist socialization. The risk is that these researchers may be unknowingly ‘postpositivizing’ constructivist qualitative methods, which is akin to forcing a round peg into a square hole.” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 127). Conversely, researchers who are most comfortable in a qualitative framework can benefit from applying quantitative methods when contextually warranted to utilize the generalizability that develops from standardized practices and common language. For transformative change to occur, diversity in methods is essential. Guba and Lincoln (1994) strongly advocate that “students must come to appreciate paradigm differences and, in that context, to master both qualitative and quantitative methods…they must also be helped to understand the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender history and structure that serve as the surround for their inquiries, and to incorporate the values of altruism and empowerment in their work.” (p. 115). With this in mind, an explanatory sequential mixed methods design (QUANT→qual) was used in this study and is described below.

**Procedures**

College counselors were contacted by email based on membership in the American College Counseling Association (ACCA). The participants were emailed a link to the survey, and two reminder emails were sent to help increase the return rate. Participants were
asked to fill out a close-ended survey about their training and professional experience with religious and spiritual issues. At the end of the survey there was one open-ended question asking if the participant had any other information to add that was not addressed in the survey and if they would agree to be contacted for a follow-up in-depth interview.

Ethics approval was sought from the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Following IRB approval, a recruitment letter was emailed to current members of the American College Counseling Association (see Appendix C). All participants were informed in writing about the study and that participation was on a voluntary basis. Consent to participate was obtained from those who volunteered to participate by their decision to continue with the study. Participants were told they could withdraw from the study at any time. Raw data including questionnaires and transcripts are being stored securely for the appropriate period of time according to the requirements of the IRB.

Quantitative Phase

Participants. Participants in the study were college counselors who are members of the American College Counseling Association (ACCA). One hundred and ninety nine participants completed phase one of the study. Demographic data were analyzed using descriptive and frequency analyses concerning gender, age, ethnicity, and religious/spiritual affiliation. The mean age of the participants was 45 (SD = 11.6; range 22 - 68). Of the 191 participants who completed the gender demographic question, 20.4% \((n = 39)\) were male and 79.6% \((n = 152)\) were female. Of the 195 participants who completed the ethnicity demographic question, 85.6% \((n = 167)\) were White, 5.6% \((n = 11)\) were Black, 3.1% \((n = 6)\)
were Asian/Pacific Islander, 2.6% \((n = 5)\) were Latino/a, 2.6% \((n = 5)\) were Multi-racial, and 0.5% \((n = 1)\) was Native American. While the age, gender, and ethnicity distributions are skewed they are relatively representative of the overall ACCA membership demographics. When asked how they self-identified religiously, participants were able to select multiple responses. In response, 50.8% \((n = 101)\) selected Religious, 7.5% \((n = 15)\) selected Non-religious, 61.8% \((n = 123)\) selected Spiritual, 1.5% \((n = 3)\) selected Non-spiritual, and 9% \((n = 18)\) selected Other.

The initial target population consisted of 1094 current members of the American College Counseling Association (ACCA). Two hundred and five participants completed the study, which was a response rate of 20.3% from among 1010 deliverable emails distributed. According to Dillman (2008), internet surveys typically have a 13% response rate. Five were deleted listwise from analyses due to over 50% of the responses missing. Of the remaining 199 that completed the survey, missing values were at random with no case missing over three items and were replaced by series means.

**Instruments.** Currently no instrument exists that addressed this study’s research questions, therefore one was created. The self report questionnaire (see Appendix D & E) was composed of three sections; demographic questions, spiritual exposure questions, and spiritual competency questions. Demographic information was collected regarding the participants’ gender, age, ethnicity, and religious/spiritual affiliation.

**Spiritual Exposure.** This scale is a 13-item self-report measurement based on a recent study identifying strategies and barriers to integrating religious and spiritual issues into counselor education and supervision (Adams, Puig, Baggs, and Wolf, 2011, March).
The measure was broken into two subscales; training exposure and professional exposure. Items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale with descriptions ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, therefore possible scores ranged from 13-52. Cronbach’s coefficient alpha was used to measure inter-item reliability with the current sample. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale was high (.91).

**Spiritual Competency.** This scale is a 14-item self-report measurement based on the Competencies for Addressing Spiritual and Religious Issues in Counseling (ASERVIC, 2009). Each competency was operationalized and placed on a 4-point Likert scale with descriptions ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. For example, the competency “The professional counselor actively explores his or her own attitudes, beliefs, and values about spirituality and/or religion” was turned into the item “I actively explore my own attitudes, beliefs, and values about spirituality and/or religion”. Possible scores ranged from 4 – 56. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale with the current sample was high (.92).

**Data Analysis.** For this study sequential mixed analysis was used. The analysis of the quantitative data was used to inform the content and analysis of the qualitative interview portion. Comparing how closely the sample resembles the general population of the ACCA college counselor membership checked the adequacy of the sample. Unfortunately demographic information of the nonresponders was not available, so a comparison of responders and nonresponders was not feasible.

The survey responses were analyzed to construct a model of college counselor spiritual training and professional exposure and spiritual competency using structural
equation modeling (SEM) with maximum likelihood (ML) estimation to determine if there is an association between counselor training and professional exposure and counselor spiritual competency. SEM is a multivariate statistical approach that allows researchers to examine both the measurement and structural components of a model by testing the relationships among constructs. This technique is becoming an increasingly popular method in the social sciences as it allows researchers to assess empirical relationships among observed and latent variables (Schumacker & Lomax, 2010; Crockett, 2012). In the model, latent variables are defined as hypothetical constructs that cannot be directly measured and therefore are comprised of observed indicator variables. SEM is a 5 step process that involves model specification, model identification, model estimation, model testing, and model modification (Bollen & Long, 1993).

In the full structural equation model, the first part of the analysis is the validation of the measurement model through a series of estimation techniques that are, in essence, confirmatory factor analysis. In each part of the measurement model, factor loadings and reliability measures are assessed to determine the link between the latent variables and their observed measures. Next, analysis of the strength of the relationships within the structural model is performed to assess the links among the latent variables themselves (Byrne, 2010).

The computer program AMOS ™ (Arbuckle, 2007) was used to estimate the interrelationships between variables and to analyze both the measurement and structural components of the study model. Model fit was informed by the comparative fit index (CFI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The guidelines used to indicate good model fit were that the CFI should be at least .90 and RMSEA values should be less
than .06 to indicate an acceptable fit of the data to the model (Byrne, 1998). The information collected from this quantitative phase was essential to informing the qualitative aspect.

**Qualitative Phase**

**Participants.** Of the 199 study participants, 125 replied that they would be willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview and supplied their contact information. Those 125 participants were broken into three groups based on their composite Spiritual Competency score. As previously described, The Spiritual Competency Scale consisted of 14 items that represented each of the 14 Competencies for Addressing Spiritual and Religious Issues in Counseling (ASERVIC, 2009), and were answered on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree (1)* to *strongly agree (4)*. Therefore, a possible score ranged from 14 – 56 where a higher score indicated higher self-reported spiritual competency. The original phase 1 sample score’s ranged from 21-56 (*M* = 44.24, *SD* = 6.76) and the modified phase 2 sample score’s ranged from 31-56 (*M* = 45.5, *SD* = 6.19).

The modified sample of participants was categorized into “low”, “medium” and “high” based on their respective competency score. While these ratings could be considered somewhat arbitrary, an effort was made to rationalize the category boundaries given the distribution characteristics. The score distribution was negatively skewed, indicating the sample had a relatively high spiritual competency level. If a participant choose “agree” for all items, their score would be 42, therefore a score of 41 and below was considered low (*n* = 40) indicating at least one competency they did not feel they had. A score between 42 - 49 (*n* = 44) was considered medium, and 50 - 56 was considered high (*n* = 39). Participants who scored “low” or “high” on the Spiritual Competency scale were emailed the follow-up,
qualitative interview questions. Of the 79 participants who were contacted, 32 completed the interview (18 high, 14 low).

**Interview Questions.** The phase two interview questions (See Appendix F) were informed by the survey results and aimed to further explore what experiences impacted the participants’ spiritual competency. The follow-up interview questions examined what specific training and professional experiences impacted the participant’s comfort and competence integrating religious and spiritual issues into their current counseling practice. Participants were also asked what motivated them to explore religious and spiritual issues with their clients.

**Data Analysis.** For the qualitative phase, I analyzed the data from the interviews using thematic content analysis (Riessman, 2008). This involved coding the interviews for common and uncommon themes using a three step process of identifying, organizing, and interrelating themes. The coding process was focused on counselor’s training and professional experiences that impacted their comfort, competence, and motivation to integrate religious and spiritual issues into their current practice. The identified themes were contextualized in a broader analytical framework connecting back to the quantitative results and the research literature.

The interview data were examined according to the individual question and participant group (low or high spiritual competency). Next, all responses were analyzed focusing on each individual question regardless of group, which provided commonalities and differences across groups. Finally, the interview data were explored as a whole to examine
dominant patterns that emerged across all groups and questions. The emergent themes were mapped out, and compared to the phase one results for further clarity.

Throughout the study I took into consideration different aspects to enhance the trustworthiness of my interpretation of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I practiced reflexivity (Hesse-Biber, 2010) by attempting to clarify my own experiences, assumptions, and interpretations through journaling. In addition the data were triangulated through accumulating multiple forms of data. The survey data and interviews were examined independently for reliability, and then collectively to generate a more complete understanding of the phenomenon under study.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Overview of Analytic Strategy

This study was designed to examine the relationship between training and professional exposure to religious and spiritual issues and college counselor spiritual competency. The study participants were current members of the American College Counseling Association (ACCA). In the first phase of the study, data from quantitative survey instruments were analyzed descriptively to determine the distributional characteristic of the variables. Next, the survey items were used to construct a model of college counselor religious/spiritual training and professional exposure and spiritual competency using structural equation modeling (SEM) with maximum likelihood (ML) estimation procedures. Results of first phase informed the qualitative data collection in the second phase of the study. Follow-up interviews were collected from a subgroup of the original sample and coded thematically to add a thick description to help explain the results from the first phase.

The phase one quantitative results are presented first, followed by the phase two qualitative results. The results of the first phase of this research will be presented in the following sections: (1) data quality, (2) measurement model analysis, and (3) structural model results. Next the results of the second phase of this research will be presented by theme.

Phase One: Quantitative Data

Data quality. Correlations were conducted among study variables and are presented in Table 1. The assumptions of structural equation modeling (SEM) were met. To determine normality, data were screened for the presence of extreme univariate and multivariate
outliers. An examination of the skewness and kurtosis at the item level indicated that the data did not generally deviate from a normal distribution. All skewness values were between -1 and 1, and all kurtosis values were between -2 and 2. There was no evidence from visual inspection of scatterplots of the data violating linearity and homoskedasticity.

**Measurement model analysis.** The first step in the analysis is the validation of the measurement model through a series of estimation techniques that are, in essence, confirmatory factor analysis. In each part of the measurement model, factor loadings and reliability measures are assessed to determine the link between the latent variables and their observed measures. Specifically, standardized factor correlations were examined to ensure no issues of multicollinearity.

**Exposure Model.** The hypothesized two factor exposure model was tested against a one factor alternate model. As shown in Table 2, the two factor model significantly decreased $x^2$ by 127.94, with 64 degrees of freedom remaining. The two factor model yielded factor loadings ranging from .64 - .85 on the professional exposure factor, and .62 - .83 on the training exposure factor. Overall, the two factor exposure model fit indices indicate that this model better fits the sample data (CFI = .83, RMSEA = .15).

Once the two factor model was chosen, the modification indices were examined for pairs of error covariance parameters that increased $x^2 > 15$ and made theoretical sense due to overlapping content (e.g., Item TE6 “I was offered a specialized course in religious/spiritual issues in counseling/therapy” and Item TE7 “I took a specialized course in religious/spiritual issues in counseling/therapy”) to free ($n = 2$). As shown in Table 2, the final two factor modified model yielded factor loadings ranging from .58-.85 and decreased $x^2$ by 220.37,
with 62 degrees of freedom remaining. The final model (shown in Figure 1) fit indices indicate that this model sufficiently fits the data used (CFI = .97, RMSEA = .06).

**Competency Model.** Upon examination of the modification indices in the proposed model, pairs of error covariance parameters that increased $x^2 > 15$ and made theoretical sense due to overlapping content were freed ($n = 8$). As shown in Table 2, the final one factor modified model yielded factor loadings ranging from .54-.83, and decreased $x^2$ by 140.15, with 69 degrees of freedom remaining. The final model (shown in Figure 2) fit indices indicate that this model sufficiently fits the data used (CFI = .97, RMSEA = .06).

**Measurement Model.** The complete measurement model examined the fit of the 27 observed variables to the three latent constructs (professional exposure, training exposure, and spiritual competency). A test of the measurement model resulted in an excellent fit to the data (CFI = .96, RMSEA = .05). All of the observed variables significantly loaded on their respective latent variables (all $p$ values < .001; see Table 3). The overall fit of the measurement model and the significant factor loadings demonstrate that the three latent variables in the model have been adequately measured by their respective observed variables.

**Structural model results.** As shown in Table 2, the full structural model demonstrated a good fit for the sample data (CFI = .96, RMSEA = .05). The unconstrained model decreased $x^2$ by 387.16, with 311 degrees of freedom remaining. Upon examination of the standardized residuals (see Table 1), only one pair exceeded the recommended cutoff of 2.58 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). The covariance between TE7 and PE1 is represented by the standardized residual value of 3.02. As this is the only statistically significant
discrepancy of note in the standardized residuals, the model can be considered to lack any substantial evidence of model misfit (Byrne, 2010).

As shown in Figure 3, the standardized path coefficients (interpreted as regression coefficients) in the full structural model show a significant relationship between training exposure and professional exposure ($\beta = .39, p < .001$) and professional exposure and spiritual competency ($\beta = .64, p < .001$). Interestingly, training exposure alone did not have any significant effect on spiritual competency ($\beta = -.01$). As shown in Figure 4, training exposure explains 15% of the variance in professional exposure. And professional exposure explained 40% of the variance in spiritual competency.

**Phase Two: Qualitative Data**

**Interview Results.** The data analysis revealed themes between both groups (low and high spiritual competency) and within each group. The emergent themes across both groups will be examined below, while the differences between groups will be discussed in chapter 5. Upon examining the participants’ responses of how their counselor training program impacted their competence, comfort, and motivation to integrate religious/spiritual issues into their counseling practice, as shown in Table 4, the following themes emerged: role of faculty; role of counselor training program structure and culture; role of personal worldview; role of honoring the client’s worldview; role of supervision, consultation, and practice; and role of client needs.

**Role of faculty.** The role of faculty was consistently cited as a barrier to integrate religious and spiritual competencies into the participant’s learning. In particular, faculty who lacked knowledge, training, and/or experience with religious and spiritual issues in
counseling were seen as a barrier to student’s learning. One participant reflected, “I think that the only barriers were the limitations that particular faculty might have had due to their own experience level and comfort in integrating this information.” Participants noted that some of their faculty did not seem confident with their own spiritual competency, and were uncomfortable integrating these into class. One participant noticed “discomfort on the part of the faculty with dealing with these issues” and another even experienced “faculty disinterest if not hostility towards religion, lack of texts, and research”. If faculty lack knowledge or comfort about religious and spiritual issues in counseling, they are most likely not encouraging or facilitating classroom discussion about these issues. A participant noted, “Professors needed to be trained and taught that religious and spiritual concerns are ok to talk about in counseling. I think the students were open to it, but it was not emphasized as a multicultural issue.” Another participant remembered, “I did hear a few professors say that it would be okay to talk about religion or spirituality as long as the client brought it up. But then no further direction was given to us about that.” One participant was even taught that “religion/spirituality was a line in the sand that shouldn’t be approached or crossed.” When faculty do not model how to discuss religious and spiritual issues in training, student’s will get the message that the topic is not suitable for discussion with peers or colleagues, let alone with clients. One participant remembered that “some [faculty] were clearly uncomfortable with this topic while a few were somewhat contemptuous of the place of religions and spirituality in counseling”. In contrast, one participant was encouraged by “Professors who were open with their own biases and faith journeys. Professors who did not shy away from the topic and allowed open discussion, with questions and respectful debate.”
**Role of counselor training program structure.** The degree to which religious and spiritual competencies were infused into counselor training curriculum was seen as either a strategy or a barrier and had implications for the overall program culture and attitude towards the importance of these issues. Barriers included a lack of religious and spiritual curriculum, lack of diverse viewpoints, and the view that religious and spiritual issues were taboo and not appropriate in secular/state school training programs. Program structure strategies included incorporating spiritual development into classes and placing importance on understanding the client belief system.

A clear barrier to integrating religious and spiritual competencies into counseling training programs was a lack of curriculum and training. Many participants responded that these competencies were not addressed in their courses and therefore a lack of training around religious and spiritual issues. Indicating that religious and spiritual issues were not infused into the overall program structure or culture, one participant noted that “Probably the most significant barriers were time and energy. Because so many specific (non-spiritual) classes, training hours, etc. were required by the program, I had little time and energy left for more spiritually based classes and personal activities.”

In addition, a lack of, or appreciation for, diverse viewpoints related to religious and spiritual issues in counselor training programs was seen as a barrier. Some participants responded that there was “Awkwardness/reluctance to address differences in people’s views due to fear of offending”, “Rigid opinions/beliefs of some students who were not open to considering other points of view”, and a “Lack of variety of diverse instructors and fellow peers”. In addition, one participant noted that religious and spiritual issues “Were not
discussed very much, and the culture of the school was non (not anti) religious from my perspective. Students who identified as religious seemed to be devalued.”

The final barrier to religious and spiritual competencies being integrated into the training program structure was the view that these issues were taboo or not appropriate specifically in secular/state schools. A participant stated that “In one of my programs at a public university the ‘separation of church and state’ clause was often cited as a reason that we could not address spiritual and religious concerns – hence – no competencies were ever addressed” and another saw a barrier as “Going to a public university where professors are hesitant to encourage religious discussion because of the diversity of student beliefs and the worry about upsetting someone.” Attending both public and religiously affiliated programs, one participant reflected that “At a secular school, professors didn’t bring it up, students didn’t feel it would be welcomed, second Master’s in counseling at a Christian school, faith is integrated intentionally into every discussion”. Finally, one participant noted “The topic was never really discussed in classes. Actually, we were all encouraged not to bring anything religious or spiritual into the counseling session. It seemed like a taboo subject”.

Strategies to infusing religious and spiritual competencies into the program structure included weaving spiritual development into classes and placing importance on understanding client belief systems. Some participants learned about spiritual and religious competencies in their counseling theories and techniques course while others were offered electives focused on spiritual issues in counseling. Some participants experienced a training program that included “Requiring a thorough and formal training/education related to one’s faith”, “Philosophy courses which integrated the whole person (body, mind and soul)”, and
“The study of morality and ethics”. In addition, one participant noted that “My program offered a ‘spirituality and counseling’ class and in our multicultural class, open minded discussion were encouraged. Being in a person-centered program created a safe environment for learning and growing in these areas” while another reflected that “Recognizing individual/cultural differences in general and incorporating those into conceptualization and treatment were emphasized in most, if not all, courses”.

Finally, a significant strategy that emerged for programs that incorporated religious and spiritual competencies into their program culture was emphasizing the importance of understanding client belief systems. One concrete example identified by a participant was “Some students completed a ‘out of comfort zone’ experience by going to a different faith setting than they were used to. This opened up the conversation to discuss different belief systems and how to incorporate into counseling”. For one participant their program “Developed comprehensive information about different belief systems. Information regarding the perceived importance to clients of addressing these issues.” Another participant noted their program taught students to “Start with where the client is coming from…respect and work with whatever spiritual persuasion/leaning”.

**Role of personal worldview.** The third theme that emerged was the impact of the participant’s personal interest in and knowledge of integrating religious and spiritual issues into their counseling practice. When participants were asked what motivated them to integrate religious and spiritual issues into counseling participants identified their personal enrichment from their spiritual identity and personal growth from experiencing spiritual struggles as key factors.
Participants highlighted their own personal experiences of spiritual development as a motivating factor in integrating religious and spiritual issues into their counseling practice. One participant noted that “As I have been in the field for a number of years now and through my own experiences, one’s spiritual belief does impact their decision making capabilities” and another was encouraged by “The importance my own faith has for me and I am motivated by the prospect that we are on a spiritual journey on which we don’t know the outcome. That’s exciting to me, and leads me to study and learn”. Participants own faith backgrounds and personal experiences influence their own desire to explore not only their own spiritual development, but gain comfort with the role of spirituality in counseling practice. One participant responded, “I am not a religious person per se, and my spiritual practice is personal and not very disciplined, but I do find that having a spiritual component to my life enriches it. My spiritual interests (Buddhist-based, nature) provide me tools to cope with stress, enrich my life and find meaning. They also provide perspectives and clinical tools that I use with clients when appropriate.” One participant noted s/he was comfortable integrating these issues into their counseling practice due to “The numerous opportunities I have had over the years in terms of education, exposure to varied spiritualities and the deepening of my own spirituality”. Another participant noted “My personal spirituality has most influenced my comfort. My view of all as spiritual beings leads to comfort- a natural state for all”.

In addition, participants noted that their own experience with spiritual struggles has helped them relate to the issues clients may face. A participant reflected on “The Bible as it has a long history of human struggling to better themselves as they develop a strong faith”.
Another was motivated by “Coming to terms with the pain created by my own early religious experiences and indoctrination and moving toward a practice of secular humanism”. One participant reflected, “I identify as Christian Spiritual which allows me to live the values promoted by Christ without being obligated to uphold the dogma created by men. This allows me to respect others from different religions. It also gives me personal experience in reconciling with my original religion sans oppression that I can use to help others who want to do the same”. Through their own spiritual development and experiences of spiritual struggles, counselors are better equipped to explore these issues with their clients.

**Role of honoring the client’s worldview.** The fourth theme to emerge was the role that honoring the client’s worldview had on the participants and their openness to address these issues in counseling. Participants identified the importance of viewing the client holistically, being open to the issues the client brings in, and viewing the client as the expert of their worldview as an essential aspects to integrating these issues into counseling.

The view of the holistic client and belief that worldview is an important part of the client’s perspective was highlighted. Participants noted that they were motivated to include religious and spiritual issues in counseling by their own beliefs that spiritual identity is an integral part of addressing the whole person. One participant noted that “Our identities are a big part of creating a healthy whole person, so finding ways to express our identities in healthy ways is important work that benefits many people. For some people one of those identities is religion”. Another participant reflected on “My own motivation and mindfulness of the issues. I did not buy into the limits as presented by professors and knew that without helping clients address issues related to religion and spirituality my work would not
effectively provide options for my clients.” From a holistic perspective, a client’s religious or spiritual identity should be valued and explored just as any other multicultural identity they may identity with. As one participant stated “I can’t imagine not including religious and spiritual issues into counseling, any more than I could imagine not paying attention to someone’s gender, ethnicity, race, class, education, etc. It is part of who we all are. If someone identifies as agnostic or atheist, that is also part of who they are and how they make meaning in life.”

In addition, participants recognized that their own openness to the religious and spiritual issues that a client brings into counseling motivates their own desire to be competent in this area of practice. On participate stated they were motivated by “Books I’ve read and students I work with. I enjoy hearing about the different cultural traditions of my students and want to learn more about their backgrounds.” Another participate noted their “General interest in different belief systems and how these impact behavior as well as a general openness to other people’s right to believe whatever they choose and acceptance that I don’t have a corner on truth.” In addition, participants identified their exposure to diverse belief systems increased their openness to these issues in their counseling practice. Participants identified strategies such as educating themselves about diverse religious and spiritual traditions and being open to perspectives different from their own. One participant stated “My own personal background in religion and spirituality and the choices I have made (e.g., exposing myself to different religions and ideas, living in places with diversity in cultures and spiritual traditions) have had a strong impact on my comfort level with integrating religion and spirituality into my practice”. Another participant reflected they “Read about
various religious beliefs and non-religious spiritual approaches to life and its ultimate
meaning to the client. As one of my own spiritual practices, I acknowledge the importance
of understanding others’ approaches to the mystery that is life in order to better comprehend
their motivation for making meaning in life”.

Finally, the belief that the client is the expert of their own worldview and the impact
that has on counselor’s own examination of personal bias was identified as a motivating
factor to competently integrate these issues into counseling. One participant stated that they
were motivated by “My unconditional acceptance of each client’s spiritual/religious life and
how that worldview helps him or her make meaning in a world of daily challenges and stress
for so many people” and another shared that “My personal philosophy on counseling is the
client is the expert on his/her experience and therefore the expert on his/her spirituality. I am
there to listen and provide objective feedback, I do not need to be a spiritual expert in order
to discuss spirituality with clients”. When the client is viewed as the expert, the counselor is
challenged to learn from the client and continually examine their personal bias. One
participant reflected on their “struggle to overcome the inevitable biases and work toward
openness and acceptance to ALL religious, spiritual and silenced perspectives so as to
develop better understanding of those I serve”. In addition, one participant stated:

I think examining my own beliefs has helped, along with getting more experience
with integrating religious/spiritual issues over time have both helped. Going to
church with my partner, even though I do not identify as religious, has helped me to
be more aware of my biases and be more empathetic to those with strong
religious/spiritual beliefs. Also, seeing how much I have in common with people
who identify as religious in terms of our values and ideas, has helped me realize that I
am not as different from them as I once thought I was.
Through honoring the client’s perspective, experience, and expertise counselors can be more open to the religious and spiritual issues that clients bring to counseling. By asking questions, listening, and continually examining their own bias counselors can effectively integrate spiritual competencies into their practice.

**Role of supervision, consultation, and practice.** The fifth theme that emerged was the impact supervision, consultation and practice that incorporated religious and spiritual issues had on participants’ current competence and practice. These strategies for increasing competence were identified in participants’ counselor training program, current practice, and professional development. Participants identified lecture, case-review, role-playing, and mock sessions as key strategies in supervision to integrate these competencies into their learning. One participant noted that “Supervision was a great place to learn about addressing religion via individual cases. I also happened to attend graduate school in Utah, where tensions between LDS and non-LDS made religion a presenting issue in more cases than places where religious tensions may be less mainstream.” And another participant identified the successful strategy of “Process recorded clinical supervision that specifically looked for my awareness of my own biases and for client strengths”. Education, training and supervision were key components in participants’ counselor training programs that were seen as effective strategies for increasing spiritual and religions competencies.

In addition, consulting with supervisors and colleagues about religions and spiritual issues played a significant role in many participants current competence integrating these issues in their counseling practice. When asked what impacted their competence integrating religious and spiritual issues into their counseling practice some participants responded,
“Meeting with other spiritual counselors”, “Mentors and counseling supervisors who had significant experience about when and to what degree to incorporate spirituality in counseling”, and “Learning about others who have been successful in using religious and spiritual teaching to help others”. Conversely, one participant reflected that “I do not feel very competent in this area because of a lack of professional training and work experience”. While another identified that “My lack of knowledge sometimes makes me feel less comfortable so I am trying to learn and read more. I feel by experiencing and talking with others I can grow more”. A common theme from the participants was that knowledge alone was insufficient, the key is to pair training with “practice, practice, practice, and consultation, consultation, consultation!”

The final strategy identified was engaging in professional development, such as continuing education, conference presentations, and reading research. One participant described that they “Engage in the conversations about it with other therapists, clergy members, as well as reading about the topic and attending and creating worships on the topic”. Another participant stated s/he was motivated to “Seek out education and training experiences in this area to integrate it into my work”.

**Role of client needs.** The final theme that emerged was the role that client needs play on participants’ motivation to learn about and integrate religious and spiritual competencies into their counseling practice. Participants identified the following client needs: clients want to explore the religious and spiritual dimension of their lives; clients’ issues may stem from the religious and spiritual dimension of their lives; client’s religious and spiritual framework
serves as a strength in the therapeutic process; and the positive impact spiritual development has had on client growth.

When asked what motivates them to integrate religious and spiritual issues into counseling, participants responded they were motivated by the needs of their clients. One participant reflected that “As a professional in the field of counseling for 12+ years now, I have been fortunate to experience spiritual training outside of my field. I have done this as the needs of my clients changed. Arizona is a spiritually open-minded area. Many clients feel comfort in talking about angels, higher powers, native American spiritual influences, etc.” Viewing these issues as a crucial piece of the counseling process one participant noted that “It is a significant concern for many of my clients and they raise the issue. I believe in doing a thorough psychosocial assessment and spiritual health is a part of that assessment”. Another participant stated s/he was motivated “Working with various people from diverse backgrounds and understanding that many people carry religious and spiritual values. Understanding their perspective and/or experiences can help strengthen the counseling relationship”.

Another reason participants are motivated to integrate religious and spiritual competencies into their counseling practice is that they see client issues that stem from the religious and spiritual dimension of their lives and also the strength that can come from their worldview. One participants stated they were motivated by “Issues revealed during client presentation and through the counseling process, my own belief system/worldview, all coupled with my understanding of human makeup and needs/tasks.” Another participant reflected that a client’s belief system “can be a tremendous support to my clients during
stress, trauma or loss” and can “reflect symptomology with clients who have OCD, schizophrenia, Bipolar Disorder, etc.” Finally, one participant stated:

My two main specialties are women’s issues and holistic multicultural counseling. So I’ve worked with a lot of people who are struggling with their religion because of its teachings that hurt women and LGBTQ individuals, and/or because their religion is not the dominant religion in that area. I also value spiritual health in its many forms. So, it has been important to me to help my clients find spiritual health through reconciling with their original religion, finding alternative expression of their religion, or finding a new healthier spirituality.

Participants also identified the view that the client’s worldview is a strength in the therapeutic process as motivation to learn more about and integrate into practice religions and spiritual competencies. One participant noted “If my client uses religions and spiritual issues as a strength, then it will motivate me to learn more about them.” Another stated that “I practice my own spirituality and religion. When I find out that this is important to a client, I use that and build on it as far as the client is comfortable. I think spirituality can be a huge help to people in crisis, or who are going through difficult times.”

Finally, participants were motivated to integrate religious and spiritual competencies into their counseling practice as a result of seeing the positive impact they have on clients’ growth. Some participants responded “Seeing how powerful it is for clients to tap in to their spiritual belief system for healing and motivation to change”, “As I have worked with clients who are religious it has made me more aware of the need to learn more. I clearly see the connection and growth of clients when using faith to help them make positive changes in their lives”, and “So many people turn to spiritual guidance in times of struggle so it’s natural that we as counselors consider this as part of their treatment”. One participant noted that “Regardless of my judgement of the value of such a system of belief, it is the underlying
meaning-maker in life for the client and my clinical entre into their world and how to understand it in therapy.” Using a multicultural lens, another participant reflected “I’ve seen how influential religious and spiritual beliefs can be in understanding clients’ presenting concerns and how best to approach them. In those cases where religion as a salient cultural characteristic for them, not integrating it into the work would have been detrimental to them, so I am motivated to keep learning about these issues to ensure I am providing effective, ethical care.”

**Summary of Results**

As previously stated, training exposure explained 15% of the variance in professional exposure. And professional exposure explained 40% of the variance in spiritual competency. An unexpected result was that there was no significant relationship between training exposure and spiritual competence in phase one, therefore follow up interview questions were used to explore what aspects of participants training program were barriers or strategies to integrating spiritual competencies into their current practice. To further explore what aspects of professional exposure most impacted current practice, participants were also asked what motivates them to integrate spiritual competencies into their current practice. In response to these questions the following themes emerged: the role of faculty; counselor training program structure and culture; personal worldview; honoring the client’s worldview; importance of supervision, consultation, and practice; and client needs.

From these results, counselor spiritual competency can be understood to be a complex, multifaceted construct. In counselor training programs faculty, program culture, and supervision all play an important role in the counselor’s spiritual competency. In
addition, professional exposure experiences such as personal spiritual development and experience with client needs motivate counselors to continue to learn about and integrate spiritual competencies into their current practice. The differences between the low and high spiritual competency participants will be discussed Chapter 5. In addition, the implications of these results, limitations of the study, and directions for future research and practice will be explored in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In this chapter the results will be summarized and examined in relationship to previous research. In addition the limitations of the study and implications for future research and practice will be discussed. The purpose of this study was to utilize an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to examine background factors related to counselor competence in exploring diverse religious and spiritual issues with college students. The questions that the current research attempted to answer were:

1) What is the relationship between counselor preparation and counselor competence addressing diverse religious and spiritual issues with college students?
   a) How does counselor training exposure relate to counselor spiritual competence in counseling?
   b) How does counselor professional exposure relate to counselor spiritual competence in counseling?

The goal of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how counselor training and professional experiences impact college counselor competence and comfort with religious and spiritual issues in their counseling practice. Also, to explore what types of training and professional experiences have impacted current college counselors’ ability to successfully explore religious and spiritual issues with their clients.

Research Findings and Interaction with Previous Research

The results of the current student showed that training exposure explained 15% of the variance in professional exposure. And professional exposure explained 40% of the variance in spiritual competency. An unexpected result was that there was no significant relationship
between training exposure and spiritual competence in phase one, therefore follow up interview questions were used to explore what aspects of participants training program were barriers or strategies to integrating spiritual competencies into their current practice. To further explore what factors most impacted their comfort and competence addressing these issues in their current practice, participants were also asked what motivates them to integrate spiritual competencies into their work. From a thorough analysis of the data, overarching themes emerged: (1) the role of faculty, (2) the role of counselor training program structure, (3) the role of personal worldview, (4) the role of honoring the client’s worldview, (5) the role of supervision, consultation, and practice, and (6) the role of client needs. The differences between the low and high spiritual competency participants will now be discussed in more detail.

**Role of faculty.** Confirming Adams et al. (March, 2011) findings, the role of faculty was consistently cited as a barrier to integrate religious and spiritual competencies into the counselor’s learning. Specifically, faculty who lacked knowledge, training, and/or experience with religious and spiritual issues in counseling were seen as a barrier to student’s learning. If faculty lack knowledge about religious and spiritual issues in counseling, they may not be comfortable encouraging or facilitating classroom discussion about these issues. If faculty do not model how to discuss religious and spiritual issues in class, how can counselors-in-training be prepared to do so in practice?

Comparing the low and high spiritual competency groups, similar themes were shared between both groups. However, substantially more high spiritual competency participants identified faculty as a barrier to integrating religious and spiritual competencies into their
learning. Perhaps students who already have an interest in these issues were more aware of
that they were being left out in coursework and were therefore more motivated to gain
competency on their own. This would help explain the quantitative findings that training
exposure had no impact on spiritual competency, while professional exposure had a
significant impact.

**Role of counselor training program structure.** Participants considered their
program structure as either a strategy or barrier to integrating religious and spiritual
competencies into their counselor training curriculum. The first barrier identified was the
lack of infusing religious and spiritual issues into curriculum and training. Participants
indicated that religious and spiritual issues were not infused into the overall program
structure or culture. The second barrier was a perceived lack of diverse viewpoints related to
religious and spiritual issues in their counselor training programs, both among faculty and
peers. If these issues are not discussed in the counseling program students will never know
how they relate to, or are different from, one another. The final barrier to religious and
spiritual competencies being integrated into the training program structure was the view that
these issues were taboo or not appropriate specifically in secular/state schools. The two
strategies to infusing religious and spiritual competencies into the program structure that
were identified were incorporating spiritual development into classes and emphasizing the
importance of understanding client belief systems.

Both the low and high spiritual competency groups identified all five barriers and
strategies. In terms of barriers, the low competency group simply noted that religious and
spiritual competencies were not infused into their training program (course on these issues
were not offered, diverse viewpoints were not presented, and topics were simply not addressed) while the high competency group tended to experience resistance in their training program to addressing these issues (identified only one professor or class who was open to these issues, noted reluctance in program to explore issues, and experienced discomfort around discussing these issues in a public institution). These results support previous research that indicated that religious and spiritual diversity is not addressed as comprehensively in multicultural counseling training as other types of diversity (Hage, et al., 2006). Similar to the previous theme, these results further explain the lack of impact between training exposure and spiritual competency. For both groups, the strategies that were identified were related to the purposeful integration into the program culture through infusing spiritual development into classes and framing these issues within the task of understand the client belief system. It is simply not enough to state that religious and spiritual competencies are important, rather spiritual development should be identified and facilitated for both students and clients. As shown by Rogers and Love (2007), counseling students need the knowledge and language through which to identify and communicate the spiritual dimensions of their lives and their client’s lives.

**Role of personal worldview.** The participant’s were motivated to integrate religious and spiritual issues into their counseling practice, in part, by their personal interest in and knowledge of these topics. Participants identified personal enrichment from their spiritual identity and personal growth from experiencing spiritual struggles as key experiences that impacted their comfort with utilizing spiritual competencies in counseling sessions with students. Personal faith backgrounds, exposure to diverse beliefs, and spiritual exploration
impacted college counselors’ comfort with the role of spirituality in their counseling practice. Through their own spiritual development counselors are better equipped to explore these issues with their clients.

These findings support previous research that spirituality is an important aspect of cultural identity (Bishop, et al., 2003) and the positive impact working through spiritual struggles has on one’s acceptance of others of different faiths and spiritual development (Bryant & Astin, 2008; Love et al, 2005; Soet & Martin, 2007). There was no clear difference between the low and high spiritual competency groups in regards to this theme. Given the voluntary participation in both phases of this study, it is possible that the participants as a whole have a higher interest in religious and spiritual issues than the general population thus this theme was shared among the majority of the participants.

**Role of honoring the client’s worldview.** College counselors that are open to client’s experiences and expose themselves to diverse worldviews seem better equipped to explore spiritual and religious issues competently with clients. From a holistic perspective, a client’s religious or spiritual identity should be valued and explored just as any other multicultural identity they may identity with. Participants recognized that their own openness to the religious and spiritual issues that a client brings into counseling motivates their own desire to be competent in this area of practice. And participants identified that their exposure to diverse belief systems increased their openness to these issues in their counseling practice. Through honoring the client’s worldview the client is viewed as the expert and the counselor is challenged to learn from the client. By asking questions,
listening, and continually examining their own bias counselors can effectively integrate spiritual competencies into their practice.

Both spiritual competency groups expressed an interest in gaining knowledge and exposure to diverse belief systems, but the high spiritual competency group reported significantly more emphasis on the holistic view of the client as the expert. The high spiritual competency group reflected more on learning the value of this belief through experience, so perhaps those participants have been in the field longer. These results suggest the importance of encouraging counselors in training to examine and discuss with others their own values, beliefs, and biases to gain insight and experience engaging in spiritual dialogue. In addition, many of the strategies for overcoming the barriers to integrating religious and spiritual issues in counselor training identified by Adams et al. (2011, March) related to framing religious and spiritual development as an essential component of the client worldview.

**Role of supervision, consultation, and practice.** The fifth theme that emerged was the impact supervision, consultation, and professional development in participants’ training program and current counseling practice had on their spiritual competence. Consulting with supervisors and colleagues about specific cases, as well as religions and spiritual issues in counseling in general, played a significant role in many participants current competence integrating these issues in their counseling practice. The strategies for increasing competence were identified in participants’ counselor training program, current practice, and professional development. These included lecture, role playing, supervision, consultation, continuing education, conferences presentations, workshops, and reading related research.
Education, training and supervision were key components in participants’ counselor training programs that were seen as effective strategies for increasing spiritual and religions competencies. These findings support previous research that indicated the importance of integrating spiritual competencies into supervision (Bishop, et al., 2003; Kelly, 1994).

The two groups differed in that the low competency group mainly identified supervision strategies in their training program while the high competency group added strategies regarding professional development they continued to engage in after graduating. Both groups noted quality supervision, but only the high spiritual competency group reported to participate in professional development. These results help explain the phase one findings, and help to clarify that while training experiences did not significantly impact competency they can impact professional experiences that do significantly impact competency. In addition to counselor education coursework, religious and spiritual issues in counseling should be integrated into supervision, consultation, and continuing education throughout the counselor’s career.

**Role of client needs.** In the final theme that emerged, participants described their motivation to integrate religious and spiritual issues into their counseling practice as a result of identifying client needs related to these issues. The following client needs were highlighted: clients want to explore the religious and spiritual dimension of their lives; clients’ issues may stem from the religious and spiritual dimension of their lives; clients’ religious and spiritual framework serves as a strength in the therapeutic process; and the positive impact spiritual development has had on client growth.
Similar to the previous theme, these findings indicate a connection to practical experience in the field and highlight the need for counseling students to explore these issues in supervision. These findings support the research by Kelly (1995) that encourages an assessment of the client’s spiritual and religious beliefs during the intake process so the counselor can begin to understand if and how the spiritual views of the client affect issues in counseling and how they can be helpful in developing the client’s self-understanding. In addition, these results substantiate the findings by Kellems et al. (2010) that religious and spiritual issues are common in college counseling centers and congruent therapist/client religious identity is not as important as the quality of the therapeutic relationship. By being open to client needs related to religious and spiritual issues, clients receive the message that all aspects of their worldview are appropriate to explore in counseling.

Limitations

As with any research study, the present study had limitations that could impact the significance of the findings and generalizability of the results. This study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed method methodology in the hopes that many of the limitations of the quantitative phase would be balanced by the strengths of the qualitative phase, and vice versa. The limitations in this study include participant characteristics, sample size, and instruments.

**Participant characteristics.** While all of the participants were current members of the American College Counseling Association (ACCA), the amount of time since they were enrolled in their counselor training program greatly varied. Therefore, some participants were reflecting on their own experience in a program that might be different today than it
was when the participant attended. In addition, perceptions of the study participants may be different from other college counselors in the field. The sample size was deemed more important in this study than selecting only participants who were recent graduates and new professionals. This decision limits the ability to generalize the results to the state of current counselor training programs. Limiting the sample to recent graduates would remedy this limitation.

Response rate. As is often the case with survey research, the low response rate is a threat to external validity. While the sample size obtained was sufficient to have statistical power in the SEM analysis, the low response rate could impact the generalizability of the results to the population of college counselors. It is possible that the participants who chose to participate in the survey and follow-up interviews are more interested in the topic than those who chose not to participate. In addition, because no identifying information was recorded for the participants in phase two there is no way to explore the possibility of the threat of attrition. In addition, as referenced above, the differences between the low and high spiritual competency groups could be related to amount of professional experience and opportunity for continuing education. This is an interesting issue and would be useful to explore in future studies in order to understand what types of professional experiences have the most impact on spiritual competency.

Instruments. Due to a lack of pre-existing instruments that fit the parameters of this study, the instruments used were created for use in this study. As a result, there is limited validity and reliability information available. In addition, the information collected was self-report and therefore can only be considered valid within each participant’s own lived
experience. Creating a study that utilizes observable behavior, such as watching filmed counseling sessions for instances of engaging in religious and spiritual exchange, could improve this limitation.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Given that in the last decade there has been a shift within the counseling field to place more importance on religious and spiritual diversity, future studies should target students directly after they have completed their program to get a better sense of how current counselor training programs are addressing these issues. While a few authors have written about their experiences with including religious and spiritual issues into their curriculum (Curtis & Glass, 2002; Fukuyama & Sevig, 1997), a formal measure was not used to evaluate efficacy of training. Future research should seek to develop and evaluate religious and spiritual multicultural curriculum based on empirical evidence of students’ academic needs.

As noted above, clinical experience seems to impact counselor openness to these issues. Therefore, case studies and taped clinical sessions that address common client needs related to religious and spiritual issues should be explored and utilized in counselor supervision. In addition, only modest research has investigated specific interventions to help facilitate client’s experiencing spiritual struggles. New ways to meet the needs of college students experiencing spiritual struggles should be explored. Finally, the groundbreaking research conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI, 2005) on college student spirituality should be expanded to examine trends, beliefs, and values of college counselors, counselor educators, and graduate counseling students.

**Recommendations for Practice**
Results from this research aimed to inform counselor education multicultural curriculum, improve college student experience and self-exploration, and advance college counseling practice. The results from phase two indicate that a hands on approach to religious and spiritual diversity in counselor training and supervision is essential. Faculty and supervisors who show an openness to discussing these issues, model ways to discuss these issues, and provide opportunities to practice were all seen as strategies for integrating spiritual competencies into counselor training. Participants also identified specific strategies such as role play and reviewing supervision tapes as important in shaping their comfort and competence integrating religious and spiritual issues into their current counseling practice. From the present study, the following suggestions aim to stimulate discussion and offer strategies to foster spiritual growth and encourage authenticity in counselor training and practice.

Spiritual diversity is an important component of multicultural counselor training and should be addressed in diversity coursework, as well as counselor supervision and training. Improving the curriculum of counselor education through understanding the factors that lead to counselor competence working with college students of diverse religious and spiritual backgrounds is essential to improving the educational experience for all college students.

The work of Fowler, Parks, and others should be addressed in current theories of student development and human growth. Counselor educators are encouraged to include spiritual development in their courses even if it is not (and probably won’t be) discussed in their chosen text.
In addition, the Competencies for addressing Spiritual and Religious Issues in Counseling (ASERVIC, 2009) should be discussed, practiced, and evaluated in counselor supervision and training. Counseling students need to be exposed to spiritual and religious counseling techniques and interventions in their education and supervision experience to help facilitate their professional development as competent, culturally aware, mental health professionals.

College counselors should be familiar with college student spiritual development theory and be able to identify client’s current stage of faith development. This awareness will hopefully aid in resolving problems commonly encountered in spiritual and psychological growth. College counselors should integrate spirituality into client intakes, interventions, and treatment plans and such practices must be modeled in clinical training and supervision. Finally, college counselors and other student affairs professionals must collaborate to encourage and acknowledge spiritual growth and development into the holistic student learning environment.

**Closing Statement**

Similar to previous research findings, spiritual competencies are not being addressed enough in counselor training programs. In phase one, their counseling training did not significantly impact college counselor’s spiritual competency. A novel contribution from this study is the finding that professional exposure did significantly impact the participants’ spiritual competency. And counselor training significantly impacted professional exposure. These findings highlight the importance of not just talking about spiritual competencies in training programs, but also fostering counseling students own spiritual development. By
modeling how to talk about, study, and research issues of religious and spiritual diversity in counselor training and supervision, counselors will be more competent in continuing these behaviors as professional counselors. And it is the competence and comfort that comes from professional exposure to these issues that seems to have the greatest impact on counselor spiritual competency with clients.

From these results, college counselor spiritual competency can be understood to be a complex, multifaceted construct. In counselor training programs faculty, program culture, and supervision all play an important role in the counselor’s spiritual competency. In addition, professional experiences such as exposure to diverse beliefs, self-reflection on personal spiritual development and biases, and experience with client needs related to religious and spiritual issues motivate counselors to continue to learn about and integrate spiritual competencies into their current practice.
REFERENCES


## Appendix A Tables

### Table 1

**Correlation and Standardized Covariance Residual Matrices With Means and Standard Deviations for Observed Variables**

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*Note.* Standardized residual covariances appear in the upper right of the matrix. Correlations appear in the lower left of the matrix. For correlations, *p < .05, **p < .01. \( N = 199 \). PE = professional exposure, TE = training exposure, C = spiritual competency.
Table 1 Cont.
Correlation and Standardized Covariance Residual Matrices With Means and Standard Deviations for Observed Variables

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Note. Standardized residual covariances appear in the upper right of the matrix. Correlations appear in the lower left of the matrix. For correlations, *p < .05, **p < .01. N = 199. PE = professional exposure, TE = training exposure, C = spiritual competency.
## Table 1 Cont.

**Correlation and Standardized Covariance Residual Matrices With Means and Standard Deviations for Observed Variables**

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**Note.** Standardized residual covariances appear in the upper right of the matrix. Correlations appear in the lower left of the matrix. For correlations, *p < .05, **p < .01. *N* = 199. PE = professional exposure, TE = training exposure, C = spiritual competency.
Table 2

Summary of Model Fit Indices

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*Note. df = degrees of freedom; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; CI = confidence interval. *** $p < .001$. 
### Table 3

**Standardized Factor Loadings for Measurement Model**

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*Note. N = 199. PE = professional exposure, TE = training exposure, C = spiritual competency. ***p < .001.*
### Table 4

*Summary of qualitative findings by theme*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Barrier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role of faculty</td>
<td>Faculty openness to diverse belief systems</td>
<td>Lack of faculty knowledge and interest of religious and spiritual issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty encouraging exploration of bias and personal worldview</td>
<td>Lack of faculty training on spiritual competencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role of counselor training program structure</td>
<td>Incorporating spiritual development into classes</td>
<td>Lack of religious and spiritual curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasizing the importance of understanding the client belief system</td>
<td>Lack of diverse viewpoints</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role of personal worldview</td>
<td>Personal enrichment from spiritual identify</td>
<td>View that religious and spiritual issues are taboo and not appropriate in secular/state school programs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal growth from experiencing spiritual struggles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role of honoring the client's worldview</td>
<td>Importance of holistic view of client</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being open to the issues the client brings into counseling</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>View of client as expert of their own worldview</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role of supervision, consultation, and practice</td>
<td>Integrating religious and spiritual competencies through lecture, role playing, case studies, and supervision</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Continuing education experiences related to religious and spiritual competencies including conferences, worships, and reading related research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role of client needs</td>
<td>Clients want to explore the religious and spiritual dimension of their lives</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Client issues may stem from the religious and spiritual dimension of their lives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Client’s religious and spiritual framework can serve as a strength in the therapeutic process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive impact spiritual development has on client growth</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B Figures

Figure 1
Two factor exposure measurement model
Figure 2
One factor spiritual competency measurement model
Figure 3
Structural relationship among training exposure, professional exposure, and spiritual competency
Figure 4
Structural relationship among training exposure, professional exposure, and spiritual competency (zoomed in)
Appendix C

North Carolina State University

INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study: Spirituality in Higher Education

Principal Investigator: Abigail Holland Conley

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Sylvia Nassar-McMillan

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of factors that impact college counselor spiritual competencies and practices. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?

As the plurality of religious life in America continues to increase, so will the religious and spiritual issues that students struggle with on college campuses across the nation. College is a time for self-exploration, and it is imperative that college counselors are prepared to work
with a diverse student population with a broad range of spiritual and religious backgrounds. The purpose of the proposed study is to examine background factors related to counselor competence in exploring diverse religious/spiritual issues with college students in order to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between counselor background factors and current counseling practices. Results of the study will have implications for college counselors’ practices and competencies as well as the research, training, and curriculum requirements in the field of counselor education.

**What will happen if you take part in the study?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to answer a brief internet survey, the College Counseling Spiritual Competency Scale, about your personal and professional experience with religious and spiritual issues. This survey should take approximately 10-20 minutes. At the end of the survey there will be an open-ended question asking if you have any other information to add that was not addressed in the survey and if you would be willing to be contacted for an optional, follow-up interview conducted via email.

**Risks**

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences and practices associated with spiritual competency. Participants will be instructed to share only those experiences that they are comfortable with sharing. Discussing one’s personal spiritual beliefs and comfort and competency with diverse spiritual beliefs could potentially cause stress and/or anxiety although the likelihood of that occurrence is low. If the participants at anytime wish to withdraw from the study they will be allowed to do so immediately. In the follow-up interviews, the researcher, who has a master’s degree in counseling, will attempt to address
any potential feelings of anxiety, stress, or difficulty that may arise as a result of sharing personal memories and experiences related to spirituality.

**Benefits**

There are no direct benefits offered to you, however indirectly you will gain exposure to the ASERVIC Spiritual Competencies that may increase your knowledge and, in turn, influence your practice.

**Confidentiality**

The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely in a password protected computer. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. You will only be asked to give your name if you agree to be contacted for a follow-up interview, however no identifying information will be reported that could link individual responses with the participants who gave them.

**Compensation**

For participating in this study you will be entered into a drawing for a $100 Amazon gift card upon completion of the survey. You do not have to agree to a follow-up interview to be entered into the drawing.

**What if you have questions about this study?**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Abigail Holland Conley, at 336-408-5382 or aeholla2@ncsu.edu.

**What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU (919-515-4514).

**Consent To Participate**

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. **By proceeding with the online survey, I am giving my consent to participate in this study.**
Appendix D

Phase 1 Survey – Spiritual Exposure Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please rate to what degree you agree with each of the following statements:</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1. I have taken continuing education related to religious/spiritual issues in counseling.</td>
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<td>P2. I engage in discussion with colleagues about religious/spiritual issues.</td>
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<td>P3. I read publications about religious/spiritual issues in counseling.</td>
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<td><strong>In my counselor training program:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>T1. Faculty were willing to explore their own spirituality and/or biases toward religious/spiritual issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>T2. Faculty encouraged students to explore their own spirituality and/or biases toward religious/spiritual issues.</td>
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<td>T3. Religious/spiritual issues were included in multicultural/diversity courses.</td>
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<td>T4. There was discussion on where and how to best integrate religious/spiritual issues into counseling.</td>
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<td>T5. Religious/spiritual development was contextualized as an aspect of human development and culture.</td>
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<td>T6. I was offered a specialized course in religious/spiritual issues in counseling/therapy.</td>
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<td>T7. I took a specialized course in religious/spiritual issues in counseling/therapy.</td>
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<td>T8. Religious/spiritual issues were infused into most courses.</td>
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<td>T9. The psychological implications of religious/spiritual issues were addressed.</td>
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<td>T10. The inherent spiritual nature of meaning and value systems were addressed.</td>
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</table>
Appendix E

Phase 1 Survey – Spiritual Competency Scale

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Please rate to what extent you agree with each of the following statements:</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1. I can describe the similarities and differences between spiritually and religion, including the basic beliefs of various spiritual systems, major world religions, agnosticism, and atheism.</td>
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<td>C2. I recognize that the client’s beliefs (or absence of beliefs) about spirituality and/or religion are central to his or her worldview and can influence psychosocial function.</td>
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<td>C3. I actively explore my own attitudes, beliefs, and values about spirituality and/or religion.</td>
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<td>C4. I continuously evaluate the influence of my own spiritual and/or religious beliefs and values on the client and the counseling process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C5. I can identify the limits of my own understanding of the client’s spiritual and/or religious perspective and am acquainted with religious and spiritual resources, including leaders, who can be avenues for consultation and to whom I can refer.</td>
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<td>C6. I can describe and apply various modes of spiritual and/or religious development and their relationship to human development.</td>
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<td>C7. I respond to client communications about spirituality and/or religion with acceptance and sensitivity.</td>
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<td>C8. I use spiritual and/or religious concepts that are consistent with the client’s spiritual and/or religions</td>
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perspectives and that are acceptable to the client.

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<tr>
<td>C9. I can recognize spiritual and/or religious themes in client communication and am able to address these with the client when they are therapeutically relevant.</td>
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<td>C10. During the intake and assessment processes, I strive to understand a client’s spiritual and/or religious perspective by gathering information from the client and/or other sources.</td>
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<td>C11. When making a diagnosis, I recognize that the client’s spiritual and/or religious perspectives can a) enhance well-being; b) contribute to client problems; and/or c) exacerbate symptoms.</td>
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<td>C12. I set goals with the client that are consistent with the client’s spiritual and/or religious perspectives.</td>
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<td>C13. I am able to modify therapeutic techniques to include a client’s spiritual and/or religious perspectives.</td>
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<td>C14. I am able to utilize spiritual and/or religious practices as techniques when appropriate and acceptable to a client’s viewpoint.</td>
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Appendix F

Phase 2 – Interview Questions

1. In your counselor training program, what do you think were the most significant barriers to integrating religious and spiritual competencies into your learning?

2. In your counselor training program, what do you think were the most significant strategies for integrating religious and spiritual competencies into your learning?

3. As a counseling professional, what motivates you to learn more about religious and spiritual issues in counseling?

4. What has most impacted how competent you are integrating religious and spiritual issues into your counseling practice?

5. What has most impacted how comfortable you are integrating religious and spiritual issues into your counseling practice?