EXPLORING EXPERT COUNSELORS SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT AND HOW IT CONTRIBUTES TO THEIR COUNSELING WORK

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EXPLORING EXPERT COUNSELORS SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT AND HOW IT CONTRIBUTES TO THEIR THERAPY (287 pp.)

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This qualitative research study explored expert counselors’ spiritual development and how it contributed to their counseling work. During a five week period, twelve expert counselors were interviewed in a variety of locations around the state of Ohio. Transcripts of the interviews, along with demographic data, vitas, researcher’s case notes, additional information obtained through follow-up phone calls and e-mails were used to glean information for themes in their discourse. Each participant mentioned a spiritual core or connection as an important component of their spirituality. Relationships were highly valued. Finding meaning in life’s joys and sorrows or assisting clients and others towards discovering meaning was another element mentioned by all.

The expert counselor participants had a strong faith base with all of them believing in a God, higher power or connection and committed to their own spiritual traditions. Eleven pray and meditate regularly. Nine spoke of their spiritual core or inner guide contributing to their desire to make right choices for their life. Five individuals believed all of their life was spiritually oriented and the remaining group averaged more than ten hours weekly on their spiritual practices. The majority of the participants consistently address spirituality in their counseling work. Seven participants regularly assessed their clients at the intake session for spiritual values and beliefs. Two others waited until their client disclosed a spiritual interest and then attended to the issue.
This study’s results provide support for the concept of spiritual core and connection providing a lens or way to make meaning of life events, inspiration to create a purposeful life which brings holistic health, satisfying relationships and opportunities to be in flow or in sync with that spiritual energy. A discussion of the data collection and analysis is presented. Implications, limitations and conclusions are incorporated.

Approved: ____________________________________________

Tom E. Davis

Professor of Counseling and Higher Education
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EXPLORING EXPERT COUNSELORS SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT AND HOW IT CONTRIBUTES TO THEIR COUNSELING WORK

Chapter One

Overview

Topic

The exploration of spiritual themes in the professional literature and integration of spirituality into clinical practice has gained momentum over the past fifteen years. The proliferation of professional articles urging attention to the inclusion of spirituality in graduate training and clinical practice is indicative of a deepening interest in the field of spirituality (Richards & Bergins, 2005). The creative energy and spirit in the culture created a need for counselors experienced in spiritual issues to serve clients who are seeking purpose and meaning in their lives. Abundant spiritual books, assessments, texts and articles on ways to address spirituality in counseling flourish. However, little seems to have been written about the spiritual development of counselors. There appears to be a lack of research on how counselors’ spiritual development may contribute to their willingness to attend to the client’s spiritual concerns as they appear in their professional work. This study explored counselors’ spiritual development in an attempt to understand how it evolved and additionally, sought to discover how their spiritual development contributed to the likelihood they would address spiritual topics as they arise with their clients.
Need to Address Spirituality Issues in Counseling

Eighty percent of the population in the Western hemisphere and Europe belong to one of three major theistic world religions: Christianity, Judaism or Islam (Richards & Bergin, 2005). A developing spiritual surge has moved professionals to assess the state of counseling and spirituality and concludes that spirituality needs to be addressed in counseling sessions (Burke & Miranti, 1992; Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992; Hinterkopf, 1994; Kelly, 1994; Myers, 1991; Watts, 2001; Wiggins Frame, 2003).

A tremendous growth has occurred in the desire for counseling services and the inherent costs with one in five adults suffering from a diagnosable mental disorder (Sexton, Whiston, Bleuer, & Walz, 1997). An estimated $273 billion was spent on mental health treatment costs in 1988 alone (Sexton et al., 1997). If just half of these costs could be retrieved by using a holistic approach in counseling and medicine, focusing on mind, body and spirit, a remarkable savings could be realized (Benson, 1996).

About 95% of Americans believe in God or a universal spirit and the number has remained above 90% for 50 years (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999). In an era of declining church attendance, a spiritual renewal is occurring as manifested in the surge of spiritual books, music and visual media in the culture (Richards & Bergin, 1997) and by an explosion of spiritual publications and spiritually-oriented research in graduate academic institutions (O’Connor, 2001). Evidence indicates a search for new moral guidelines and an increase in moral and value-oriented literature (Richards & Bergin, 1997). Society’s renewed interest in spiritual issues has contributed to a greater openness to considering spiritual perspectives in mainstream therapy (Richards & Bergin).
Counseling and Spirituality

Due to this resurgent interest in spirituality, individuals are coming to therapy seeking spiritual enlightenment from the therapy process. Counselors have reached a crossroads where they can acknowledge the spiritual dimension as crucial to the holistic process of wellness. Spirituality is an important part of life that counseling has failed to sufficiently address (Ivey, Ivey, Myers, & Sweeney, 2005), but the challenge is how counselors can best address spiritual issues (Burke, 1992). Leech (1980) suggests the goal of psychotherapy is to heal the soul. Creating a union between spirituality and therapy is recovery of a very ancient way of addressing holistic healing (Hart, 2002). Koch (1998) saw therapists as spiritual catalysts.

Psyche, the Greek prefix meaning soul, and logos, the Greek root for study, form the word psychology (Beck, 2003). Moon (2002) proposes psychotherapy means “soul healing.” Wiggins Frame (2003) acknowledges that counselors are serving as the culture’s shamans addressing concerns about the meaning and purpose of life. Individuals seeking therapy may not consciously separate the psychological and moral issues troubling them. In a 2000 study, 85% of counselors indicated they are spiritually-oriented (Young, Cashwell, Wiggins Frame, & Belaire, 2000) while Kelly (1995) reported 89% of counselors indicate a belief in a personal God or a transcendent reality dimension. Two-thirds of a National Gallup survey indicated individuals would prefer to see a counselor who holds similar spiritual values and beliefs when faced with a serious problem (Lehman, 1993).

Psychotherapy is rooted in the spiritual tradition of “cure of the souls” (Mack, 1994). Modern day psychotherapy developed early in the 19th century when science was
challenging religious dogma (Richards & Bergin, 2005). As the focus of scientific study changed, social sciences moved toward a curing of minds versus the curing of souls. Intellectual circles believed science would find the secrets of the universe through methods other than religion. The thrust for academic studies and empirical documentation moved towards the hard sciences and away from the softer ones such as philosophy. Spirituality faded from attractiveness in scholarly circles that gave birth to most theories in counseling and science in the 20th century (Burke, Hackney, Hudson, Miranti, Watts & Epp, 1999).

Carl Jung (1933) forged a re-valuation of spirituality with his belief that spirituality is integral to the therapy process by saying, “All human problems are spiritual.” The relationship between spirituality and counseling began to solidify when the philosophies of Carl Jung (1933) and Viktor Frankl (1985) began to intertwine the two (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1997; Mack, 1994). Kelly (1995) noted the important historical roots of the counseling works of Frank Parsons (1909) and Jesse Davis (1914), both of whom viewed faith in a positive light.

Hickson, Houseley, and Wages (2000) found 90% of 147 Licensed Professional Counselors (LPC) in Georgia and Mississippi agreed that the spiritual self is a powerful psychological change agent and 86% believed counselors needed the skills and ability to discuss spiritual issues. Professional counselors’ attitudes toward religious and spiritual issues were assessed by Myers and Truluck (1998) using the Mentally Healthy Lifestyle Scale (MHLS). Counselors gave greater importance to spirituality in mental health than the professional field of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and marriage and family therapists. Graham, Furr, Flowers, and Burke (2001) found a statistically
significant correlation between 115 master’s level counseling student’s personal spirituality and their positive ability to cope with stress. Myers, Mobley and Booth (2005) used the Wellness Evaluation of Lifestyle (WEL) to test 263 doctoral students in counseling programs. Findings showed these students demonstrated a higher level of spirituality than the general adult sample used for the norms. These studies documented high levels of belief in spirituality among professional counselors and graduate counseling students.

As a newer and evolving profession, counseling had been inclined in the past to be a follower of the principles of conventional professions (Burke, Hackney, Hudson, Miranti, Watts, & Epp, 1999). With the sudden increase of spiritual issues in the research and professional literature, counseling is poised to become the leader in the inclusion of spirituality training in the core curriculum of accredited schools.

ACA has spirituality as part of its heritage. It began life as the American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA) in 1952. The name changed to American Association of Counseling and Development (AACD) in 1983 and once more in 1992 to American Counseling Association. The National Catholic Guidance Counselors (NCGS) was formed in 1961 by merging three groups. This spiritually-based group merged in 1973 with APGA becoming its tenth division. In 1977, the NCGS changed its name to Association for Religious Values in Counseling (ARVIC). At the ACA 1993 national conference, the vote was to include “spiritual” and “ethical” to ARVIC’s name, thus becoming Association for Spiritual, Ethical and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) (Miller, 1999). Just two years later, a twenty-two day Summit on Spirituality was hosted by the leaders in ACA and ASERVIC and they defined
spirituality and the key counselor competencies for spirituality (Miller, 1999), which will be explored later.

*Spirituality and Health*

Since the 1990s, hundred of studies have been conducted on religion and health providing evidence that spirituality and religion are positively associated with mental health indicators. During the early 2000s, numerous scientists and theologians began to explore the connections between science and faith (Richards & Bergin, 2005). A re-awakening of the value of interdisciplinary and integrative studies seems to be occurring in academic circles.

The relevance of spirituality as a potential health factor has been shown in longitudinal studies of community samples consistently resulting in a positive relationship between spiritual/religious involvement and increased chances for living longer and having improved physical and mental health (Koenig & Cohen, 2002; Larson & Larson, 2003). Research exploring spirituality/religion as a coping resource finds a large proportion of mental health patients may turn to their spiritual/religious community and to their relationship with God for hope, comfort, sense of connection and feeling loved and valued in the midst of their turmoil (Larson & Larson, 2003). Individuals gain strength to persevere and a greater sense of well-being from these coping methods.

Holistic issues of the entire person, such as mind, body and spirit are rarely addressed formally in counselor education programs (Kelly, 1994; Pate & High, 1995). Counselors, when aware and trained, can respectfully inquire about the client’s spiritual belief system and use it as an additional resource for improved health in all aspects.
Researchers have recently been attempting to prove a neurological or biological basis for spirituality (Benson & Proctor, 2003; Hamer, 2004; Newburg, D’Acquili, & Rause, 2001). Numerous authors have placed spirituality as the core dimension of human functioning and personality (Burke, Chauvin, & Miranti, 2005; Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992; Helminiak, 2001; Myers & Sweeney, 2005; Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000; Myers & Williard, 2003; Purdy & Dupey, 2005; Richards & Bergin, 2000).

Counselor Training

Despite this strong American belief, the spiritual dimension has long been neglected in psychotherapy (Richards & Bergin, 1997). Many have called for the inclusion of a course in spirituality in the counselor curriculum (Graham, Furr, Flowers, & Burke, 2001; Richards & Bergin, 1997; Weaver, Flannelly, Flannelly, & Oppenheimer, 2003; Worthington, 1989). Research indicates most counselor educators in the field today have no graduate program training on spirituality in counseling (Young, Cashwell, Wiggins Frame, & Belaire, 2002) and little information exists on how prepared counselor educators are for addressing the topic (Hickson, Housley, & Wages, 2000). Schulte, Skinner, and Claiborn (2002) suggested the current state of training is likely to perpetuate the current state of practice, training and supervision of future counselors. Currently, the situation is unclear whether counseling graduate students are adequately prepared to work as competent counselors ready to face the complexity of spiritual concerns today’s society presents.

The counseling profession has traditionally been based on a philosophy of holistic growth and development throughout the lifespan, with adaptation to transition and change (Myers & Williard, 2003). Counseling further has embraced a developmental, wellness
focus for training and intervention. However, in the past, counselor education has rarely addressed spirituality (Burke, Hackeny, Hudson, Miranti, Watts, & Epp, 1999; Burke & Miranti, 1995; Hickson, Houseley, & Wages, 2000; Kelly, 1994; Littrell, 2001).

The counseling profession has begun to recognize the need to develop awareness of spiritual issues in the counseling curriculum (Myers & Williard, 2003; Richards & Bergin, 1997; Souza, 2002; Stanard, Sandu & Painter, 2000). Counselors have reached a crossroads where they can acknowledge the spiritual dimension as crucial to the holistic process of wellness. The challenge is how to best go about addressing the issue of spirituality if one is a therapist currently practicing in the field without prior spirituality training.

Training for spirituality would fall under the auspices of The American Counseling Association’s (ACA) 2005 Code of Ethics under Section F.6.b. Infusing Multicultural Issues/Diversity. Counselor educators infuse material related to multiculturalism/diversity into all courses and workshops for the development of professional counselors. ACA principles require counselors provide services that reflect boundaries of their competence. If spiritual issues are not addressed in counselor preparation, insensitivity towards clients’ spiritual concerns in counseling may be inadvertently fostered (Hinterkopf, 1994).

Nine Spiritual Competencies were identified at the Summit on Spirituality by ASERVIC and ACA leaders. Spiritually competent counselors will be able to explain the difference between religion and spirituality, describe religious and spiritual beliefs in a cultural context, demonstrate sensitivity and acceptance, identify the limits of their skills, assess relevance of spiritual/religious themes and be able to use the client’s concept of
religion/spirituality for treatment planning and goal setting (Burke, Chauvin, & Miranti, 2005). A new text has been written with a collection of articles addressing these dimensions in counseling and training (Cashwell & Young, 2005).

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2001) standards stated counselors in training should be “provided an understanding of the cultural context of relationships, issues and trends in a multicultural and diverse society related to such factors as . . . religious and spiritual values” (p. 61). If counselors aren’t aware of their own reactions to spiritual issues in treatment and have no knowledge of spiritual beliefs, they run the risk of acting as unethical and subversive moral agents (Souza, 2002; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2000). Conducting an assessment of a client’s spiritual beliefs is a standard part of taking a good psychosocial history (Kelly, 1995), and a proliferation of spiritual tests abound in the literature.

**Spiritual Development**

What is a counselor’s obligation to aid a client in their spiritual development? If the counselor seeks to avoid spirituality in therapy he/she should examine how this tactic may negatively affect the client (Miller, 1999). The counselor willing and comfortable with blending spirituality into counseling should be thoughtful and aware of his/her motivation to do so and any potential biases. Just as with any other diversity issue in a culture, counselors must explore their own beliefs prior to working with clients (Curtis & Davis, 1999).

Grimm (1994) explored the nature of therapist spiritual and religious values and the impact of these values on psychotherapy. Grimm (1994) found the notion questionable that all counselors would have fully evolved spiritual value systems. Psychotherapy is a
value-laden endeavor (Kelly, 1995). That counselors be aware of their own attitudinal and affective responses to spiritual values would seem to be critical. Our value orientations towards life are derived over time through interaction and relationship with numerous individuals. Grimm believes the client has a right to know what spiritual and religious values the therapist holds. His finding was that many counselors do have spiritual values, which may be expressed in therapy, and he recommends further research on the efficacy of spiritual and religious methodology.

The developmental path of counselors is just beginning to be fully comprehended. Going from novice to expert counselor takes fifteen years (Skovholt, Ronnestad, & Jennings, 1997). Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) stated in their most recent study of counselor development that the Senior Professional Phase was represented by counselors with 20 to 25 years of practice. The Senior Professional would be the type of individual I would be seeking to participate in this study. Being an expert counselor has no gold standard or specific definition (Jennings, Goh, Skovholt, Hanson & Banerjee-Stevens, 2003; Skovholt, Hanson, Jennings, & Grier, 2004). However, multiple elements have been identified in the development of expertise: experience, openeness to change, cultural competence, highly developed characteristics of master therapists and comfort with ambiguity (Jennings et al., 2003). Numerous articles explored the developmental stages of counselors (Shovholt & Ronnestad, 1992) and refined them to six stages: lay helper, beginning student, advanced student, novice professional, experienced professional, and senior professional (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003).

Several authors have proposed that one cannot help another past one’s own level of spiritual development (Chandler, Holden, & Marquis, 1992; Matthews, 1998). Therefore,
counselors must know their own limits and be able to set appropriate boundaries (Chandler, Holden, & Marquis, 1992) or refer the client to a more appropriate professional. Only through addressing their own spiritual issues can counselors competently work with clients in a way that authenticates the client’s spirituality issues (Westgate, 1996). Myers (1991) called for counseling to commit to a philosophy of wellness, which encompasses the spiritual dimension, saying counseling cannot promote what they do not first believe in and model. Counselors are being challenged to move beyond their previous position of lack of knowledge and awareness of spirituality to surpass their current frame of reference and grow into a position that allows them to interact knowledgeably and sensitively on the topic.

Fowler (1995) wrote about the development of faith, finding it more personal and deeper than religion, and called it the individual’s way of responding to the transcendent. Expanding on the work of Kohlberg, Erikson, and Piaget, Fowler developed the seven stages of faith, which can be viewed as a step progression. Higher levels are seen as more mature. The stages are the following: primal faith, intuitive/projective faith, mythical-literal, synthetic-conventional, individual-reflective, conjunctive and universalizing. Understanding where one’s own faith level lies in this sequence of stages, as well as the client’s faith level, could provide insight into the counseling process and aid the appropriate formulation of questions at the client’s stage. Spirituality can be viewed as the highest level of any line of development (Burke, Chauvin, & Miranti, 2005).

Little research was found specifically addressing the spiritual development of professional counselors. However, a large body of information is available in the spiritual direction field on spiritual development, which will be perused and included in
this research paper. Professional counseling articles have recently called for incorporating a developmental wellness approach, with spirituality as the central core, into the clinical training of counselors (Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992; Myers & Mobley, 2004; Myers & Williard, 2003). Some studies are available reviewing the wellness orientation of counseling students and professional counselors, but not specifically focusing on spiritual development.

Statement of the Problem

Individuals grow in spiritual development just as they grow in personal development. The thought is conceivable that one must reach a certain level of spiritual maturity to be comfortable with advancing into the spiritual territory with another. The purpose of this study is to explore expert counselors’ spiritual development and how it contributes to their therapy. Do they address the spiritual issues and concerns of their clients within their scope and practice of the art of counseling, and if so, then how do they go about doing so?

Patterns established in clinical training are likely to continue throughout the career span of the professional counselor (Granello & Hazler, 1998; Myers & Mobley, 2004; Skovholt & Ronnestad, 1992). Therefore, professional clinical counselors who were exposed to spiritual issues during clinical training would more likely be open and receptive to exploring the spiritual realm with clients who express spiritually related concerns in therapy.

However, for other reasons, some clinical counselors may approach spirituality and wellness topics with their clients while others do not. Perhaps some clinical counselors have more of a natural affinity for the transcendental realm contributing to a personal
comfort and ease flowing into their transactions with clients on the spiritual dimension. Counselors with an openness and acceptance towards life in general and especially towards a desire to hear their clients’ full stories and the meaning they attribute to life events may also contribute to a natural evolution of discussing the transcendent.

**Significance of the Study**

The results of this study inform the knowledge base of counselor education and clinical training on aspects of spiritual development and the choice whether or not to address spiritual concepts in the therapy room. The expectation was that information from this inquiry would emerge to illuminate the specific attributes, training or life experiences, which influence positive development and comfort with expression of spirituality. It was hoped that gleaning information from professional counselors, related to their spiritual and professional development, as well as investigating their willingness to tackle the issues of spirituality in the therapy room would enlighten the professional wisdom of the field on these aspects.

**Limitations**

The survey and interviews were conducted in the state of Ohio. Generalizations to other populations beyond Ohio may not be applicable. A query was posted on the listserv for members of the Ohio Association of Spiritual, Ethical and Religious Values in Counseling (OASERVIC), a subdivision of the Ohio Counseling Association (OCA). Results are limited to those professional counselors in the state of Ohio who choose to belong to the professional counselor spiritual organization OASERVIC. Counselors who join OASERVIC would have an interest in spirituality. The request for counselors willing to talk about their spirituality pre-supposes that an individual did have an identified faith
they were willing to discuss. Individuals without a congruent faith-base or who lack a desire to reveal their position would not be inclined to volunteer. Counselors who do not choose to belong to this organization might also have a wealth of knowledge on the topic at hand and could enhance the research base. It might be interesting to do a random sampling of expert counselors who are members of the professional organization, OCA, but without a clear identified association with the spiritual sub-group. It might also be interesting to poll expert counselors who choose not to belong to the professional organization, OCA. One would wonder where their expertise and spirituality lies on the continuum of professional and personal health.

Nine volunteers emerged from the OASERVIC request and five became participants in the study. Additional candidates were identified through snowball techniques with other professional counselors. A more diverse group of candidates might have been found through conducting a random sampling of counselors licensed through the State of Ohio Counselor, Social Worker and Marriage and Family Therapy Board.

Counselors who work specifically in religious organizations were not specifically sought. The tenets of the religion may have fostered a different development for counselors who consistently worked in that environment than those who work in mental health facilities not affiliated with a faith organization. However, once the quest began for appropriate candidates, two volunteers emerged who were employed by faith-based institutions. Both were interviewed and their expertise and wisdom added depth and richness to the study.

Lack of cultural diversity among the interviewees was another limitation of this study. It might have enriched this research project if culturally diverse candidates
volunteered or were found and agreed to participate. Even though such candidates were specifically sought, not one person emerged with a diverse background who was willing to participate in an interview.

This study was conducted by one investigator with an interest in the spiritual dimension of counseling. The naturalistic inquirer accepts the presence of multiple realities and adequately acknowledges them. Patton (1990) states the credibility of the researcher in naturalistic inquiry involves adequate reporting of data collection details and the process by which the data was analyzed. Further, researcher credibility is dependent upon training, status, experience, and presentation of self (Patton, 1990). Therefore, an important aspect is for the investigator to address his or her orientation and possible influence on data collection and analysis is important. This investigator accepts the standpoint that multiple dimensions may be influencing the spiritual development of therapists, or lack of it, and their willingness or reluctance to address spiritual issues in counseling. This researcher explored all options and possible interpretations, suggesting alternative explanations, where appropriate, for the inquiry results. The interviewer strived for an objective focus to allow the results to speak for themselves.

Conclusions

This study sought to understand expert counselors’ spiritual development. Additionally, the study inquired how the counselors’ spiritual development contributed to her/his counseling work, as issues arise with clients. The initial question of the interview was open-ended: “Please tell me about your own spiritual development.” If the interviewee did not voluntarily address how their spirituality may influence their counseling work, then he or she was asked this question near the conclusion of the
interview hour, “How does your sense of spirituality contribute to your counseling work with clients?”

Definition of Terms

The words religion and spirituality and how clients define them has had essentially no research (Ivey, Ivey, Myers, & Sweeney, 2005).

1. Spirituality is defined by Wiggins Frame (2003) as that which brings purpose, meaning and value to life. Koenig (2005) sees it as a personal quest for understanding the ultimate questions about life’s meaning. Spirituality is a personal matter. Being spiritual represents a transcendental relationship between the person and a Higher Being. Spirituality can be defined as a sense of presence of a force or being, which transcends the material aspects of life and provides a deep sense of wholeness or connectedness to all of creation (Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000). Richards & Bergin (1997) included in the spirituality concept the experiences and beliefs that pertain to the transcendent facet of life. Spiritual experiences tend to be universal, affective, spontaneous, ecumenical, internal and private (Burke, Chauvin, & Miranti, 2005). While Richards and Bergin (2005) define it as the invisible phenomena related to oneness with God, transcendence, and thoughts and feelings of enlightenment and harmony. For this study, spirituality was defined as a relationship with a higher power or God which contributes purpose and meaning to life and influences positively the way the individual lives out his or her life.

2. Religion is a public matter, which refers to institutional beliefs and group religious participation (Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000). Religious expressions
tend to be denominational, cognitive, behavioral, realistic, external and public
(Burke, Chauvin, & Miranti, 2005). Religion was used to indicate worship with a
community of believers of a specific faith tradition.

3. Expert counselor is used synonymously in this study with the term master
counselor. For this study, an expert counselor is a licensed therapist with fifteen
years of profession practice. The word expert means “experienced in” (Skovholt,
Hanson, Jennings, & Grier, 2004). An expert, in the original context, meant a
person whose smoothness of skill in a specific domain is grounded in an amassed
set of specific significant experiences in that domain (Jennings, Hanson,
Skovholt, & Grier, 2005).

4. Transcendent faith refers to a relationship with something greater than ourselves
(Wiggins Frame, 2003). For this study, Transcendence referred to a belief in God
or a higher power.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

The literature review begins by exploring the historical patterns between counseling and spirituality and more current counseling views of spirituality. Counselor training and counselor development will be discussed. Research on expertise is summarized. The extensive research available on spirituality and its contribution to health is assessed. Spiritual development and the spiritual direction field will be appraised for possible findings to inform counselor education. Finally, theory preference will be addressed.

Counseling is based on a foundation of holistic wellness focused on healthy development across the life span with adaptation to transition and change (Myers & Williard, 2003). The highest line of any form of development is spirituality (Burke, Chauvin, & Miranti, 2005). Numerous authors have placed spirituality as the core element of the human dimension (Burke, Chauvin, & Miranti, 2005; Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992; Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000; Purdy & Dupey, 2005; Sweeney & Witmer, 1992).

Wellness is a commitment to make a choice to live one’s life in a way that is responsible to one’s body, mind and spirit (Gilmartin, 1996). A primary spiritual need is to have a life philosophy that gives purpose and meaning to life (Gilmartin), with each individual conceptualizing this into a unique guiding vision all his or her own. This vision needs to be re-shaped in midlife to accommodate the changing purposes associated with meaning as the human evolves. Counselors may be unable to avoid dealing with clients’ spiritual issues due to the frequency of queries presented such as a search for meaning and coping with serious illness and death issues (Gilmartin).
Therapy originates from the base word therapeia, which means “soul healing” (Burke & Miranti, 1995; Frankl, 2000, Koch, 1998; Moore & Meckel, 1990). The ancient connection through linguistics appears to delineate spirituality as an integral part of the counseling process. Hart (2002) concurred by identifying the Greek word _therapeuein_ as meaning “to heal”; thus, therapy is the art of healing. Leech (1980) was in agreement when he wrote the goal of psychotherapy is to heal the soul. Leech further suggested the union of priest and therapist is recovery of a very ancient way. Psychotherapy essentially means soul healing (Moon, 2002).

Counselors have moved into the void where no one is ministering, in lieu of the guides in ancient days. Plato recognized the prime need for curing the soul in order to find real healing of the body and saw the importance of healing as one of the ways in which creative energy seizes and possesses human beings (Kelsey, 1988).

Religion and spirituality are two distinctly different aspects that are occasionally erroneously used to indicate the same position. Religion is often designated as the dogma or rules of organized religion. Spirituality is seen as a more universal concept. Wiggins-Frame (2003) stated spirituality is concerned with persons’ search for meaning, purpose and value in life. Religion is seen as a public display while spirituality is a more private acknowledgement of connection with a meaningful entity (Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000).

Myers and Williard (2003) defined spirituality as any experience in an individual’s life that creates new meaning and fosters personal growth demonstrated by movement from a former frame of reference and risk change. Spiritual experience is any experience of transcendence of one’s former frame of reference that results in greater knowledge and
Myers and Williard (2003) suggested counselor education could imbed a wellness philosophy into graduate education. Students could be initially assessed. Dialogue could be stimulated about healthy lifestyles. Intervention techniques based on the philosophy of spiritual and holistic wellness could be used throughout training. An assessment at the conclusion of studies could be conducted. Outcome research can then be used to assess training and instructional effectiveness.

Counseling and Spirituality

Historical Patterns

The early beginnings of psychological thought and religious ideas actually began in the 1700s, during the Age of Reason (Richards & Bergin, 2005). Modern day psychology developed in the early 20th century just when science was dialoguing with and challenging religious dogma. Many thought science would unlock the mysteries of the universe, discovering innovative paths around religion’s dogma (Richards & Bergin, 1997). The formative period for professional counseling occurred in the early 1900’s work of Frank Parsons and Jesse Davis, which include a positive view of spirituality (Kelly, 1995).

Swiss psychiatrist Jung was the first professional in the psychological/psychiatric disciplines to reveal the close relationship between psychology and spirituality (Leech, 1980). Jung said the great psychotherapeutic symbol systems of humankind are the world’s religious traditions (Hart, 2002). Jung recognized the value religion held for the psychotherapeutic field of expertise. He first introduced the concept of incorporating spirituality into psychotherapy (Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992; Kelly, 1995; Moore & Mickel, 1990). In Jung’s mind, analytical psychology evolved out of the
Christian tradition, according to Moore and Mickel. Jung called the journey towards wholeness the process of individuation. The individual achieves a new synthesis between conscious and unconscious through attending to the voice within. Movement in individuals brings them toward a sense of calm acceptance, detachment and a realization of the meaning of life (Storr, 1983). Individuation is essentially a spiritual journey. The self is the God within. By fulfilling his or her own highest potential, the individual is realizing the meaning of life and fulfilling God’s will (Storr).

To heal the soul was the aim of psychotherapy according to Frankl (1985). The spiritual aspects of man were seen as the core nucleus of the personality. The spiritual dimension is what makes us human and cannot be ignored. He writes of the three dimensions of personality he terms somatic, mental and spiritual, which were predecessors to our present language of mind, body and spirit. His version of psychotherapy, logotherapy, honored man’s spirit. The term logo signified spiritual and meaning to Frankl.

The first great spiritual directors in the Christian tradition were third century monks who emphasized contemplation and taught by example (Leech, 1980). Twentieth century spiritual directors are Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen. Leech contends present day spiritual directors must have an awareness of spiritual theology, knowledge of psychology and be able to foster good will in the relationship. The demand for spiritual guidance has increased and with the diminishing number of clergy in the Catholic Church, traditional home of Spiritual Direction as a ministry, the gap has increased. Spiritual Direction training programs have risen out of this growing need for individuals to explore the meaning of life, deepen their feeling of connectedness with a Higher
Power, and the lack of availability of formally trained clergy with a counseling focus. Many individuals have turned to spiritually-oriented therapists (Caprio & Hedberg, 1986).

In the past, religion has been misused to justify violence, aggression, hatred and prejudice. Yet religious beliefs centered in caring, compassion, forgiveness and hope can provide a sustaining framework for coping with illness and offer a greater sense of well being through an optimistic world view (Larson & Larson, 2003).

Current Counseling Views of Spirituality

Widespread public interest in spirituality and religion has generated a cultural demand for therapists who are sensitive to their client’s spiritual values and needs. Many therapists have not been academically trained to address spirituality due to the historical alienation between the behavioral sciences and religion (Richards & Bergin, 2005). Due to increased awareness, and continuing education opportunities, hundreds of articles have been published in professional journals on spirituality, mental health and therapy. Once therapists have attained a general spiritual awareness and understanding, they may develop the skills needed to attend to their clients’ spiritual concerns.

Wiggins Frame (2003) noted the linguistic connection between the psychological understanding of wholeness and well-being and the spiritual understanding of whole. The two concepts were interwoven from similar Latin root words. The spiritual notion of being whole is interwoven with physical and psychological components of health, wholeness and well-being. She cited the connection between the Latin word *salus* meaning “healthy” or “whole” and salvation’s root word *salvare* meaning “to save.” Therefore, the psychological concept of wellness is bound to the spiritual notion of what
being whole means. Ellison and Smith (1991) attributed the Saxon word from which health is derived as the same word from which whole comes. Therefore, health and wholeness are fundamentally related.

Ivey, Ivey, Myers, and Sweeney (2005) believed spiritual issues are a central aspect of a person’s core dimension and meaning system. They suggested substituting the words meaning, purpose and values for spirituality and religion if this substitution assists people to become more comfortable with the core issues. An individual’s personal values and the meaning he or she attributes to his or her life can often be traced to cultural, spiritual roots.

Multiple authors have placed spirituality as the central dimension of human functioning (Burke, Chauvin, & Miranti, 2005; Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992; Ivey, Ivey, Myers & Sweeney, 2005; Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000; Myers & Williard, 2003; Purdy & Dupey, 2005). Ingersoll (1994) proposed spirituality is a systemic force that acts to integrate all the dimensions of one’s life. Various images have been proposed to explain spirituality as the central construct of human personalities.

The Wheel of Wellness was offered as a multi-dimensional symbol with sixteen dimensions including four concentric circles and twelve spokes (Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000). The hub of the wheel is spirituality from which all other aspects emanate. Purdy & Dupey (2005) used a pictogram somewhat like one of the old fashioned paper or plastic pinwheels children use to blow upon to make them spin on a stick. As one would look down upon the top of this pictogram, spirituality is the central theme, with other elements of personality spiraling out from that interior location. For Burke, Chauvin, and Miranti’s (2005) depiction, one should imagine a Venn diagram composed of four equal
circles representing physical, emotional, social and intellectual features. A fifth circle is in the center, connecting the other four equally, and solidifying the union is the core of spirituality, from which all other aspects of personality radiate. The spiritual essence of the person integrates and unites all human dimensions equally.

Each set of authors has created an original design to explain their perception of how spirituality intersects with all other facets of the human personality. Regardless of which character one might choose to symbolize spirituality within the system of the human, all have spirituality at the heart of the representation. From these examples, the theory may be posited that spirituality is the central element, which interplays with all other mind and body dimensions. Health or illness in one part would seem to correlate with other dimensions due to the interconnectedness and close proximity.

Frankl’s (1985) premier work was on man’s search for meaning and purpose in life. As a psychiatrist and concentration camp survivor, Frankl composed his work from observing others during the war. Those who found something to hope for, such as a relationship or a way to find value or make meaning of their life, may have survived beyond all odds. Those who failed to find significance in their life soon experienced a diminished immunity in their already frail body with disastrous results. Once the spirit was unsuccessful in achieving a purpose or goal in life, the body failed to survive as well. Mind, body and spirit seem integrally connected. People who are able to move beyond or transcend suffering and physical disabilities to experience spiritual and emotional health and growth seem to be those who retain their deepest spiritual commitments and are able to find a deeper positive meaning within the suffering (Frankl, 2000).
Just as in Wiggins Frame’s (2003) analysis of spirituality, others have built upon Frankl’s (1985) search for meaning in life as a symbol of spirituality. Purdy and Dupey (2005) aligned spirituality with meaning making and Myers and Williard (2003) built upon the concept of meaning for their view of spirituality. Weaving their definition of spirituality which indicates it contributes to growth, personal adaptation and change, into the basic foundation of human growth and development, Myers & Williard (2003) suggested the synthesis be used as the underpinning for counselor education to represent a holistic wellness focus for clinical training.

**Counselor Spiritual Development**

Very little research exists on the spiritual development of counselors. Using a qualitative approach with ten therapists, Duty (1999) studied the spiritual development and its influence on how these psychotherapists conduct therapy. She used psychologists, social workers and clinical counselors with a range of 7 to 35 years in practice. All ten defined themselves as spiritual with eight associating themselves with a specific religious affiliation. Findings were divided into the categories of defining the therapist, what the therapist believes, and what the therapist includes in therapy. None of the participants were academically trained in spirituality and had to discern from their own experience how and when to include spirituality in their therapeutic work. She concluded it would be important for future research to address the methods of including spiritual and religious components in counseling education. Additionally, she recommended research into the reason therapists are currently attending spirituality workshops – is the reason to understand their client’s development or to explore their own?
The marriage and family therapy field has acknowledged a need to attend to spirituality of the client as one aspect of culture however, no one has proposed using the therapist’s spirituality to aid in creating the relationship connection with the client. Carlson, Erickson, and Seewald-Marquardt (2002) propose their own spiritual journeys have influenced their work as family therapists. Their definition of spirituality stems from the central theme of God calling us into relationship. They propose relationship with the Divine as central to spirituality and extends to relationships with all creation and all individuals. Using the therapist’s own spirituality can be beneficial in creating the client-therapist relationship.

The authors suggest narrative therapy as a way of inviting counselors to be thoughtful, reflective and especially careful about the relationships they invite, encourage, and develop in all realms of life. They see their own spirituality as a lens of intelligibility from which they make sense of the relationships in their lives. Spirituality is a relational way of being, lived out each day, with a primary focus on an intimate relationship with God. Narrative therapy has an expanding research base with an essence similar to social constructionism, feminism and post modernism, all of which encourage relationalism. Spirituality is viewed as an enormous source of serenity, peace, comfort, and strength that could be tapped.

Little has been written encouraging therapists to use their own spiritual lives as a work source. Carlson, Erickson, and Seewald-Marquardt (2002) describe how being open in therapy to a client’s spirituality and acknowledging his/her own relational spirituality can aid the therapeutic process by partnering with the Divine. An excellent discussion is provided for therapists to review and enhance their personal ethics and
become aware of their own spiritual preferences. The description of the spiritual and relational focus of the work they suggest is quite similar to the essence of spiritual direction. It would be helpful to see future articles clarifying their distinction from, or alignment with, spiritual direction.

*Counselor Training*

A spirituality course in counselor education (CE) programs has been suggested by many authors (Graham, Furr, Flowers & Burke, 2001; Richards & Bergin, 1997; Weaver, Flannelly, Flannelly, and Oppenheimer, 2003, Worthington, 1989). Counseling students who do not feel adequately prepared may fail to address spiritual issues in the therapy room (Souza, 2002; Young, Frame, & Cashwell, 1999). The literature suggests counselors are interested in discussing spiritual issues with clients when the topic is pertinent but do not know how to incorporate these issues into therapy (Richards & Bergin, 1997; Souza, 2002; Young et al., 1999).

The spiritual competencies provide a template on which to design curriculum and experiences for graduate students. When Cashwell and Young (2004) reviewed fourteen syllabi of graduate programs currently teaching a class on spirituality, they found inconsistencies in addressing the spiritual competencies. This current state may indicate more standardization of curriculum is needed to fill the void where there is no unifying model by which to teach spirituality.

Counseling is a new and evolving profession inclined in the past to conform to ideologies of established professions, many of which undervalue the human spiritual dimension (Burke, Hackney, Hudson, Miranti, Watts, & Epp, 1999). There was a long historical split between spirituality and counseling due to Freud (Fukuyama & Sevig,
However, deeper examination reveals spirituality and counseling both help individuals find meaning and wholeness. Erikson’s (1964) explanation of a benevolent and loving deity who forms an eternal relationship with the individual helps support a child’s development of trust.

Myers, (1991) as president of the American Association for Counseling and Development, proposed the philosophy of wellness be adopted by the counseling profession as the central focus of what they do in counseling and development. Myers & Williard (2003) suggested counseling embraced a developmental wellness orientation as a core philosophy. Align a spiritual definition consistent with this philosophy, and counselor education would have a holistic wellness paradigm for clinical training. They suggest spirituality is any experience in an individual’s life that creates new meaning and fosters personal growth demonstrated by movement from a former frame of reference and risk change.

Professional counselors must be prepared to help clients with spiritual or religious issues. The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) requires coursework on human growth and development. Counseling is focused on the development and situational difficulties of usually well-functioning persons (Gladding, 1996). The person who has sufficient cognitive development to seek answers to the ultimate purpose for their life’s meaning but has inadequate faith development to pursue the topic may experience free-floating anxiety or a spiritual emergency at his inability to resolve the question (Bishop, Avila-Juarbe, & Thumme, 2003; Burke, Hackney, Hudson, Miranti, Watts, & Epp, 1999).
Counselor training can create an opportunity for students to examine counseling theory from the perspective of the burgeoning literature on the value of spirituality in human life. Skill building can be enhanced in training through addressing fabricated stories with a spiritual thread (Burke, Hackeny, Hudson, Miranti, Watts, & Epp, 1999). Issues of loss in life through death, divorce, physical crises and developmental changes all have spiritual components. Counselor education can pose questions for the student about the client’s spiritual connections of their family of origin, current spiritual support system and view of self in relationship to the world (Bishop, Avila-Juarbe, & Thumme, 2003; Burke et al.)

Bishop, Avila-Juarbe, and Thumme (2003) suggest inadvertently insensitive counselors may overlook unhealthy spiritual focuses, dysfunctional family systems or viable spiritual resources. They believe training budding counselors to address and integrate spirituality into sessions can improve client welfare. Counselor educators, supervisors and counselors need to understand how spirituality is a significant component of human personality. If spiritual issues are not addressed in the supervision process, how are counselors going to become competent in effectively addressing spiritual issues with their clients (Bishop et al.)? Spiritual skill development would seem to be essential with spirituality as the core of all human functioning.

Counselor competency is developed slowly over time and enhanced through the acquisition of specific skills. Yet few studies address spirituality or religion in counselor education training (Souza, 2002). In fact, Bernard and Goodyear (1998) state they were unable to discover a single published work specifically on spirituality as a legitimate
supervisory topic. The kind of training and supervision provided by therapists is directly related to the kind of training they received (Schulte, Skinner, & Claiborn, 2002).

With the high percentage of Americans indicating they are religiously oriented, it seems inevitable that clients will bring their concerns to the therapy room. People in emotional crisis often spontaneously consider spirituality and religious methods of coping (Worthington, 1989). The client may be reluctant to bring up religious issues in secular counseling. Counselors who are reluctant to address spiritual issues may make it difficult to work to the fullest extent with clients who have spiritual and religious concerns.

Spirituality can be viewed as the highest level of any line of development (Burke, Chauvin & Miranti, 2005; Gladding, 1996). The spiritual essence of the person integrates and unites all human dimensions equally (Burke, Chauvin, & Miranti, 2005).

Brawer, Handal, Fabricatore, Roberts, and Wajda-Johnston (2002) made recommendation guidelines for training programs to integrate spirituality and religion. Training can be incorporated into already existing courses, knowledgeable guest speakers can be invited, books and publications can be made available, and students can be kept informed about conferences examining spirituality and religious issues. Training directors need to enhance their awareness of and sensitivity to spirituality and religious issues, be knowledgeable about religious systems, culture, traditions and assessment measures.

What students learn in graduate training they are more likely to retain for the remainder of their lives (Granello & Hazler; 1998; Myers & Mobley, 2004). By assessing students’ wellness at the beginning of graduate training, incorporating periodic wellness discussions throughout the program, students could be tested again at the conclusion of
their studies. Thus, creating and maintaining healthy habits as well as modeling these for clients and peers can be one more positive outcome of a graduate counseling program. Additionally, an emphasis on wellness in all dimensions would be a benefit to a graduate counselor education.

Most likely, counselors who have been in practice for fifteen years did not receive training in how to address spirituality in their graduate program. If they desired spirituality training, they would have had to seek it on their own to become adept at skills needed to serve their clients or to meet a personal need to grow in that area. If no official training occurred, then the counselor would be left to discern for himself or herself when, if, and how he or she should address spirituality with his or her client.

*Spirituality Summit*

Leaders of the ACA group met in 1995 and conducted the Summit on Spirituality, completing two major goals: defining spirituality and outlining spiritual competencies for counselors who wish to assist their clients with spirituality issues (Miller, 1999). The consensus description of spirituality was:

The animating force in life, represented by such images of breath, wind, vigor and courage. Spirituality is the infusion and drawing out of spirit in one’s life. It is experienced as an active and passive process. Spirituality also is described as a capacity and tendency that is innate and unique to all persons. This spiritual tendency moves the individual towards knowledge, love, meaning, hope, transcendence, connectedness, and compassion. Spirituality includes one’s capacity for creativity, growth, and the development of a values system. Spirituality encompasses the religious, spiritual, and transpersonal (p. 501).

The spiritually competent counselor will be able to explain the differences between religion and spirituality, describe religious and spiritual beliefs in a cultural context, engage in self-exploration of religious and spiritual beliefs in order to increase sensitivity
and acceptance, describe their own religious and spiritual system and explain various models of spiritual development across the lifespan, demonstrate acceptance of a variety of religious and/or spiritual expressions, identify personal limits of understanding of client’s religious or spiritual expression, assess the relevance of client’s religious or spiritual concerns within client’s therapeutic issues, show sensitivity and receptivity to spiritual themes in the counseling process, and use client’s spiritual beliefs in pursuit of the client’s therapeutic goals (Miller, 1999).

CACREP requires accredited programs to address human growth and development, which is typically focused on healthy progression with brief mentions of wellness. Counseling licensure in the state of Ohio expects counselors not to discriminate among varying cultures or forms of religion. Thus, professional clinical counselors are expected to attend to the healthy development of their clients and to acknowledge their faith orientation.

Ethics

The American Counseling Association’s (ACA) Code of Ethics (2005) F.6.a. requires that counselor educators infuse material related to multiculturalism/diversity into all courses and workshops for the development of professional counselors. C.2.a. requires that counselors practice only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, etc. C.2.b. indicates that counselors practice in specialty areas new to them only after appropriate education, training and supervised experience. While developing skills in new specialty areas, counselors take steps to ensure the competence of their work and to protect others from possible harm. A.1.a. states the primary responsibility of counselors is to respect the dignity and to promote the welfare of clients.
The opening line in the introduction to the ACA Code of Ethics states counselors encourage client growth and development in ways that foster the interest and welfare of clients and promote formation of healthy relationships. Further, counselors actively attempt to understand the diverse cultural backgrounds of the clients they serve. Counselors also explore their own cultural identities and how these affect their values and beliefs about the counseling process (ACA, 2005).

Richards & Bergin (2005) presented a checklist of ethical recommendations for training standards for counselors, which begins with a foundation in multicultural counseling. This foundation can be achieved by reading books on religion and spiritual issues in counseling, current scholarly literature about spirituality and religion from mainstream mental health journals, taking at least one class or attending a conference on spirituality and religion in therapy. Additionally, therapists should take a class on world religions or read a good book or two, gain knowledge about the spiritual issues they most frequently encounter in treatment, seek supervision or consultation or both when first initiating spiritual interventions and again when they try each new aspect of spiritual interventions such as centering prayer or recommending sacred scripture.

Richards & Bergin’s (2005) guiding ethical principles for counselors using spiritual interventions with clients included having deep respect for clients’ freedom and autonomy, sensitivity to their faith beliefs and being responsive toward their values and needs. More specifically, when counselors are working with spiritual interventions, they should consider the following suggestions: clients should be assessed regarding spiritual and religious issues, clients should be advised during intake when informed consent is
explained that the therapist will be approaching therapy from a theistic spiritual perspective, and a relationship rapport with trust needs to be created.

Prior to using spiritual interventions, counselors should carefully consider whether they are indicated, explain interventions to the client and get his or her permission prior to using them, and perform them in a respectful manner. The counselor should also work within the client’s framework ascertaining that he or she will not urge clients towards his or her own spiritual values and beliefs. Interventions are to be used flexibly and in a manner appropriate for treatment. The counselor should seek spiritual enlightenment concerning type and timing of interventions. Richards and Bergin (1997) offered ethical guidelines of situations to avoid when using spiritual practices in therapy: dual relationships, imposing religious values on clients, and displacing religious authority, practicing outside the boundaries of competence, and violating work-setting boundaries.

**Counselor Professional Development**

Counseling is focused on the development and situational difficulties of usually well-functioning persons (Gladding, 1996). Ivey, Ivey, Myers, and Sweeney (2005) specified a counselor’s task is to create an environment conducive to developmental growth, transformation and change.

Psychotherapists, who have been independently licensed and practiced in their field for at least fifteen years, may begin to experience a disillusionment or loss of energy and enthusiasm for their professional work (Berger, 1994). Berger conducted a qualitative inquiry into the professional lives of ten psychotherapists to determine if others were experiencing a similar quandary. The senior therapists he interviewed described similar turning points in their work lives at approximately the same time period of fifteen to
twenty years of practice. A transition occurred as the seniors began to work from their own integration of experience and theory. Four goals he developed for ongoing professional sustenance included the following: a network of friends and colleagues for support, eliminating and including work activities based on his needs, creating short and long term goals and thinking about how he wanted to practice psychotherapy. The fact that Berger didn’t explore spirituality as a rejuvenating resource seems curious. This omission seems even more glaring in light of several of his interviewees’ comments, which would invite further discussion related to the topic of spirituality. Respondents spoke of how they maintained resilience, a strong sense of optimism, a search for inner strengths and, “you do what you’ve got to do, you just keep moving on.” One therapist (as cited in Berger, 1994) verbalized it eloquently:

I have some kind of solid foundation on which I am standing most of the time . . . it’s a certain strength, it’s inside, just a part of me in an unconscious way. . . as long as I can establish some rapport that keeps them returning, then there is something in the relationship that will make a difference. I have this faith in myself and my abilities. (p.311)

In contrast to Berger (1994), Wittine (1994) spoke of how an awareness of a deep spiritual center can support and sustain the professional therapist. His concept of the Self is defined as being a part of and rooted in a greater life, being, awareness and power. An experience of the Self may occur spontaneously as a result of a particularly painful time, spending time in nature or observing beauty or participating in psychotherapy. He wrote of heightened senses and increased energy akin to Maslow’s (1968) peak experience concept. It is often accompanied by a sense that one is connected with something deeper and far greater than one’s personal existence, in touch with a divinity. The result can be a sense of calmness, serenity, peace and profound love. Through meditation and
mindfulness, therapists will become aware of a spiritual perspective characterizing their life view and work. Wittine may have had some very good ideas but perhaps didn’t develop them completely for therapists to readily understand and utilize. Perhaps a look at the Spiritual Direction literature is warranted to see what lessons might be available for counselors.

Jennings and Skovholt (2005) related their findings on master therapists to Maslow’s self-actualized person and Erikson’s developmental stage of ego integrity. Optimally, their findings indicated a framework for counselor education programs and on-going therapist development. Continuous learning, reflection and feedback, and on-going sharpening of relationship skills are cornerstones of developing expertise. Counselors were encouraged to attend to their personal emotional well-being and keep an open mind when encountering complexity and ambiguity in their vocation.

Ronnestad and Skovholt’s (2003) qualitative, longitudinal study of one hundred master counselors resulted in the formulation of six distinctive phases and fourteen themes. Each developmental phase builds in expertise from lay helper, beginning student, advanced student through novice professional, experienced professional to senior professional. The one hundred American counselors were in different phases of training and life practice from graduate counseling students to an average of twenty-five years experience. Sixty of the original informants were re-interviewed. The original work required six years to formulate conclusions. Ten years later, they presented what they perceived to be the most important counselor developmental themes.

Defining development as an echo of the 18th century enlightenment era, the value of science and education with a focus on growth and advancement formed a cultural
context. The original words signified a progressive change in human functioning, derived from the Latin pro for “forward” and *gradi* as “to go” (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Development implies change, in a structured or organized way in a sequential way over time. Condensing the essence of fourteen themes to a significant few, Ronnestad and Skovholt believe a few to be especially crucial. Mentioned first is the expert counselors’ on-going continuous reflection in a focused search for a more comprehensive understanding of themselves and others and the counseling process. Openness to new learning and comfort with uncertainty are two more. Interestingly, Ronnestad and Skovholt posited Csikszentmihalyi’s (1997) Flow as a good representation of the relationship between the counselor’s skill and the nature of the challenge. Flow will be discussed further in a later paragraph. Stagnation occurs if the therapist engages in a defensive process or premature closure when the counselor is unable to master the challenges of the work and skews his working modality into one therapeutic approach or one set of client groups or some other limited approach to the art of counseling. The quality of the client-counselor relationship is a crucial element in outcome research and professional development with the master counselor still meeting challenges and difficulties in the creation and maintenance of client relationships. Due to the excellence needed in relationship skills, such training seems to be needed as a foundation of counselor education programs.

After nearly fifteen years in the field of professional counseling and determined by how a therapist changes to judge success, he or she is likely to, have internalized theory and research into a comfortable working style and discarded aspects, which no longer are consistent with his or her personal philosophy (Skovholt, Ronnestad, & Jennings, 1997).
After multiple hours of practice, the master counselor will evolve developmentally towards the use of internal theory as opposed to external theories via reflection, incorporation of techniques that work and the discarding of those that do not. Once again, reflection and motivation were found to be hallmark characteristics of master counselors’ development. Without a desire to continue learning and taking the time to reflect on how to incorporate new research while ceasing those aspects that no longer work effectively, the counselor is in danger of becoming stagnant.

Being a master counselor is about optimum human development (Skovholt, Jennings, & Mullenbach, 2004). The master counselor’s characteristics as summarized by Skovholt, Jennings, and Mullenbach paint a portrait of a highly functioning self with four major groupings of attributes. Paradoxical Characteristics include great at giving and nurturing of self, able to be fully present with another and often preferring solitude, quest for mastery and a sense of never fully arriving. Word Characteristics are self-aware, generous, fun, intense, open, curious, inspiring and passionate. Identifying Characteristics examples are drawn to metaphorical descriptions of human life, emotional health as evidenced by self-acceptance, including warts and all, and the internal working domain is rich with the compilation of thousands of practice hours in the field.

**Expertise**

The word *expert* is from the Latin word *experiri* a derivative of the word experience, translating as “experienced in” (Skovholt, Hanson, Jennings, & Grier, 2004). In the original context, it meant a person whose fluency of skill in a given domain is grounded in an accumulated set of specific experiences significant to that domain (Jennings, Hanson, Skovholt, & Grier, 2004).
The highest levels of human performance in a variety of fields are generally recognized as being attainable only after ten years of extended, daily amounts of deliberate practice activities. Ten years of extensive preparation after physical maturation is when experts in most fields attain their highest level of performance (Ericsson & Lehmann, 1996). This ten year rule has been generalized to various domains, including chess, music and professional sports where even the most talented individual cannot attain international performance without approximately a decade of preparation. The level of sustained concentrated training by expert musicians and athletes without burnout or exhaustion was four hours a day for that decade. Motivational factors are attributed to success more than talent for predicting the differences in levels of attained expert performance (Ericsson & Lehmann, 1996). Rote training studies with college students showed, after 50 to 100 hours of practice on specific digit retention tasks, college students were able to surpass the most exceptional subjects who retained 20 digits. Such skills are believed to be adaptable to expand working memory in many types of expert performance. A unique finding about experts’ superior memories reveals they have a way of selectively encoding relevant information and mechanisms. One of the mediating factors in expertise is cognitive processes are used by the individual continuously to reason, plan and anticipate. For experts to move to a higher level of performance, they must engage in continued successful learning. Only through committing their full attention and engaging in active learning can performers improve their response to feedback. Experts seek and process information differently than novices.

Essentially, vast amounts of knowledge and a pattern-based memory system acquired over multiple years of experience contribute to the expert’s superb ability
Experts are better able to chunk or group meaningfully relevant information in their field of expertise. Characteristics experts share are the following: they have superior memory, spend a great deal of time analyzing a problem qualitatively, have strong self-monitoring skills, excel in their own domain, perceive large, meaningful patterns in their domain, are faster at skills required for their profession than novices, and see and present a domain problem at a deeper level than novices. The expert holistically and easily understands and uses patterns and situations. Evidence indicates an ordinary person must invest extraordinary amounts of practice, time and commitment to develop expertise.

Gleaning key points from the general expertise literature can inform mental health practitioners they can become experts through diligent hard work and motivation. Other skills are particularly unique to the counseling profession such as learning to master a cycle of caring consisting of emotionally attaching, detaching and attaching to clients over and over again, which enables them to stay the course through the emotional storms of the client (Skovholt, 2005). A cornerstone of becoming an expert counselor also requires excellence in relationship skills that essentially cover the cognitive, emotional and relational (Jennings & Skovholt, 1999). Further review of finesse in relationship and emotional skills could glean important information to inform our counselor education programs. Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, 1995) shows promise for building excellent relationship skills, which could enhance training and the future performance of counselors.

In the arts and sciences, the peak ages for most creative and unique achievements along with the highest productivity frequently occur in the thirties and forties. This
finding is consistent with Skovholt, Ronnestad, and Jennings (1997) who have done extensive research in their search for the defining qualities of master counselors. Their view is that becoming an expert or master counselor who is skilled in the profession takes fifteen years of clinical experience. Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) categorize the counselor’s development as a lifelong process. Skovholt, Ronnestad, and Jennings (1997) believed counselor educators, in order to be experts, must also be counseling practitioners because high-level competence develops only when the counselor has specific knowledge of the domain.

Developing Expertise in Counseling

Currently no ‘gold standard’ or agreed upon definition of a master or expert counselor has been established (Skovholt, Hanson, Jennings, & Grier, 2004). Counselors are behavior change agents within the context of therapeutic relationships that share common elements and processes (Sexton & Whiston, 1994; Sexton, Whiston, Bleuer, & Walz, 1997). Seeking a definitive answer in the research to clarify expertise in counseling, Jennings, Goh, Skovholt, Hanson, and Banerjee-Stevens (2003) gleaned from the literature these commonalities in the development of a master counselor: personal characteristics of the counselor, experience, cultural competence, openness to change and comfort with ambiguity. Master counselors retain an extensive storage of general knowledge of counseling and when choosing the best course of action for a client, call upon that knowledge parsimoniously to make a determination. Experienced counselors consider all aspects and concepts of a client’s life and don’t seek immediate closure on determinations of how to proceed. This factor would indicate that assessing the spiritual
dimension of the client for possible assets and problem areas could be a strong possibility.

Among the characteristics of master therapists, Jennings and Skovholt (2005) found master therapists had emotional and relational attributes as well as cognitive gifts. Experts in the counseling field were found to be voracious learners open to experience and able to use intelligence and experience when dealing with complexity and ambiguity. Using self-awareness and reflections, they continue to learn and grow personally and professionally. They display strength of character and emotional maturity born of life experience and years of active learning. Jennings and Skovholt proposed a Cognitive Emotional and Relational (CER) model for the master therapist with certain characteristics seen as especially crucial. A voracious appetite for learning and possessing cognitive complexity are attributes of cognitive skills. Emotional receptivity and maturity are components of the emotional aspects. Master therapists were gifted interpersonally, an attribute that indicates the relational aspect.

*Attributes of Effective Counselors*

Three aspects seem to rise to the forefront as contributing to expert counselors developing and maintaining the exceptional skills needed to excel in the practice of psychotherapy. The Cognitive, Emotional and Relational (CER) model is similar to Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002), and, therefore, each will be explored more in depth. The final aspect, Flow, has been noted in the counseling literature as significant since expert counselors never tire of learning new approaches or techniques to incorporate in their work so their skills rise to meet the challenges of ongoing practice.
Central Characteristics in the CER domains include, in the cognitive arena, an insatiable curiosity, embraces complex ambiguity and is guided by accumulated wisdom. Emotional domain shows the master therapist is vibrantly alive, genuinely humble, with an intense will to grow. Relational assets included welcomed openness to life feedback, being guided by boundaried generosity, and a nuanced ethical compass. The master counselor is on a trajectory of life-long learning and curiosity. Skovholt, Hanson, Jennings, and Grier (2004) categorized the master therapist with a term from the gifted and talented literature “rage to master.” Essentially, the expert counselor has an internal drive for on-going growth and development and models the essence of professional counseling.

Jennings and Skovholt (1999) explained CER as excellence in cognitive realms, indicating motivated learners able to draw upon accumulated experiences and having comfort with ambiguity. Emotional excellence was defined as attending to self-care, self-aware, congruent and open to change. Relational excellence is a finely tuned sense of time and amount with clients and highly developed interpersonal skills. Wisdom and intuition contribute significantly to the field of expertise in counseling.

Intuition again is one of the dichotomies on the Myers Briggs, an attribute with which only a small portion of the American population are born. Mentors and early life experiences greatly affected the master therapists. Wisdom and expertise take a vast amount of practice and experience to accumulate. CER are contributing factors to the development of mastery in counseling, as well as cultural competence, openness to change and comfort with ambiguity. Further qualitative research on master counselors
and the essence of excellence will inform the profession regarding attributes that will benefit therapists and counselor educators.

Overall, the single most important research-based aptitude in the counseling domain is the capacity to establish and maintain a positive working alliance with clients (Skovholt, Ronnestad, & Jennings, 1997). This finding is confirmed by Sexton and Whiston’s (1994) outcome research concluding successful client outcomes have consistently been shown to relate most significantly to the quality of the counseling relationship. Novices can bond well with clients who have a history of positive relationships. However, expertise in therapeutic relationship building is the capability to bond well with those individuals who have histories of poor relationships (Skovholt, Ronnestad, & Jennings, 1997).

Jennings, Goh, Skovholt, Hanson, and Banerjee-Stevens (2003) indicated some counselors viewed their work as spiritual in nature. Spirituality is defined by Wiggins Frame (2003) as that which brings purpose and meaning to life. Meaning in life is directly relational to the concept of Flow. Graduate students could have a conceptual map of their future on-going development if they are informed during clinical training how the basic components of Flow – increased challenges mean increasing skills – will be the nature of their lifelong career as they continue to develop cognitive complexity and evolve over time. When counselor educators use the language of Flow throughout training, the edicts would be normalized as a distinct component expected of expert counselors.
**Emotional Intelligence.**

The essential components of good therapeutic practice are almost an exact match for the edicts of Emotional Intelligence (EI): reflection, self-assessment, cognitive complexity, openness and problem-solving. EI is the awareness of and ability to manage your own feelings along with the recognition of emotions in others and the ability to problem-solve (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). While striving to enhance long term goals, emotionally intelligent individuals know how to express themselves at the right level at the right time (Goleman, 1995). EI is a learned ability, not an innate one such as Intellectual Quotient (IQ). The older the individual, the more practice required to break the neural pathways created by earlier habits to breakthrough with newly formulated, positive patterns of interactions (Goleman et al., 2002).

**Flow.**

Csikszentmihalyi (1997) suggested that three emotional states be considered: flow, boredom and challenge which are related to the influence of expertise in a particular skill level and challenge of a new opportunity for learning. Flow exists if both skill level and challenge are high and an optimal experience occurs.

Flow is a concept that acknowledges individuals enjoy finding meaning in their life and get lost in the generation of activity related to that meaning, which can be productive work (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). Expert counselors enjoyed their work and found meaning and purpose in it (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003), which is akin to the concept of Flow. The theory of Flow is essentially getting lost in an activity that is meaningful, losing track of time and becoming energized to the point of perhaps having a peak experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). Flow is based on the construct of increasing skills to meet
increasing challenges. As novices begin in the counseling field, the challenges would prove greater than their skill level. Novices will have to stretch and become more proficient in using their counseling skills to have a therapeutic effect with clients. After a few years of practice, novices become more proficient in their skills, and the challenge is not so intense. Those who seek more complex understanding of the work and wish to synthesize current research into their practice will raise the challenge level. In the ongoing developmental process, essentially no plateaus exist. Once a counselor is adept and the parameters are established in an area, he or she seeks new challenges to continue to enhance, deepen or hone the skills, which contribute to expertise. Each phase of development is met with new challenges and the counselor must cultivate new skills or become more talented to rise to meet the challenge. The pattern can continue indefinitely. Some individuals will never become bored but will always be seeking innovative ways of stimulating their work. Internal motivation provides the fuel for life-long development. Satisfaction from the work and the joy of serving others well helps maintain the progress.

Flow is a process, like expertise, characterized by time, practice and thorough skill development. Descriptions of the Flow experience described by athletes, musicians, religious mystics and artists are consistently similar despite the fact that all do very different things when they reach peak performance or Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Flow only happens when a strong match between challenges and the individual’s skills is imposed. Once optimal performance or mastery occurs, it is evidenced by effortlessness and grace. Individuals experience a sense of spontaneous creativity and enjoyment. Seeking and experiencing Flow encourages on-going growth, bringing meaning and satisfaction to one’s life.
Myers, Sweeney, and Witmer (2000) said wellness is a way of life oriented toward optimal health and well-being in which body, mind, and spirit are integrated. Considerable research exists linking spirituality with better physical and mental health. Overall, a growing body of research relates the potential resource of using a client’s spirituality to improve physical and mental health. There exists a protective link between frequent religious participation and increased longevity. Additionally, spirituality may enhance pain management, reduce risk of substance abuse and suicide, protect against depression and improve surgical outcomes (Larson & Larson, 2003). A brief review of current progress in the field will be explored here.

Just three to five days after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Schuster, Stein, Jaycox, Collins, Marshall, Elliott, Zhou, Kanouse, Morrison and Berry (2001) surveyed 560 adults. Ninety percent had symptoms of stress and ninety percent indicated they had turned to prayer, religion or spiritual feelings to help them cope. Historically, therapists have not been inquisitive about their client’s spirituality and may have failed to refer clients in spiritual distress. A few bioethicists have called this failure to attend to client’s spiritual needs as negligence (Larson & Larson, 2003). For clients whose spirituality is relevant, the opportunity arises to link with a trained professional to aid with spiritual support.

Better mental health was found to have a statistically significant association with religion in nearly 500 studies during the twentieth century (Koenig, 2005). Eighty percent of 100 studies that examined well-being and religion prior to the year 2000 were
found to have a statistically significant relationship between greater life satisfaction, happiness, better mood, or higher morale and greater religious involvement (Koenig, 2005). Religious practices and beliefs were usually associated with more purpose and meaning in life; greater well-being, hope and optimism; and greater quality of life.

Koenig and Cohen (2002) defined religiously involved people as not just those who attend public religious services, but also those who are involved in private religious practices like prayer. Koenig (2005) cited the ways religion helps as promoting a positive worldview, making sense of difficult situations, giving purpose and meaning, discouraging maladaptive coping, enhancing social support, promoting other-directedness, helping to release the need for control, providing and encouraging forgiveness, encouraging thankfulness and providing hope. All of these functions are issues that counseling clients may bring to their therapy sessions. Having an awareness of the research indicating the beneficial effects of faith acts on health and well-being, a good therapist would be inclined to explore such options with their client.

Koenig (2005) defined spirituality as an individual’s personal quest for understanding the meaning of life. Of sixteen studies during the twentieth century that examined the relationship between meaning and purpose in life and religion, fifteen found that more religious individuals had significantly greater purpose and meaning (Koenig). For adults, finding meaning and purpose as they sift through their memories in a life review, may be especially important in the last life stage described by Erikson (1950), integrity vs. despair.

Quite likely, religious beliefs may cause considerable psychological and social strain through exclusion of some individuals, fostering of physical abuse, dogmatic
thinking, dependency, and prejudice although this area has not been studied very well (Koenig, 2005). When situations arise that are out of an individual’s control, people often turn to a faith community and religious beliefs.

Faith has multiple positive dimensions. Those who choose to worship in a facility with others have the added benefit of a supportive community. Church services involve rituals, which have been shown to have a calming effect on our body (Benson, 1996). Benson believed our bodies are wired to retain the memory of activities associated with rituals including the emotional content and the nerve cell firings and chemical releases that were first activated. Visually, the atmosphere in worship centers inspires calmness and reassurance to people and inspires remembrance of prior calming rituals such as lighting a candle in preparation for prayer. Many potentially therapeutic elements are components of worship services such as aesthetic surrounds, music, prayer and contemplation, the opportunity for socializing and fellowship and distraction from everyday tensions. Not everyone chooses to experience his or her faith or spirituality in a church. However, the powerful calming of rituals are demonstrated in the studies that are outlined in the following section.

*Research Findings.*

Hackney and Sanders (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of 35 studies with multiple measures of religiosity and psychological adjustment such as coping, attribution and physical robustness with a data set consisting of 264 correlations published between 1990 and July, 2001. A significant positive relationship was found between religiosity and psychological adjustment. Personal devotion produced the greatest correlation, and institutional religiosity produced the weakest correlation. The data indicated the greater
internality of motivational style – autonomy orientation – is associated with more positive mental health outcomes. With the increase in therapist’s desire to address spirituality in their client’s therapy (Seybold & Hill, 2001), one possible strategy would be to guide clients toward the most psychologically beneficial aspects of their spiritual life (Hackney & Sanders). Curiously, the authors noted all the studies were correlational in nature and generated the idea that good mental health could predispose individuals to religious commitment and involvement.

Koenig and Larson (2001) reviewed 850 studies and found links between religiosity and mental health, concluding a generally positive relationship exists between the two. Eighty percent of the studies correlating religiosity and life satisfaction showed a positive relationship with practices and beliefs and greater life satisfaction.

Koenig, (2005) a psychiatrist at Duke Medical Center, has been doing research for 20 years on the moderating effects of religion on mental health, well-being and physical health. He has found a clear pattern of the moderating effect of spirituality (Koenig, 2005). Seventy-seven studies are cited in his book on psychoneuroimmunology and the faith factor, indicating a clear pattern between spirituality or faith and improved immune system functioning. Koenig and Larson (2001) did a systematic review of over 1200 published scientific studies in the physical health, mental health and social health fields. They found the literature indicated a 79% significant positive association between religious involvement and greater well-being. They suspected religious involvement affects physical health through the neuroendocrine and immune mechanisms and have been exploring these possibilities in this current research. They believed that through the
neurological, endocrine, and immune pathways, the mind, body and spirit are intimately connected.

**Spirituality and Physical Health**

Consistent links exist in the research between active spiritual/religious involvement and increased chances for living longer (Larson & Larson, 2003). Faith may provide coping resources, strength in helping in prevention, and sometimes aid recovery from physical and emotional illness. Attending worship services frequently emerges as a factor linked with living longer. Religious issues have been neglected in clinical care. The therapeutic community needs to recognize the important relevance of acknowledging faith issues in fostering insightful healthcare (Larson & Larson, 2003). Their review of eighty studies over the last one hundred years found religion/spirituality generally linked to lower rates of depression.

A thirty year study of 2,676 individuals found weekly attendance at a religious ceremony was associated with statistically significant improvement in sustaining stable marriage, becoming frequently active, increasing personal relationships, avoiding depression and quitting smoking (Larson & Larson, 2003).

Benson (1996) also reported the faith factor as having a significant influence on health and well-being. An average 90% improvement was reported in 60 studies of reduced alcohol, cigarette, drug use, depression and improved psychological functioning. In 49 studies, faith was shown to contribute to an average 80 % improvement in physical health due to reduced general anxiety, hostility, blood pressure and improved quality of life in seriously ill patients with cancer or heart disease. Psychological health showed a 79% percent improvement with involvement of the faith factor in 35 studies. Benson has
worked at the Harvard Mind Body clinic for 30 years, always demonstrating a
fascination with wellness and the interweaving of spirituality. Early research resulted in
The Relaxation Response (Benson, 1975) describing a simple activity of focusing and
body calming technique quite similar to eastern meditation.

More recently, Benson and Proctor (2003) described an event close to a peak
experience observed on the functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging which tracks blood
flow to different parts of the body. The authors described a paradoxical calmness that
occurs. The parts of the body that control breathing, respirations and blood pressure slow
down, while intense activity showed in the attention, focus and orientation areas of the
brain. They dubbed this event the Breakout Principle, where former patterns of
disruptive thought can be broken forever and individuals can find relief and a sense of
freedom. The onset of this activity is after a period of intense and focused activity, which
can be different for each individual. People who experience this move to a new plane of
normal. The Breakout Principle seems quite similar to the aspect of Flow as explained by
Csikszentmihalyi (2003).

Flow is an experience of getting lost in an activity that is meaningful to the
individual, where losing track of time and becoming energized to the point of perhaps
having a peak experience are part of the components (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). The
experience of Flow can occur naturally in spiritually-oriented activities. Flow is based on
the construct of increasing skills to meet increasing challenges, which contributes to on-
going growth and leads to contentment. At a beginning level, individual challenges would
prove to be the greater task, thus stretching him or her to become more proficient to
accomplish the job. After a period of time on a plateau, motivated individuals will seek
new challenges or more complex aspirations in their line of development to keep them interested. Once new parameters are established, individuals must again cultivate new skills or become more talented to rise to the level of the challenge. This pattern can continue indefinitely. Thus, some individuals will never become bored but will always be seeking innovative ways of stimulating their work. Flow encourages on-going growth and development, which will bring meaning to individuals’ lives.

No evidence was found in the research that the experience of Flow has been observed under medical conditions. The time would seem ripe for the two schools of thought, Benson’s Breakout Principle (2003) and Csikszentmihalyi’s Flow (2003) groups, to confer and perhaps collaborate on their research. The human spirituality events they each describe have similar constructs. Therapists would want to be appraised of activities, which may benefit their clients and contribute to their happiness while working through the therapeutic process to reach higher levels of wellness and spiritual satisfaction.

**Spirituality and the Physical Sciences**

Research in the sciences is showing reliable results linking aspects of spirituality and religion to physiological responses such as neuroendocrine and cardiovascular. Spiritual and religious practices cause bodily responses (Seeman, Dubin, & Seeman, 2003). Included here is further research in three specific areas.

**Neurotheology**

Neurotheology is the term coined to denote work in the area of science and religion. Radiologist Newburg and psychiatrist D’Acquili along with columnista Rause published their research in 2001 after observing Tibetan Buddhist monks and Franciscan
nuns meditating under single photon emission computed tomography (SPECT). The SPECT is a high-tech imaging camera, which scans inside the head and essentially monitors blood flow in the brain. Previous work with older equipment, EED found blood flow increases in attention areas and emotion control areas of the brain as meditation deepens. SPECT scans taken at the height of the spiritual meditation showed a surprise finding. A lessening of blood flow occurred to the parietal lobe at the base of the brain, which controls orientation. The brain may not be able to distinguish the boundaries of its body and may feel connected to the entire universe and all that is. Newburg, D’Acquili and Rause (2001) have been searching for a neurological basis for spirituality and believe they have discovered a biological basis for it, indicating spiritual experience is interwoven with human biology which induces the spiritual urge. They saw humans as being hard-wired for spiritual experience and that our interpretation of God or the infinite calls the experience out of us. The authors also wrote about individuals in hyper-arousal states who arrive at the “Flow” experience via channeling vast amounts of energy through their consciousness and track how emotions are created in the mind.

Ritual generates emotional responses and unitary states that Benson (1996) and Koenig (2002) believed are biological in origin. Since then, studies have shown that participating in spiritual behaviors such as meditation, prayer, and faith services can lower blood pressure, reduce heart rate and generally improve health functioning (Benson, 1996; Koenig, 2002). The hypothalamus and autonomic system regulate these systems; thus, ritual is affecting autonomic body states (Newburg, D’Aquili, & Rause 2001).
God Gene

Research into spirituality and science led to another discovery by Hamer (2004) dubbed the God gene. Due to research conducted by the National Cancer Institute, Hamer had access to DNA samples from over 1000 men and women, along with data from Cloninger’s (2004) Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI), which has a spirituality transcendence scale. Deciding to do some exploration, he began searching in the 35,000 human genes. Narrowing the focus to the nine genes that control mood by managing the flow of epinephrine, dopamine and serotonin, he found a connection on VMAT2. On this particular gene, if individuals had a cystoine (C) marker at a certain location, they were able to experience transcendence. Those who had an adoine (A) at the same location were quite low on the transcendence scale. However, those individuals who have the genetic capability to experience this aspect of spirituality may not necessarily take action and actively participate in faith activities. About 48% of the particular study’s participants were able to experience transcendence. Hundreds of other DNA gene interactions may contribute to a bodily felt expression of spirituality. This new finding is just the beginning, and further research may unveil even more significant paths to search for the evidence of spirituality being inherent in the human body.

God Code

Taking yet another avenue searching for spirituality in science, Braden (2004) explored the ancient Hebrew Scriptures of the Kabbala to discover links to scientific information, which he uses to attempt to prove the hypothesis of God’s imprint being in every bit of DNA in our body. Ancient scriptures say God gives information about his world in three ways: text, numbers and oral communication. God’s name in the ancient
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scriptures and the Bible is listed as Yahweh. Removing the vowels, as was the ancient, acceptable tradition, leaves YHWH. The Jewish conversion code for transforming letters to numbers indicates the letters YHW become 1, 5, and 6. The elements of the earth are Fire, Air and Water, which are essentially hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen. Reducing each of these elements to its simple mass, we have again the numbers 1, 5 and 6. Our human bodies are composed of the same essential elements of hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen with the addition of carbon, again represented by 1, 5 and 6 with the number for carbon being 3. Braden translates this code to mean we are composed of the elements of God but are of the earth. Additionally, he goes through a process of explaining how the 23 pairs of chromosomes in the double helix of DNA are translated and reduced to the same numeric components. Researching and analyzing these topics took 12 years for Braden (2004) to compose and publish his findings. Braden’s contributions provide us with further food for thought signifying the importance of spirituality in the makeup of human beings. Counselors failing to address the spirituality of their clients would be omitting a substantial dimension of human functioning.

Seventy-four percent of complaints patients bring to medical clinics are of unknown origin and are probably caused by psychosocial factors (Benson, 1996). What if just half the conditions experienced by psychosocially ill patients could be eliminated with greater attention to mind, body and spiritual health? Due to Benson’s 1996 calculations, the savings would be $ 55 billion.

Physical Science and Spirituality Conclusion

The literature review shows a plethora of medical research seeking to find a connection between the body, health, well-being and spirituality. A discovery of one
indication of transcendence in DNA is strengthened by others’ neurological findings of
a transcendent state demonstrated by imaging of blood flow. Much research still is to be
conducted; however, clear indications support that spirituality affects the body and its
physical and emotional health in a positive manner.

None of the four most recent books, which were briefly reviewed here give a
specific definition of how they view spirituality or, in Hamer’s (2004) case, God.
Because no specific parameters are indicated, the interpretation of what they are seeking
might be similar to the counselor education researchers’ concepts. Synthesizing Frankl
(1985), Csikszentmihalyi (2003), Wiggins Frame (2003), and Myers and Williard (2003),
spirituality is that which brings meaning and purpose to life, moving human beings
forward in some manner of positive growth.

*Spiritual Development*

Humans are spiritual beings (Poll & Smith, 2003). Normal human development
occurs in readily recognizable phases throughout life. Parallels exist in the developmental
theories of cognitive, moral, and psychosocial development. Erik Erikson’s eight stages
of development closely correlate with chronological age and biological maturation. In
Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg’s stages of development, an individual can arrest in
one of the intermediate stages but progress forward in Erikson’s stages. Spirituality has
been called a developmental process involving the accumulation and integration of
spiritual experiences (Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992). Thus, this linear process is
partly dependent on the individual’s maturation. Spiritual emergencies can bring periods
of rapid change.
A pivotal work in the understanding of faith development and spiritual evolution occurred with Fowler’s publication of *Stages of Faith* (1995). James Fowler believed individuals were motivated to discover and maintain meaning in life and developed spiritually as a result. He saw faith as a holistic concept of the total person, providing goals and purpose to the individual’s hopes, thoughts and actions. Religious development is conceptualized as a series of discontinuous stages, but he did not rule out a continuum interpretation. Phases are based on the foundational work of Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, and Lawrence Kohlberg’s stages of optimal human development.

In Stage One, Undifferentiated faith, the infant’s environment plants the seeds of trust, hope and love or the opposite, which undergirds all that comes later in faith development. The dangers or deficiencies of this stage may later emerge as excessive narcissism or patterns of isolation and failed relationships.

Stage Two is Intuitive-Projective faith, which occurs during the age range from three to seven. The child’s thinking is fluid and magical with tenuous boundaries between reality and fantasy. Through the child’s relationship with parents as caregivers, he or she begins to trust. The child can be permanently influenced by moods, actions, examples, and visible faith of adults. At the first stage of self-awareness, children create their own intuitive images of good and evil through the experience of their own consequences. Positive consequences are seen as good while negative happenings to the self are deemed bad.

Stage Three, the Mythic-Literal faith is the stage in middle to late childhood when children incorporate the symbols, stories, and beliefs of their community. The child has
begun to think more concretely and perceive the world as being more orderly than previously conceptualized. Religious stories are accepted at face value and the child interprets them in very literal ways without reflection. Determination of good or right is seen as reciprocal fairness.

Stage Four, Synthetic Conventional faith evolves from late childhood to adolescence where the person’s experience of the world now extends beyond the family. Faith provides a basis for identity and outlook, synthesizing values and information. The emerging individual is developing formal operational thought, the highest line of development for Piaget. Adolescents tend to conform to the religious beliefs of others and haven’t examined religious alternative ideologies. Beliefs and values are deeply felt with the adolescent dwelling in them and their meaning. Moral questions are defined in terms of what others might say or the harm it may do to a relationship. This is the stage most adults become locked into according to Fowler and fail to evolve to higher stages.

Stage Five is Individuating-Reflexive faith, which occurs during the transition between adolescence and adulthood when individuals begin to take seriously the responsibility for his or her own lifestyle, beliefs and attitudes. Movement is towards individuality as opposed to being defined by a group and is no longer defined by the composite of one’s role or meaning to others. As individuals move away from home, they begin to question the religious beliefs they learned growing up and begin to explore alternate religious systems and beliefs. Such exploration is essential to the development of this stage.

Stage Six is Conjunctive faith. Very few people achieve this stage of development, which may occur in middle adulthood (Fowler, 1995). Aging creates a
vantage point from which to consider one’s limitations as well as those of others and the irrevocable commitments and acts of earlier years. This period has a reclaiming and reworking of one’s past. Individuals become more tolerant of paradox. They are willing to consider other views and integrate what is congruent to their current identity into their own current faith experience. They are ready for new depths of experience in spirituality.

Stage Seven is Universalizing Faith and the highest stage of religious development, which Fowler sees as exceedingly rare. It is epitomized by individuals such as Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa, Thomas Merton and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Individuals develop a transcending belief system to achieve a sense of religious oneness with all beings (Boone, 2005).

Helminiak’s Stages.

Helminiak (1987) suggested his five stage model of spiritual development, which is based on Fowler’s stage theory of human development. This view used a particular set of concerns to understand human development. Spiritual development and general human development are seen as related processes. Similar to Fowler, Helminiak proposed individuals move from concrete spiritual conceptualization to highly abstract and inclusive conceptualizations.

Spiritual Identity.

Poll & Smith (2003) postulated the successful navigation through progressive stages of identity development empowers the individual to proceed to the final life stages of intimacy, generativity and integrity. Poll & Smith (2003) speculated creating an awareness of spiritual identity and enhancing it may be a factor aiding individuals through their development. Poll & Smith synthesized insights from four major identity
theories and concluded: People desire a sense of who they are, which is separate from others and connected to those with whom they relate, a sense of continuity in their personal sense of self, and to understand their relationship to others and their experiences. These insights contribute to four general phases of identity development: unawareness of self as separate yet connected to others, crisis or learning challenging this unawareness, progressively creating and experiencing the relationship of self to others, and integrating experiences that give meaning and continuity into a clear identity and sense of self. From this analysis, they speculated spiritual identity develops in individuals through their interactions with God and recognizing the divine in themselves and others. The authors propose four specific stages for their spiritual identity model: Pre-awareness, where the self is unaware it is an eternal being in relation to God; Awakening, where crisis or learning prompts awareness; Recognition, with awareness progressively building towards spiritual experiences in other settings and interactions; and Integration, resulting in the self-concept and spiritual experiences. Individuals recognize spiritual experiences across many settings and realize spirituality is interwoven through their lives. These individuals are drawn to spiritual experiences as a natural way of life. Spiritual development is initiated in childhood and is a lifelong process. Techniques to encourage development at each stage are offered by the authors.

*Spiritual Direction*

In addition to the general trend to integrate spirituality in counseling, a more specific focus is gaining momentum: that of including spiritual direction in therapy (Tan, 2003). A formal description of spiritual direction was specified by Barry and Connolly (1982) as one Christian providing help to another which enables that person to attend to
God’s communication with him or her and to respond to this personal message, growing in intimacy and to allow the consequences of the relationship to live out in his or her life. Three distinct differences exist between spiritual direction and counseling of which one aspect is spiritual direction is Spirit-centered while counseling is problem-centered. Spiritual directors place their empathetic focus on the Spirit of God while counselors seek to be empathic to the inner experience of their clients. Finally, spiritual directors take no notes while counselors are engaged in record-keeping and note-taking.

Spiritual techniques frequently used by spiritual directors, Christian counselors and pastoral assistants are discernment, spiritual history, intercessory prayer, teaching from Scripture and forgiveness (Tan, 2003).

*Discernment.*

Attributing the word *discernment* to Greek origins, May (1992) indicated it is from the word *diakrisis* which is composed of the parts dia, meaning apart and krisis, meaning to separate. In the spiritual direction field, discernment appreciates mystery and seeks to discriminate among inclinations and yearnings to determine God’s will. Intentional practices such as meditation, prayer, fasting, mindfulness and charity are quite important in personal spiritual development. Signs of spiritual growth present in an individual as a gradual lessening of attachment to various desires, a movement towards “not-knowing,” spiritual surrender to a various ways to open oneself to union with God or higher power and an increasing spaciousness. The mind responds to spiritual threats just the way it does to aggressive threats, and the first line of defense is repression. Denial, projection, rationalization, intellectualization and displacement are other defenses.
Contrasting the meaning of “discernment” to that of “diagnosis” which has the same root words, May (1992) defined diagnosis as using thorough knowledge to determining a disorder for the purpose of remedying or correcting it. He noted spiritual directors must undergo a process similar to counseling: education, supervision and on-going accountability. However, he believed spiritual direction is a charism and individuals must be called and gifted to enter that line of work.

Ivey, Ivey, Myers and Sweeney (2005) saw discernment as a process counselors can use. They attributed the word to Latin origins as *discernere* meaning “to separate” or “sort out” and defined it as identifying when the spirit is at work in a situation. It is encouraging clients to go deeper within themselves to discover their deepest purposes in life, sifting through and separating the interior movements that indicate spirit’s personal involvement (Conroy, 1993; Ivey, Ivey, Myers, & Sweeney, 2005).

Determining personal meaning and goals through discernment can aid clients seeking clearer direction for their life journey. Once bolstered with the discovery of this sense of mission, making decisions and taking action can more easily follow. In their interpretation, discernment is an exploration of the individual’s values, which would help them focus and set large life goals. The counselor’s role would be to aid the client in creating conditions for learning his or her goals. Meditation, guided imagery, reflection and deep listening are techniques to prepare for openness towards discerning life goals. The authors see the possibility for a spiritual relationship to occur between client and counselor during crisis periods due to the deep levels of trust involved. Clearly, the discernment process is a mixture of intuitive and intellectual skills. This spiritual
philosophy could be incorporated into the counselor’s repertoire for use with clients who present with concerns regarding their life purpose.

In *Holy Listening*, Guenther (1992) defined discernment process as having two parts: perceiving and judging. The everyday life of the individual provides the material for the possible fruits of discernment. Guenther site the major difference from counseling is that spiritual directors must be willing to be known as a child of God with their own vulnerabilities and limitations. This author also defines spiritual direction as seeking to help people discover a rule of life or how to define themselves in relation to God and the world, which is essentially meaning-making. A disproportionate number of introverts are attracted to spiritual direction, and their quiet nature takes a great deal of time and patience to reach the level of trust necessary for self-revelation. The fact comes as no surprise then that a common metaphor for spiritual direction is midwifery. One person with training waits on another’s meaningful birthing process in an environment of gracious hospitality.

*From Spiritual Direction’s Point of View.*

Spiritual Direction is assisting individuals in their search for the presence of their God in their life (Bakke, 2000; Barry, 1992; Edwards, 2001; Standish & McCormack, 2001; Stout, 2001; Vest, 2000) and the enhancement and deepening of that relationship (Bakke, 2000; Edwards, 2001; Kelly, 1995; May, 1992). People’s search for meaning and fulfillment in their lives is an ongoing quest with many believing that a vital ingredient for growth and coping is spirituality (Sperry, 2001). Due to the resurgent interest in spirituality with many clients discussing spiritual issues in the therapy room, London
(1985) referred to therapists as today’s secular priests, and Wiggins Frame (2003) said counselors are serving as cultural shamans.

Sperry and Mansager (2004) discussed spiritual and psychological development in an attempt to clarify the language for psychotherapists dealing with client’s spiritual issues. Psychotherapeutic and spiritual aspects complement one another and the relationship is best described as a holistic intrarelationship among differing expressions of a singular psychic movement. Therefore, Sperry and Mansager propose a holistic outlook that indicates consciousness is the intersection point between spirituality and psychotherapy. Exploring, deepening and expanding consciousness can come from both spiritual and psychotherapeutic methods (Sperry & Mansager).

Sperry (2001) implied individuals who no longer feel comfortable with their own faith traditions or those ministering to them are now “spiritually homeless.” Sperry defined spiritual direction as developing the directee’s relationship with God and focusing on the development and maintenance of spiritual health and well-being. Many see the practice of spiritual direction as a special calling to a vocation (Sperry, 2001). Spiritual directors have their own ecumenical professional organization titled Spiritual Directors International comprised of approximately 3,500 members and publishing its own professional journal (Sperry). Spiritual counseling includes multiple dimensions of personality including psychological, moral, somatic and spiritual and is based on both developmental and pathological models of health and well-being (Sperry). Sperry posited spiritually-oriented therapists have a distinct advantage over spiritual directors who have no formal education in therapy when caring for the holistic aspects of an individual and tending to complex psychological issues. This fascinating trend towards
the desire to include spirituality in therapy appears to be sustaining over time and can be heartening to spiritually-oriented counselors.

Sperry (2001) speculated on strategies that would incorporate spiritual direction aspects into current psychotherapy. One such method would be to include a spiritual assessment of clients upon intake to reveal the client’s past and present religious and spiritual concerns, image of God or higher power and current spiritual practices. Advisement is another aspect that counselors might use to suggest spiritual practices which enhance spiritual qualities contributing to a balanced lifestyle such as reading sacred writings, meditation, healing prayer, forgiveness and service. Guided imagery strategies and spiritually-focused cognitive restructuring are specific spiritual interventions that could be utilized. Another specific strategy for integrating spiritual direction techniques is to conduct one session per month of spiritual direction while maintaining the other three sessions for psychotherapy. This strategy is more likely to be done by therapists who have had spiritual direction, feel called now to do spiritual direction, and have clients who want spiritual direction.

Beck (2003) noted the remarkable trend in just the past ten years toward the inclusion of spirituality in therapy as noted in journal articles, conferences, and training programs. Another large trend Christian counselors are experiencing is a renewed interest in spiritual direction. Therapy and spiritual direction have commonalities such as a focus on change, growth, development, insight and self-awareness. Beck (2003) explored the Greek root words of psyche, meaning “soul” and logos, meaning “study,” which formulate the original term of psychology. Through his analysis, he suggested redefining soul as the person described by Scripture – an individual with a complex psychological
existence, rich emotional life, a capacity for deep spirituality and a desire to be in a right relationship with God.

Spiritual direction is focused on a holistic view of the person (Moon, 2002) and is concerned with the soul. Moon proposed the heart of spiritual formation is discovering awareness of God everywhere. Spiritual directors are kind and good listeners, committed to their own spiritual journey and the transformation of others on their pilgrimages, moved by God’s transforming love, discovered by believers as opposed to self-proclaimed due to the evidence of the way they live their life, dedicated to helping others acknowledge the presence of spirit in their lives. Spiritual formation journeys are commonly believed to consist of three stages: purgation, illumination and union. Purgation is a reorientation of all the dimensions of the individual toward God and the long journey home again. Illumination refers to increasingly deepening the relationship with God, turning towards spiritual issues and experiencing His presence through a sense of peace and love. Union indicates a complete surrender of all dimensions of personality to God and will not be fully complete until the individual rests in heaven.

Many have proposed a holistic approach for integrating spirituality into psychotherapy (Burke & Miranti, 1995; Kelly, 1995; Witmer, 1996) stating it needs to be a part of any holistic approach facilitating human growth and development. Individuals in transition from one phase of life to another often feel as if they have lost their way and are searching for meaning and purpose once again. Perhaps the time has arrived for counselors to once again embrace the original concept of soul healing for the therapeutic process. After acknowledging psychotherapists’ work with the client’s soul and their sense of spirituality, the next step would be to insure proper counselor training.
Holistic therapy focused on growth and development of the whole individual has a place for spiritual direction (Tan, 2003). Great potential exists for enhancing wholeness and providing profound blessings for the client who is the willing recipient of a well-trained and sensitive spiritually-oriented counselor (Tan, 2003).

Counseling and spiritual direction are methodologies, which strive to assist individuals in awakening to their full potential. Both value the multi-faceted aspects of each individual and seek to appreciate the many dimensions within, while focusing on an attitude of wholeness. A close association is evident in the processes of the two disciplines. The development of a healthy relationship between the therapist and client, director and directee is a crucial element for both disciplines prior to any further work being done. The essential commonalities are an intuitive way of knowing based on an acute awareness of the situation at hand and openness to the experiential as it presents itself in symbols, stories and metaphors. Both hold the well-being of the individual in high regard. The distinct difference is counseling has traditionally been aimed toward the alleviation of symptoms while promoting a higher level of functioning and moving the individual to a generally healthier state of being. In spiritual direction, the individual is also seen as moving towards higher and healthier stages; however, God is seen as the director who invites the individual into greater mystery and a closer relationship with God. Spiritual direction is a deepening and unfolding realization while counseling may be more problem-solving and solution-oriented in the here and now.

Theory Preference

In searching for what theory master therapists who utilize spirituality with their clients might prefer, assessing what the research has to say on this topic would be
prudent. Four elements compose the change factors in effective psychotherapy: client, relationship, expectancy, and model/technique factors (Hubble, Duncan, & Miller, 2006). Relationship factors compose the second largest contributing factor, and suggestions for ensuring a positive view of the relationship are accommodating treatment to the client’s goals and ideas about interventions, utilizing the core conditions to fit the client’s understanding of those variables and assessing client’s motivational level for change (Miller, Duncan, & Hubble, 1997). Treatment should accommodate the client’s readiness for change (Miller et al., 1997) and can assess it using Prochaska’s (1994) Transtheoretical Change Model. The therapists can listen for and validate client change whenever it occurs in the treatment process. Facilitating hope and expectations for change can be done through numerous healing rituals apparent in the therapeutic process (Miller et al.) such as use positive affirmations, talk to an empty chair, charting negative self-talk or a possibility-focus such as the miracle question. An example given in Miller et al.’s text cites a therapist picking up on a client’s spiritual comment and offering it back to him as this “gift from God” gave him the opportunity to change the focus of his life, to which the client responded very positively. Other possibility-focus techniques may exist that have yet to be documented in the psychotherapeutic world.

The model of therapy does not make much difference in therapy outcome as long as a treatment is intended to be therapeutic (Miller et al., 1997). Regardless of the treatment model used, the average client attends only a handful of sessions (Miller et al., 1997). Mainstream theories of personality and psychotherapy have a serious deficiency in their neglect of God and the human spirit (Richards & Bergin, 2005). With the recent
publication of books on integrating spirituality into counseling, the past trend is being positively altered.

Techniques account for about fifteen percent of improvement in therapy (Hubble, Duncan, & Miller, 2006) with client/extra therapeutic factors accounting for 40% of outcome variance, relationship factors claiming thirty percent and hope/expectancy at 15%. Interestingly, client factors are essentially client strengths, supportive elements in the environment and chance events. One aspect of client strengths and supportive elements might be a belief in a spiritual system that helps sustain them through trials and aids their sense of connection to a higher power. Hope is defined as a belief that positive expectations are anticipated from the methods that will be utilized in therapy (Hubble et al., 2006). If a client is spiritually-oriented and seeking treatment from a similarly inclined therapist, one would expect the outcome to generally be more positive.

More than 400 therapy models exist (Hubble, Duncan, & Miller, 2006), yet the most helpful aspect they provide may be when they enlighten therapists with novel ways of looking at old situations and empower the therapist to change. Timing is crucial with most progress occurring in the early part of the treatment process. Therapists who are able to do something different when they fail to see client progress after the initial few hours, are more likely to elicit a positive therapeutic outcome. Specifically, assuming the client’s frame of reference will help to identify client goals, create a better assessment of the client’s change stage, encourage hope and link with environmental supports (Hubble et al., 2006). It has yet to be established how therapists approach spiritual issues within the therapy context. If therapists are willing to immerse themselves in the client’s worldview and allow themselves to try different tactics that might empower the
individual to process their story better, they may be more successful with client outcomes. The hope is that this study’s exploration of the participants’ possible use of spirituality with clients will enlighten the field on how the process unfolds.

Sexton, Whiston, Bleuer, and Walz (1997) indicated meta-analyses have consistently demonstrated general effectiveness of a number of major therapeutic approaches with a small advantage for cognitive and cognitive-behavioral approaches with certain client problems. Effective practitioners need to develop complex schemes to integrate information from multiple sources to make counseling decisions. The selection of techniques should depend on the client and be individualized to his or her care.

Duty (1999) found no link between therapeutic approach and counselor’s use of spirituality in therapy but recommended further research on the topic in the future. Thus, it may be wise to take a brief look at the topic while exploring the expert counselors’ use of spirituality in counseling.

Conclusion

This literature review covered historical and current patterns between counseling and spirituality. Counselor spiritual development and counselor graduate training were explored. The literature on expertise was presented. The research on spirituality’s influence on physical and mental health and in the physical sciences was summarized. Spiritual development was examined from Fowler’s (1981) classic stages and from spiritual direction’s viewpoint. Finally, information on theory preference is noted. In Chapter three will begin by presenting characteristics of the study, overall approach and the role of the researcher. Data collection procedures will be presented. The chapter will close with a summarizing paragraph.
Chapter Three

Characteristics of the Study

Many authors have proposed spirituality is the core dimension of all personality (Burke, Chauvin, & Miranti, 2005; Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992; Ivey, Ivey, Myers, & Sweeney, 2005; Myers & Sweeney, 2005; Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000; Myers & Williard, 2003; Purdy & Dupey, 2005). This qualitative investigation seeks to understand counselors’ spiritual development and how it contributes to the likelihood they would address spirituality in their counseling work.

Overall Approach and Rationale

This research study was designed as a naturalistic inquiry to understand the spiritual development of counselors who have gained expertise in their field through professional practice for a minimum of fifteen years. Additionally, the study explored how the counselors’ spiritual development contributed to their willingness to discuss spirituality as it arose in their counseling work. A review of the literature indicates little research had been conducted on the spiritual development of counselors. A few studies existed examining how a therapist’s spirituality may influence his or her process.

An important component of this study was to gather information on the evolution of counselors’ spiritual development. Another aspect was how did his or her own spiritual development contribute to the likelihood he or she would approach a client’s spiritual issues when they arose in therapy. The initial question of the interview was open-ended: “Please tell me about your own spiritual development.” A second question was held in reserve until near the end of the interview hour. If the participant volunteered how their spirituality contributed to their counseling work, then the question was not asked. If the
participant failed to mention that aspect, then they were asked, “How does your sense of spirituality influence how you approach spiritual questions as they arise in your counseling work?”

The hope was that in-depth interviewing would generate thick description of each participant’s own personal spiritual journey and how that related to his or her willingness to be open to addressing client’s spiritual issues. Open-ended questions (Appendix C) were offered to encourage further exploration of the therapists’ development and expansion of topics such as their interpretation of the meaning of spirituality and how they find meaning in their own life. Individual taped interviews with expert therapists were conducted using open-ended questions and the narrative was analyzed.

Qualitative Study

Qualitative inquiry is specifically oriented toward exploration, discovery and inductive reasoning (Patton, 2002). All qualitative studies contain rich information and provide the potential for thick description of the phenomena being studied. Thick description goes beyond the mere reporting of an act (Glesne, 1999). Of the four main qualitative areas of research, (Tesch, 1990) this study focused on discerning meaning. Specifically, this phenomenological approach (Patton, 2002) focused on exploring expert counselors’ spiritual development, understanding the meaning they made of spiritual events in their lives and how spirituality may have influenced their counseling work.

Phenomenology is the study of lived experience and the ways individuals understand those experiences to develop a worldview (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The purpose is to describe the meaning of a concept or phenomenon shared by several individuals (Marshall & Rossman). First, the focus was on the counselors’ past spiritual
experiences and second, on their current spiritual experiences. The two narratives described the individual’s essential experience. The participant’s perspective unfolded as he or she saw it. Overall, the focus was on the deep lived meanings that spiritual activities and events have had for the participating counselors and to better understand how these meanings guide their actions and interactions (Marshall & Rossman).

The phenomenological perspective places primary importance on the social meanings people attach to the world around them (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Basically, people act toward things on the basis of the meanings these things have for them. The meaning determines the action. Meanings are social products that arise during interaction. People learn to see the world through other people. The process of interpretation involves the meanings participants attach to situations, others, things, and themselves. People are constantly interpreting and defining things as they move through difficult situations. The process is dynamic. How a person interprets it will depend on the meanings available and how he or she perceives and evaluates the situation.

The purpose of exploratory research was to understand what was happening in the phenomenon and pursue the salient themes, patterns or categories of meanings for the part, (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Through this exploration, the investigator pursued how the patterns were linked or connected with one another. Structural synthesis involved imaginative exploration of all possible meanings and divergent perspectives culminating in a description of the essence of the phenomenon and its deep structure (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Phenomenon reduction involved clustering data around themes that described textures of experience.
Marshall and Rossman (1999) postulate successful qualitative study depends primarily on the interpersonal skills of the researcher. Maxwell (1996) and Taylor and Bogdan (1984) concur the researcher is the instrument of qualitative research. Glesne (1999) encourages being especially aware of nonverbal and verbal behavior and its impact. The paramount interpersonal skills include the following: empathetic understanding of and profound respect for the essence of others and the ability to be an active, thoughtful listener (Marshall & Rossman). Patton (2002) indicates the participants will recall in the long run how the interviewer treats them and the style in which they live and act more than what they say about the research or who they are. He reminds us how people are treated affects how they treat others. Respect and empowerment breed empowerment.

Interviewing

Interviewing participants for this study provided an opportunity for the researcher to enter into another person’s perspective, be present in his or her life, and enter his/her culture to learn about him/her. Watching and wondering, while remaining open and attentive were core commitments of qualitative inquiry this investigator strove to maintain (Patton, 2002). The quality of the content of the interview is greatly dependent on the interviewer. This interviewer was attentive to the questions posed in the Appendix and used encouraging words to explore topics deeper and provoke conversation (Patton, 2002).

Case Notes

Glesne (1999) outlined very specific details for managing the qualitative researcher’s field notebook. Researchers should carry a field notebook and when
something occurs to them, they can write it down, striving for accuracy. The author’s suggestions included comments on being analytical and descriptive, writing only on one side of the page and leaving room in margins for late entries or comments. At the end of each day, notes should be reviewed with expansion or clarification added as needed.

Patton (2002) told researchers field notes are not optional. They should be dated, contain a record of detailed descriptions, and include direct quotes. The researcher should also record his or her own reactions and feelings to the experience, personal meaning and significance of what was observed.

Taylor and Bogdan (1984) concur on creating detailed field notes and documenting as soon as possible after every observation in a journal and recording exact quotes. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) recommended looking for key words in people’s remarks and especially to concentrate on the first and last remarks in each conversation. In the field journal, they suggested noting hunches, nonverbal expressions, especially striking gestures, and emerging themes. They reminded researchers, “If it’s not written down, it never happened.” Maxwell (1996) used the metaphor of failing to write field notes as the equivalent of Alzheimer’s Disease. Therefore, this researcher took copious notes, documented what I observed about participants’ interactions with others and their surroundings. On at least two occasions when the recording failing to grasp an important concept, I had field notes to confirm the essence of what was said.

**Analysis**

The definition and sequence of the intellectual process involved in qualitative analysis can be initially alien. The qualitative researcher becomes immersed in the data and the holistic perspective of the paradigm being explored (Patton, 2002). On-going
analysis was conducted on the preliminary results as transcripts became available and emerging themes arose during the research project. An open mind was kept to allow for new possibilities and discoveries which could inform and shape the final methodology of the study. Participants were informed it might be necessary to conduct another interview on the concluding themes to verify the results; however, additional necessary information was gathered through telephone calls and e-mails.

**Coding.**

Coding is a progressive process of sorting, identifying and classifying the collected data. In qualitative research, the researcher analyzes and codes his or her own data. In the discovery phase, the researcher identifies themes and develops concepts. Coding the data is a systematic way of developing and refining interpretations of the data to aid the researcher’s understanding of the subject matter. Glesne (1999) suggested colored highlighting pens, different colored inks for each transcript, or colored dots as options to aid the classification of data process. Colored inks were used in this analysis. Glesne (1999) noted no study can use all the data collected.

The data needs to be understood within the context it was collected, such as an interview in the participant’s personal office, where observations of personal choices in the room decoration and arrangement may be made versus a neutral setting such as a library. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggested developing a storyline to guide the analysis, possibly an emerging theory. Essentially, this technique is an analytical thread that unites and integrates the major themes in the data.

Units of information are defined as the smallest bit of information that can stand alone without further interpretation and has meaning for the investigation (Lincoln &
Units were identified in the transcription through narrative analysis. For on-going narrative analysis, each of the nine major questions posed to participants received its own colored ink. Each major concept or central idea within each question was labeled with a different number. These numerical codes were kept in a code book, which was started soon after data collection began. The code book was a valuable tool in identifying the emerging, evolving structure of the study. Another option might have been to enter individual units on color-coded 5 x 8 index cards with one notion on each card and only one card created for each quote (Glesne, 1999). The units would then have been divided into categories according to their content; however, this was not done, because it seemed more logical to stay with the codebook.

Each transcript was transcribed, double-spaced for easier readability, printed and placed in a three-ring binder according to its interview number. The numerical color codes were placed in the margin of each transcript. For the definition of spirituality question, each separate individual’s definition was copied electronically to a new document, labeled with the participants’ interview number and then analyzed for resulting themes.

The major classification categories emerged from the data and were arranged in clumps which indicated a logical order. The content of each category was similar as possible within while being dissimilar to other categories. The expectation was that regularities would evolve within the categories as data was analyzed and themes labeled. Transforming the data through combining the mundane organizational tasks with insight was expected to lead to thoughtful interpretation (Glesne, 1999). Creative insights frequently come from deep involvement with the material (Patton, 2002). Qualitative
writers seek imaginative connections among events and people, with imaginative interpretations of the entire process (Glesne, 1999). Good qualitative authors write from the heart as well as the head and are akin to other artists who create in their own medium.

Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggested cutting up field notes, transcripts, and other pieces of data, then placing them into separate folders or manila envelopes by themes. A variation of these suggestions was used. For the definition of spirituality question, each participant’s response was moved electronically to the same document. These responses were double-spaced, printed and used for analysis. Color coded numbers from the codebook were used to analyze the spirituality definition, also. The process of color coding each question asked of participants and designating a code number to each piece of data within their response was used for this study. The analysis was refined and under constant review to correctly and adequately inform the on-going process of the research.

_Triangulation._

Triangulation methods were used to strengthen the interview analysis by reviewing the interviewee’s vita for the type of counseling work he or she pursued, analyzing the case notes and observational notes on the setting and surroundings, and investigating responses on the demographic form. Personal documents such as the vita are first person accounts of aspects of the individual participants’ lives. They were most valuable used in conjunction with the interview and first hand observation. All three modalities were used to verify the essence of the later conclusions. Patton (2002) cited triangulation as a method to increase validity.

A researcher’s notebook was kept during the process of the study. Notations were made on the emergence of early themes and details needing resolution. Participants
responded to follow-up calls and e-mails with additional information, which was documented and filed. A file folder was created for each individual by the number of their interview. Into each folder went the contributing information on each person including the informed consent, demographic form, vita, investigator’s case notes and documentation on additional clarifying information.

Participants were sent their transcripts for review as well as their story from Chapter Four when it was written. Each individual was asked to if the transcript represented the essence of what was discussed or presented in the interview. Each participant responded and gave approval. Most participants had a few clarifications on spelling, such as terms in the Eastern arts or Hebrew words, dates or elucidating specific points they were attempting to make. One individual corrected his transcript and mailed it to me. When his story was presented to him, he disagreed with what he had said in the interview and wanted to modify certain statements in his story. This process took some time but eventually he arrived at a comfortable position on how his definition and faith could be described. Therefore, the process of sending transcripts and stories to the participants prior to inclusion provided additional validation for the triangulation process because the transcripts and stories were then endorsed by the respondents.

The Study

Glesne (1999) suggested we are attracted to and shape research problems that match our personal view of seeing and understanding the world. Thus, she encouraged researchers to tap into their passion subjectively to seek a topic appropriate to their interests. This investigator had a desire to explore the spiritual development of master counselors to attempt to understand how they evolved in this dimension of their life and
to determine how their spirituality affects their professional therapeutic work with clients. There was a lack of available research on counselors’ spiritual development leaving a void in the counselor literature on this issue. Lincoln and Guba (1985) encourage researchers to explore the unexplored. This study sought to investigate master counselors independent spiritual journeys, seeking to understand how they unfolded with the counselor’s interpretation of the events of his or her life. The investigator wondered if common themes would be found due to counselors’ unique ability to assess, reflect, and process the occurrences of their lives to find meaning.

Maxwell proposed that a philosophy of life is like research design: everyone has one but some people are more aware of theirs than others. Therefore, because a design always exists, making it explicit is imperative. The following paragraphs outline the design of the study.

The ultimate goal of this study was to understand the spiritual development of counselors. The study secondarily explored how counselors feel their spirituality contributed to their counseling work as spiritual issues arose with clients. Counselors are uniquely skilled in interpersonal relationships and adept at reflection, analysis, incorporating new information in to synthesize a better way of seeing, and an ability to find meaning not only in their own lives but in the lives of others. They are poised to be aware of their own spiritual journey and how they make meaning of their own life events. As cited earlier, research shows the prominence in the general culture of 95% believing in God or a universal spirit and 85% of counselors as spiritually oriented. Authors have indicated all individuals are spiritual beings. A long continuum of spiritual awareness
exists from those who are oblivious to a connection with all things, or dormancy, to a highly developed sense of connection that gives their lives great meaning.

Maxwell (1996) proposed that qualitative research moved through a sequence of steps while recognizing the importance of interconnectedness and interaction of the different descriptive components. The interactive approach had a flexible structure to enable it to accommodate new information and assessments within the study situation.

The investigator wondered if the research would discover enhanced spiritual development in participants who have had more life struggles with which to cope. The opposite could also be true with the struggles stunting spiritual development when enormous life obstacles occurred without adequate coping skills being present. Understanding the meaning participants gave to life events and how they continued to develop spiritually was a central focus of this study. The process they used to ascribe meaning to acts and events was closely analyzed. Maxwell (1996) suggested researchers let the topic lead them. Coupled with Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) “Expect the Unexpected” the process was an adventure of discovery.

Sample Selection.

The research project was conducted after approval by the Institutional Review Board. Based on the results of the pilot study, the approach was revised slightly.

The listserv for the Ohio Association for Spirituality, Ethics and Religious Values in Counseling (OASERVIC), a division of the Ohio Counseling Association, was utilized as an approach for seeking potential candidates for interviews. Approximately one hundred and seventeen professional counselors were current members of the organization. The query for the listserv is Appendix A. A minimum of ten expert
counselors were sought for the one hour interview for this study, with the study expanding as necessary.

Responding individuals were contacted to determine their appropriateness for this study. It was desirable to have an equal number of male and female participants to explore any possible gender differences in spiritual development. It was also deemed ideal to have a variety of religions represented with the participants. Potential candidates were scheduled for face-to-face interviews of approximately one hour at a quiet location convenient for them.

Patton (2002) specified no strict criteria to determine sample size. However, sufficient expert counselors emerged to be studied and only one novice professional with two years experience volunteered. Since the novice was of the same faith as another counselor with many more years experience, the younger person was not used.

Maximum variation sampling is most useful for identifying common patterns that emerge, which exemplify specific attributes or training matters related to the issue at hand, spirituality. The hope was for a minimum of ten persons to volunteer for further discussion and exploration of the topic of spirituality and counseling and the listserv query resulted in nine individuals. Due to four of the respondents being of the Roman Catholic faith, only two of them were used. An individual who had been a pastor and changed careers to counseling volunteered but was of the Lutheran faith of which a participant was already selected. With only five useable responses to the query, then the investigator turned to use snowball or chain sampling (Patton, 2002) to identify at least further expert therapists.
The investigator approached leaders and long-term members of Ohio Counseling Association (OCA) to identify potential subjects. The investigator inquired who the OCA leaders knew that exemplified professional, licensed, counselors with at least 15 years experience, who would be willing to discuss their spirituality for a research study. Ideally candidates would have developed a comfortable expertise with responding to their client/student’s spiritual concerns as they arise and would be agreeable to discussing how they went about that process. Contacting the leads received from OCA leaders resulted in three more interviews. To find a counselor of the Jewish faith, this investigator contacted a Jewish friend, which resulted in another candidate. Professional counselor friends working in rural areas provided the names of a few possible individuals who might be willing to participate. During the five week process, twelve viable candidates emerged and were interviewed.

**Role of the Researcher**

The researcher is the instrument in qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002). As a counselor with more than 20 years experience, the fact was evident through my counseling practice that individuals pondered their relationship to a higher power or greater existence. Many came with existential questions and struggled for understanding. Spirituality is inherent in the counseling process whether it is spoken or not. Taking a holistic approach and addressing the entire individual in the therapeutic process is important.

My belief is that all individuals are spiritual beings. In those individuals who are not active in a faith philosophy or set of beliefs, spirituality may lie dormant. A developmental process leads to spiritual awareness. Some take a whole lifetime to evolve
into a deeply spiritual being. Others are catapulted into a deeper relationship with their
Creator through a personal crisis or tragedy. Being spiritual is defined as the individual’s
connection to a higher power, which enhances the individual’s relationship with others
and their interactions in the world.

I did not receive any training in graduate school that would help me address my
clients’ spiritual needs in clinical counseling. I did seek training to adequately address the
spirituality component with my clients and individuals seeking a deeper relationship with
their God. I completed a certificate program in spiritual direction. I started a spirituality
discussion group with counselors and therapists that met periodically for nearly 10 years.
My background prepared me to do meaningful interviewing with master counselors who
may acknowledge a spiritual component in their therapeutic process.

I informed prospective participants in the initial contact that they would be asked
to talk about their own spirituality and its development from their perspective. Further, if
they had not talked about how their spirituality contributes to their work as the hour came
to a close, they would be asked to discuss how their spirituality contributed to their
counseling with clients as spiritual issues arose. Patton (2002) discussed the interviewing
stance of empathic neutrality as being one where the inquirer is perceived as caring about
the interviewee but neutral about the content of what he or she reveals. I planned to adopt
such a stance during the interviews. I was hopeful of finding possible participants from a
variety of faiths to interview, which would illuminate the questions being studied even
further.
Data Collection Procedures

The research question defines what is intended to be studied and the interview questions are designed to provide the actual data needed to understand the larger picture. Open-ended questions were developed, which were clear, succinct, did not shape or restrict responses, and permitted interviewees to easily continue talking to enlighten the research questions.

Demographics

Interviewees were asked to complete a Demographic Form (Appendix B) after their interview. The information contained in their responses was used to provide a background description of the participants. Each individual was given a pseudonym. Information requested included name, age, race, sex, ethnicity, years practicing as a therapist, personality characteristics that may contribute to their spirituality, theory preference, educational background, occupational background, religious/spiritual affiliation of childhood and present day and their current level of participation in their religious/spiritual activities.

Three of the first six individuals listed their MBTI type on the personality characteristics line of the demographic form and two of those were INFJ (Introverted, Intuitive, Feeling, Judging). I began to wonder about the possibility that this initial group of six had one third of their respondents in a more rare MBTI type. Thereafter, I asked participants what their MBTI type was and documented it in my case notes. A few of the participants hadn’t been tested for 20 years and were no longer certain of the accuracy or particular components of their type. As part of the follow-up e-mail or phone call to
clarify data, I sent them a simple, on-line assessment which gives an immediate Myers Briggs result (Humanmetrics, 2007).

The participants who took the test on-line, reported the final results to me and it was included in the data. Gathering each individual’s MBTI was adding supportive information for the triangulation verification of many of the personality characteristics listed on the demographic form.

Since all of the participants began speaking of their spiritual development by talking about their early childhood, they often revealed their birth order in their family of origin. A trend towards first-borns began to emerge. Therefore, those individuals who didn’t reveal their birth order in the face-to-face interview as their story unfolded, this point became a follow-up question which was asked later. Each participant willingly divulged their birth order.

As individuals shared their stories, three volunteered they had attended colleges or universities associated with a specific faith. Seventy-five percent of the participants gave me a vita or listed their education and work experience. I began to wonder about a faith base for the colleges of the remainder of the participants. Also, I became curious about how many of the graduate programs were CACREP. Thus for the individuals who had not already shared their personal university information, this became another inquiry that went into the follow-up contact.

*Informed Consent*

Each participant was asked to sign an Informed Consent Form (Appendix C). Interviewees were assured of confidentiality, and through the use of code names, their anonymity was insured. Permission to conduct audio recording was covered by their
consent. Each was informed of the question under study and that he or she will be asked for demographic information to provide a more comprehensive background to his or her personal descriptions in the research.

Interview Process

All interviews were conducted in a quiet location of the participant’s choice. Interviewing in the participant’s own work space or choice of location provided additional possibilities to observe the surroundings they chose and how they interact with peers and staff. The length of the interview was anticipated to be approximately one hour; however, the pilot study ran one hour and a half and could have gone longer. As the pilot study participant reflected and pondered her responses, there was a natural pause which consumed some time. Introverts tend to pause before answering, and that tendency elongates the interview time. The first participant in the research also spoke an hour and a half. For several of the other interviews, it seemed apparent, that the conversation could have continued much longer. However, due to the participants volunteering only for an hour, this investigator kept the remaining interviews to the one hour timeline.

It was necessary to contact the interviewees later to clarify a word or response or to follow up on additional information needed. This was done via e-mail and telephone. The interview transcripts averaged about twenty-five pages. The transcripts and the individual stories in Chapter Four were sent to the participants with a message that it was just being presented to them for their information. Comments were invited but they were not asked to edit them.

The interviewer’s role was to build a sense of rapport and trust, just as in therapeutic interactions, to allow the interviewee’s story to unfold. Encouraging the
individual to continue with sharing his or her story was vital to the collection of data for the study. During the pilot study, the interviewee was concerned that what she was saying wouldn’t be useable. All the material was valuable, and thus she needed to be validated for sharing her thoughts and views so that she might continue. Another role was to ask probing questions for clarification of specific points where necessary. During the pilot study, I used comments such as the following: Tell me a little bit more about that. How was that? Can you recall how some of those emerged or how they came about? How did that work out? How do you approach that in therapy – these topics? What would you imagine would open that up for you so you could really get a better picture of what it is you want? Would you feel comfortable talking about that a little bit? The actual research interviews required similar types of gentle probing with open-ended questions to generate adequate information on the topics being studied.

*Interviewer’s Notes.*

During the pilot study, I took nine pages of case notes. During the actual research interviews, I took many pages of notes with each participant. On several occasions, it was good that I had documented specific points in my notes, when the voice on the tape was unintelligible or pronunciation was difficult to understand. Taking brief notes during a session is a natural endeavor due to my years as a therapist. The process of note-taking did not seem to interfere in any way with the flow or quality of the interaction.

*Pilot Study*

The pilot study showed an expert counselor was able to reflect and dialogue about the meaning of spirituality to her, how she developed, and how she recognized and attended to spirituality in the therapy room. Through the remainder of the qualitative
interviews, identifying particular signposts on this developmental journey and commonalities in the spiritual process of the participants was possible. Several questions arose after conducting the pilot study. Are counselors better able to attend to their own spirituality issues with the benefit of their training in human dynamics and years of experience with clients? Are they able to more successfully navigate life’s traumas and difficulties to find meaning in the unexplained happenings of their life? Are counselors more astute to the interconnectedness feeling of serendipitous moments? The possibility was that counselors’ skill in interpersonal relations and their clinical experience do not aid them in personal growth and development, especially in the spiritual domain. Some counselors may have chosen not to attend to their faith development and are acutely unaware of possible connections and the meanings for their life. If the discovery was made that one or more of the therapists did not see themselves as spiritual people, this information would be noted in the results along with substantial background to support the findings and a possible interpretation. However, each expert counselor in this study had an active spiritual life. Please refer to Appendix E for the pilot study.

Conclusions

As a result of the pilot study, I was curious about specifically asking the interviewee’s definition of spirituality. I was also aware of a need to develop a few more open-ended questions to be sure to generate discussion covering topics of interest to the study. My overall focus for the study changed from asking the counselors if they used spirituality in their work to exploring their spiritual development. Posing a question about the interviewee’s view of the purpose and meaning for his or her own life and how he or she arrived at their current position would be interesting. Many writers such as
Frankl (2000), Myers, Sweeney and Witmer (2000), and Wiggins Frame (2003) have proposed the quest for meaning and purpose in life is a central force in human development and spirituality. Seeing where master counselors are on their spiritual journey to find meaning and purpose in life and whether they dialogue with the individuals with whom they sit during therapy about these topics will be interesting.
Chapter Four

Introduction

Twelve interviews were conducted with seven women and five men with work experience in the counseling field ranging from 13 to 36 years, with a mean and median of 22 years. Participants’ ages ranged from 49 through 62 with a mean age of 56 and a median age of 58. All have completed masters’ degrees in preparation for the counseling field, with four individuals attaining their doctorate degree, and two others completing considerable coursework toward their doctorates. The six who did doctoral work did so after working in the field first. All are licensed counselors.

The two major focus questions for this research were counselor spiritual development and how it contributes to the counseling work. Data for the analysis was culled from transcripts of the interviews, information on the demographic forms, vitas, case notes, and follow-up e-mails and phone calls to provide a triangulation of sources. Open coding procedures were employed, permitting categorization of ideas which emerged from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

There were six first order themes. The two overarching themes for this research were the participant’s sense of connection to God or their higher power and their relationships with family, friends and significant others in their life. The resulting connections and relationships often contributed to the creation of a sense of meaning and purpose in the participants’ lives.

Participants’ individual spiritual development stories, which are a synthesis of material from the transcripts, vitas, demographic forms, case notes and follow-up contacts, will be presented first. The two overarching themes will be thoroughly
explored. Then the first order themes will be reviewed, along with their categories. Quotes from the transcripts will be used to substantiate the findings. Multiple sources will be cited for each theme to provide triangulation of data sources.

**Data Collection Process**

A query was sent to the OASERVIC listserv for volunteers for this study. Eight possible candidates volunteered and five became actual participants. Individuals who volunteered were from the Lutheran, Pentecostal, Baptist, Natural Mysticism faiths along with four Roman Catholics. Due to seeking a wide variety of faiths and cultures, four individuals were not included because their faiths were the same as individuals who became participants. Snowball procedures were employed to network through professional counselors in the Ohio Counseling Association, netting three more interviews. To find a counselor of the Jewish faith, I asked a Jewish friend if she knew of anyone that would fit the criteria which yielded another interviewee. All the participants thus far had been clinical counselors, so another friend identified a school counselor who would meet the expertise criteria. All of the participants to that point were from large metropolitan or urban areas. I actively sought participants through further linking with counselor friends, who were working in rural communities, which produced the final two interviews. Although I had known of two respondents, none were friends, peers in work or school, or had any professional relationship to me.

All of the participants were Caucasian. No individuals of diverse cultures or races volunteered and although sought, none were identified who met the criteria or were willing to participate in this study. The final two individuals had slightly less than the 15
years expertise. They were included to create a wider faith range for this study. Ten of the individuals were clinically trained counselors and two were school counselors. My professors had originally encouraged me to consider including individuals working in faith institutions. Initially, I was reluctant to do this, thinking the dictates of the faith organization might strongly overlay the counselor’s freedom to respond to individual clients in therapeutic ways. However, the two participants who currently work in faith based organization added a richness and depth to the study by sharing their stories.

Interviews were conducted between December 7, 2006, and January 19, 2007, at the participant’s choice of location. This resulted in a large variety of actual settings and sites with participants representing three of the four corners of the state of Ohio, as well as the central region. The large metropolitan areas of Cincinnati, Columbus, Dayton, and the Akron-Canton area were acknowledged as well as a suburban area of Northern Ohio, and the rural areas of Eastern Ohio and Southeastern Ohio. Five of the interviews occurred in professional offices, five in private homes and two in libraries. Ten interviews were conducted during the work day and two in the evening.

Coding

A codebook was created using each major question as a category. The categories were color coded. Each new subcategory identified was given a separate number. Transcripts were placed in three ring binders, by number according to the order of the interviews. Color coded numbers were listed in the margins of each transcript to indicate the appropriate categories. Then I began assimilating the location of each subcategory, looking for those most frequently mentioned. Coding in this manner actually produced
too many separate classifications making the clear identification of themes unwieldy and voluminous. Another approach was tried. Categories were combined, fusing similar ideas and concepts into more manageable groupings. Information was aligned under the two main research questions and three major themes emerged in each area. It quickly became apparent that connection, relationships and meaning were mentioned by almost all respondents, which became the overarching themes.

Demographics

Demographic information was taken from the Demographic form, transcribed interviews, vitas, case notes and follow-up e-mails and phone calls providing clarification. Ten of the twelve interviewees presently participate in an organized religion. One individual practiced in each of these faith disciplines: Lutheran, Episcopal, Mennonite, Tibetan Buddhist, Baptist, Jewish, Church of God (non-Pentecostal) and Non-denominational. Two individuals of the Roman Catholic faith participated; one of whom is also a nun. One interviewee had been a pastor in the Pentecostal church for a number of years prior to becoming a counselor and changing to a non-denominational faith. One had been Presbyterian and left that church four years prior. The final individual described his faith as Natural Mysticism which he practices in a solitary fashion.

Five individuals kept the faith of their childhood: two Roman Catholics, a Mennonite, a Lutheran and an Episcopalian. The most commonly reported faith was Roman Catholic, with five individuals claiming it as their childhood religious orientation and two as their current religious orientation. One person with a childhood orientation of Roman Catholic became a Tibetan Buddhist. Another with the Roman Catholic
childhood orientation now calls his faith Nature Mysticism. Yet a third raised as Roman Catholic in childhood became Baptist and married a minister. The Jewish individual was raised by an atheist parent and an agnostic parent and had no faith base. The Church of God, non-Pentecostal individual, had been a Methodist in childhood. Please see Table One for a listing of participant’s childhood and current faith affiliations.

A wide variety exists in the occupational settings. Two clinically trained individuals currently work in faith-based institutions of higher learning, one as a counselor educator and the other as college professional staff. One clinical counselor is retired after many years in private practice and is contemplating a new career as a writer. Three clinical counselors work in private mental health counseling organizations. A clinical counselor who ran a women’s center for twenty years, now works part-time in a public social service agency and is a part-time university instructor. Two clinically trained individuals practiced for 15 and 14 years; however one is a currently a counselor educator and the other is part of a college professional staff.

The two school counselors work in vastly different high schools, one in a large metropolitan area and the other a very rural, farming district. One clinical counselor works in the prison system. Another clinical counselor is semi-retired while practicing privately in her home. After practicing for 20 years, another clinical counselor is now teaching college part-time and focusing on a new avenue in her life. Thus, three clinical counselors are semi-retired and one is fully retired. One school counselor will retire in June, 2007, and the other school counselor will retire in June, 2008. At that time nearly half of the population of this study will be partially or completely retired. Please refer to
Table 1

Comparing Religious Affiliations of Childhood and Current Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview #</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Childhood</th>
<th>Current</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Tibetan Buddhist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Mennonite</td>
<td>Mennonite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Episcopalian</td>
<td>Episcopalian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Bess</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>Nature Mysticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Judaism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight</td>
<td>David</td>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>Lutheran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nine</td>
<td>Esther</td>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>Not practicing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten</td>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>American Baptist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleven</td>
<td>Jesse</td>
<td>Assemblies of God – Pentecostal</td>
<td>Non-denominational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelve</td>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>Church of God – Non-Pentecostal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table Two for a listing of number of years in counseling work, current work position and present job status.

Five of the twelve participants completed their Master’s Degree at a CACREP university. Three of the four doctorates were completed at CACREP institutions. None of the doctorates were at faith-based universities. Five of the twelve attended a faith-based institution for their Bachelor’s Degree. Five of the twelve attended a faith-based institution for their Master’s Degree. Three of the twelve individuals are currently teaching college graduate courses and another three have done so in the past. Therefore, six participants of this study have been involved in some aspect of training graduate counselors.

Ten individuals self-identified as introverts and two were extroverts. Twenty-nine different personality characteristics were volunteered as associated with their spirituality. Only three different items were chosen by two individuals: curiosity, caring, and the Myers Briggs type INFJ. The remainder of the characteristics was mentioned by only one person and were quite diverse. Some of the contributing aspects of personality indicated were: generous, thoughtful, honest, nurturing, artistic, philosophical, quiet, positive attitude, openness, enthusiasm, sense of calm and congruence.

Eight participants were firstborns in their family of origin. All interviewees began speaking of their spiritual development by sharing information about their faith base and their families of origin except one. This one individual spoke of adult friends or mentors influence in her life during childhood instead of family.
### Table 2

*Number of Years of Counseling Work Experience, Current Work Setting and Work Status*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview #</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Current Work</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Private counseling agency</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Private counseling agency</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Private counseling agency</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Bess</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Public Social Service Agency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>And University Instructor</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Prison</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>College Professional Staff</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight</td>
<td>David</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>High school counselor</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nine</td>
<td>Esther</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Private practice</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten</td>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>University Instructor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>And Yoga Teacher</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleven</td>
<td>Jesse</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>University Professor</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelve</td>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>High School Counselor</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regarding how participants attended to their spirituality, eleven pray, eleven meditate, eight enjoy spiritual study, eight participate in organized religion and four mentioned retreats. Other avenues cited were nature, reading, Bible study, yoga and martial arts, Kung Fu. The time allotted by each individual on a weekly basis for attending to their spirituality had a range of 2 to 20 hours for seven individuals with a mean of 10.6 hours per week. The remaining five individuals simply made inclusive statements saying all of their life was related to spiritual practice, integrated with God or spirit. Please see Table 4 for a complete listing of spiritual activities and amount of time allotted weekly.

Regarding theory preference, five individuals indicated cognitive therapy was their chosen theory and two reported Rogerian. Eleven other theories were offered including Gestalt, Existential, Logotherapy, Jungian, Adlerian, Object Relations and Integral.

*Interviews*

Essentially, the participant’s stories reveal how she/he made meaning of her/his early life experiences, give a glimpse of how their evolution and how she/he chooses to direct her/his present day life.

*Interview One*

Aaron, 59, has been working in the counseling field for 36 years. He listed his theory preferences as Gestalt, cognitive, and logo therapy. The religious affiliation of his childhood was Catholic and he currently is a Tibetan Buddhist, spending between three to five hours weekly on spiritual activities. Aaron earned his Bachelor’s Degree in 1970 in psychology. In 1975, he completed his Rehabilitation Counseling degree at a
CACREP university. Additionally, he completed 3 years of doctoral work towards a counseling psychology doctorate and finished a 3 year program at the Gestalt Institute. The personality characteristics which he listed that he felt might relate to his spirituality were: disciplined, openness and curiosity. Aaron’s Myers Briggs Type is INFJ and he is the oldest of 4 children in his family of origin.

Aaron was interviewed in a conference room at the main office of the private social service agency where he works at a regional branch office. The interview lasted 1½ hours. Aaron stated he had been looking forward to sharing his faith journey in our interview. Nicely dressed in slacks and a blazer, Aaron arrived promptly on time. Soft-spoken with a gentle demeanor, Aaron is pensive and thoughtful regarding responses to questions. His good posture and peaceful presence gave no visible clue to his long term involvement in the martial arts field.

Aaron attended the Catholic church as a child with his Mother. He felt a close bond with her as they walked the few blocks to church. At age six, he told his mother he wanted to be a priest and she asked him why. He responded that he wanted to make people good. Looking back with adult eyes, he recalls having Messianic fantasies in 2nd or 3rd grade. Desiring to take on all the sickness of the world he would pray for this eventuality. This early line of thinking aligns with altruism, a key factor in his current Buddhist faith. In his early life, Aaron sees the seeds of his current life motto.

P. 1 I like ministering to people. I like helping them.

Aaron remained faithful and steadfast in the Catholic tradition through his teen years, even carrying the rosary in his pocket, praying it daily. During high school he did begin to read books about the historical Buddha, yoga and meditation. College brought
turmoil regarding conflicts between science and faith. A priest told Aaron that some Catholic beliefs such as the Virgin birth had to be accepted on faith. When he could not reconcile the differences, he choose to leave Catholicism. Aaron has been involved with meditation for most of his adult life and has had an interest in eastern arts and martial arts for 34 years. He sees parallel factors in both yoga and martial arts – raising of the energy, dealing with expanded awareness, meditation and deep feelings.

One highlight of his spiritual journey was spending a week at the Omega Institute in New York, studying under a Tibetan Buddhist master. Aaron was heartened to meet other spiritual seekers, several of whom had actually been to Tibet and studied there directly under the masters. Many Tibetan monks had been persecuted and killed in recent years by the Communists. Due to the threatening circumstances, many monks had fled their home country, scattering to many parts of the world. Travel there was dangerous and difficult. Aaron said he couldn’t go east, so east came to him.

In Buddhism, there are three vehicles or levels of studies, each based on a person’s motivation. Aaron studies the Tantra, which is the highest yoga, intended to prepare the person to achieve enlightenment in this lifetime. This enlightenment is intended to be for the benefit of all sentient beings. Sentient is described as conscious or capable of feeling and perception. Aaron sees a connection back to the same motivation stance he had as a youngster in the third grade.

Challenges to his current faith include being treated like a heathen for his beliefs by his Mother and sisters, who all became Baptist. Aaron stated they know he is going to hell, just because he is not like them. Although he is tolerant of their differences, he feels
totally negated by them. When they send him Christian cards and make
pronouncements about God’s grace when they are talking, Aaron feels spiritually raped.

Relationships are a very important component of Aaron’s spirituality. He sees
life as a web of relationships and everything is connected. Altruism is therefore a crucial
component of Buddhism and you need to put others first. Prayer is offered daily for all
sentient beings, wishing them the four Buddhist Immeasureables of happiness, freedom
from pain and suffering, having a mind that has never known suffering, and that they
know peace. Those who wish for other’s happiness bring happiness and merit to
themselves.

Lawrence Kohlberg’s (1976) stages of moral development and Carol Gilligan’s
(1993) extension of that research were discussed by Aaron. Aaron likens higher level
morality, as described by Gilligan to be akin to the Buddhist view of doing no harm. It’s
seen as immoral to cause harm. All of life is a web of relationships and we all affect one
another. The Buddhist concept of Karma means action and says each action will set in
motion some effects which touch other people. Everything is seen as connected. He feels
blessed when clients come to him and he can help them in some way.

There are four opponent powers in Buddhist teaching. A meditation partner
reduced this complex teaching to a mnemonic of the four R’s. Recognition, Regret,
Resolve, and Repair or Restitution are the simple words for more lengthy teachings.
These words relate to an individual’s actions or behaviors and are easily understandable.
To Tibetans, there is no sin, only regret. Another Buddhist teaching, as told to Ram Dass,
is to love everyone, serve everyone and remember God.
As an eternal student, Aaron always leaves class hungry for more, as if he can’t get enough. There is always a mentor, or another farther along on the journey than he, who has a higher degree of development. So, he continually aspires to higher levels of growth and knowledge. He remarks that there are great rewards to what he does.

*Afterlife.*

Buddhists believe in reincarnation and they believe in an unbroken lineage of teaching. A group of monks can certify that a certain individual is the recognized reincarnation of a former master. The process to determine if a child shows remembrances of a former life or recognizes former friends of the master is conducted by the group of monks. According to Buddhist beliefs, the same teachings that produced Enlightened Beings in the 14th century continued on by word of mouth from masters that passed down the information.

There is a period of Bardo, between death and re-birth in which there are migrating spirits. These spirits may not be highly developed beings and may be flush with their own little powers. It is believed these spirits can intervene in human affairs. So, prior to the practice of meditation, humans can say a mantra, which is a word of protection for the mind or purify the environment with protection prayers.

**Question Two – Definition of Spirituality**

Aaron defines spirituality as that core part of you that makes you feel a connection to everything. He described how he felt while looking at the Grand Canyon and feeling very spiritual while pondering all the layers of history displayed in front of him. He reports feeling connected to everyone, and desires to treat them with basic human dignity.
Question Three – Spirituality’s contribution to physical health and well-being

Meditation brings Aaron peace and lowers his blood pressure. It also facilitates the flow of Chi, which he defined as energy. Aaron believes you’re healthy if you have a good balance and flow of Chi. Martial arts are a practice Aaron anticipates doing for the remainder of his life. Further, he says there is no doubt that these practices benefit his health and well-being. He feels rejuvenated and then is able to be more instrumental in aiding others.

Question Six – Purpose and meaning in life

Aaron’s general life purpose is to bring peace not only to himself but to others.

Question Seven – Influences on career choice

In the 3rd grade, Aaron declared he wanted to be a psychiatrist and a ventriloquist. He thought he could grow up to become a shaman or priest. In secular terms, he saw the psychiatrist as having the high status of the priest. When he couldn’t be successful in some of the pre-med classes in college, he changed his aspirations to psychology and felt at home. He decided he just had the wrong name for what it was that he truly wanted to do. He likes working with people and ministering to them. He calls it helping them.

P.1 I didn’t want to be a psychiatrist really. I had the name wrong. I didn’t want to be a psychologist who thinks that they are going to do some treatment on this person and themselves remain unchanged. I want to be a counselor where I model and I risk and I’m willing to make myself vulnerable so that I learn and build and grow from each interaction, as well as the client. To be authentic and to be genuine, to be transparent, these are qualities that I wish to model and become. And to be unconditional in my positive regard. That’s basic Rogers, but to feel that so much that without words people come in to your presences and they just get it.
Question Nine – Spirituality’s contribution to counseling work

I feel blessed, when they come. I’m so happy that I can be where I am and they can be who they are and that I can help them in some way. . . I’m grateful that I have the skills, that I’ve developed them, live them, walk the walk and such. There are people that I come in contact with and I’m glad that they’re there and that we’re part of this dance.

Interview Two

Anna, 58, has practiced counseling for 15 years and was a case manager for 6 years prior to that. She graduated from a church-affiliated college for her bachelor’s degree and achieved her master’s degree in a CACREP university. Childhood religious affiliation and current religious affiliation were both listed as Mennonite and she spends eight hours weekly in spiritual activities. She is the oldest of three female children in her family of origin and her Myers Briggs personality type is ESFJ. Personality characteristics she listed that might relate to her spirituality are confidence, positive attitude and groundedness. Her theory preference was listed as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Solution Focused.

Anna was festively dressed in a colorful Christmas sweater with holiday earrings. Cheerful, friendly and upbeat, she was observed interacting with staff and peers in an equally affable manner. Her office was comfortably arranged with two chairs and a small end table arranged in a conversation area in front of a window. Bookcases lined two walls. A generous desk housed her computer and held numerous files and paperwork. Brightly colored toys and stuffed animals were in evidence on many surfaces providing testament to her practice of working with children. Courteous and professional, Anna was open and easy to talk to throughout the interview.
Beginning with speaking of how she was born into a family where spirituality was very important, Anna shared the story of her spiritual development. Growing up Mennonite in a home where both parents had been born into Amish families, Anna describes her family as conservative. They had a strong sense of religious commitment. She did not feel the families’ faith beliefs were forced upon her.

P. 2  “It was just our life.”

The community in which they lived was either Catholic or Mennonite. The schools were respectful of each faith’s special tenants. For example, schools avoided scheduling any activities on Sundays or Wednesday evenings, due to prayer services and fish was served on Fridays. Attending Sunday school from the earliest time she can remember, Anna was active in her church group which was very important to her. At the age of 10, she made her first commitment to follow Jesus, was baptized and began wearing a prayer veil to church. Faith was very much a central focus of family life. Anna recalls family life as filled with so much love and devotion. Altruism and service were strong themes which seemed to have become a part of the personal fabric of Anna’s life today. She recalls wanting to do something with her life that was giving.

P. 2.  Being a counselor is compatible with my beliefs. It’s a part of who I am. I could not compartmentalize myself. Each impacts the other. One reason I choose counseling is that it fits well with who I am and how I function – accepting and respectful of others.

There were aspects of her faith that kept her separated from other children such as not being allowed to wear shorts. Therefore, she couldn’t play sports. Halloween was deemed a pagan holiday and they were not permitted to participate. They did not have TV but many families were poor in her community and didn’t have TV either.
There was no teenage rebellion for Anna and she recalls no turmoil. With help from the school counselor, she earned a full scholarship for 2 years of college at a southern school based on a different faith. The concluding two years of her bachelor’s degree were completed at a Mennonite college. As a college senior, she met her husband, the son of Mennonite missionaries. When they committed to marriage they knew their life together would be based on service.

Health challenges created several different periods of physical crisis for Anna and her father. Once she nearly died but during the long weeks in the hospital, unable to respond, she felt a strong presence and believed she was going to be okay. Her father’s faith, as he faced health problems at the end of his life, never wavered and gave Anna an even greater sense of respect for him. A personal challenge included maintaining her thirty-six year marriage relationship. A professional challenge was transitioning to some administration duties in the workplace. Describing herself as a very relational person, keeping strong boundaries and a solid focus on ethics has been part of adapting to management duties. Anna is professionally trained as a mediator and found this beneficial with supervision and administrative duties.

Question Two: Definition of Spirituality

Reporting it this way, Anna believes:

P. 2 It is your core. Who you are. The central spoke in the middle that everything radiates out from – the heart. For me, it is my belief in God and higher power.

Question Three: Physical and Emotional Health

Believing that God takes care of her helps relieve her of carrying burdens alone so physically she is not tired. She feels an aura of someone who’s there to support and
sustain her. During periods when she believes when she is not as healthy spiritually then she is not as healthy physically or emotionally. This interaction is viewed as a holistic concept.

Question Six: Purpose and meaning in life

A sense of wonder was Anna’s first response regarding purpose and meaning in her life. Being hopeful and optimistic, seeing the glass “half-full” is another aspect. Gratitude is apparent in the form of waking up each morning glad to be alive. Her focus on life is positive.

Question Nine: Spirituality’s contribution to work

Anna believes her spirituality gives her a solid groundedness which contributes to a sense of confidence. Spirituality gives a sense of meaning to all that she does. She creates a safe, confident place where the client can do their work.

Interview Three

Ben, 52, has practiced counseling for 27 years. Earning a Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology in 1978, he earned his Masters Degree in Counseling in 1979. Additionally, he completed a Masters in Business Administration in 1987 and two years of doctoral work in Counseling in 1998-2000 at a CACREP university. His childhood religious affiliation and current religious affiliation were both listed as Episcopal. He spends approximately 20 hours per week in spiritual activities. Personality characteristics that Ben named as possibly relating to his spirituality were: humor, enthusiasm and a sense of wonder. Theory preference was indicated as Adlerian. Ben’s Myers Briggs type is INFJ and he is the 3rd out of 4 male children in his family of origin.
Ben was an agreeable participant, accepting the invitation to be interviewed at the last moment. Dressed in a white shirt and dress slacks, Ben had a pleasant, calm, easygoing demeanor. His soft spoken tone and attentiveness would seem to put clients at ease. A tall man, he was casual and relaxed in his posture and movements.

A few years ago Ben completed two years of course work for his doctorate. His daughters were becoming teenagers and he made the decision to be home more to spend additional time with them. He no longer has a desire to complete that degree.

Ben began his spiritual development story by speaking about his family’s relationships. He learned about spirituality through how his family of origin expressed love, solved problems and bonded together to deal with the challenges of life. Sunday school was an extension of that central core of spirituality at home. As one of four boys, Ben recalls a time when he was 14 and his father involved them all in a possible life change, asking if they wanted to stay in California or to have an adventure by moving to another, more rural state. Ben was flattered to have his opinion considered in making the family’s future plans. Key people involved in his spiritual development were his parents and maternal grandparents. Raised in the Episcopal church, Ben was an acolyte, a lay reader and a chalice bearer.

Ben has a focus on giving to the world, is into contributing, desiring to make it a better place. Retribution or having people do community service for restitution is basically just creating a zero balance. Citing the parable of the old man who planted trees that he would never be around to enjoy, some acts can be done just to help make the future a better place for others.
When practicing his spirituality, Ben sees two major methods of doing so. One avenue is through connecting with other people and another is through a sense of getting lost in an activity he loves. For him, this often is being alone in nature, enjoying the solitude and beauty of his surroundings and just being present in the moment. This description of being totally absorbed in what’s around him, sounds very much like the concept of flow.

Several years ago Ben’s parents died and he received an inheritance. With his wife, he discussed what they might use the money for. They thought about all the children needing adopted and those who have been adopted. Ben’s father was adopted and had many reasons to be angry about life. However, Ben reported him as being a wonderful, spiritual man. His father’s spirit shined through in his daily words and actions as well as his weekly attendance at church. Together Ben and his wife decided on an international adoption from a culture in an area where they had previously lived. A nearby agency assisted them. In less than a year, the adoption was fulfilled and another human being became a member of their family.

Ben is well aware of how some of his clients have found meaning in their life in the midst of turmoil and tragedy. He feels he has learned a lot from journeying with his clients and hearing their stories. Through just being present with the clients, they show him what they’ve been through and how they brought about their own healthiness despite awful things happening to them.

Question Two – Definition of Spirituality

Spirituality is seen as the inner guide or inner light that begins to answer the impossibility of chance being involved statistically in each unique human being existing
in this sea of beings. He feels as if he has a quest to find out what he is to do here. He wonders about how we can influence the lives of others and to make a geometric progression of how we affect our world.

Question Three – Spirituality related to health and well-being

Spirituality gives Ben balance and a sense of knowing whether he is on the right path or not.

Question Six – Purpose and meaning in life

Ben sees purpose and meaning as resident within him. That’s the connection in his eyes. Previously, he quested for purpose and meaning, then became aware of the knowledge within, of who he is, how he was made and what he’s done to make use of the potential or the possibilities given to him. So, purpose is within. Connectedness with others is very important to Ben. That purpose within him is self-contained and provides him with an awareness of the knowledge that he can enjoy a sense of satisfaction in the work he does.

We can make the world a better place. It doesn’t take a whole lot. A book I thought was interesting was Pay it Forward. Why do we do it? Because we can... to be able to help or to offer contribution, not because we need to or so someone will see.

Question Seven – Influences on career choice

A family move from Washington state to southern California challenged him to think about how to gain membership in the cliquish new area. He wondered about others, about moods and how they are determined. He pondered social and spiritual
connectedness and had many discussions on the topic with a good friend. This early contemplation about personalities seems to have contributed to a desire to understand and work with people.

Question Eight – Evolution of career

Originally, Ben saw himself as a rigid, theoretical practitioner, almost a technician. As he learned predominately from the clients he worked with, other therapists and families, he recalls attaining a sense of value and much more humility. Assimilating different theories with his own experience brought growth. Now, he feels he learns as much as he teaches when working with someone.

Interview Four

Bess, 59, has practiced counseling for 24 years. She earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Spanish in 1969, from a university associated with a religion. In 1975, she completed a Registered Nurse degree from a local college. Achieving a Master’s Degree in Social Agency Counseling in 1982 from a faith based university, she continued her education by completing her doctorate in Counselor Education and Supervision in 2004, at a CACREP university. Bess was the Executive Director of a woman’s counseling center for twenty years. Now she works part time as a family therapist and teaches graduate school part time at a faith based university.

Theory preference is indicated to be Rogerian. She reported her Myers Briggs Personality Type as INFJ and she is the oldest of four children in her family of origin. Personality characteristics which she named as possibly being related to spirituality were: sense of calm, faith people can grow and change and congruence. Both her childhood
religious affiliation and her current affiliation were listed as Roman Catholic and she spends 15 to 30 minutes daily in spiritual activities.

Bess met me in a small meeting room of the local library and we settled into a conversation nook for the interview. Attractively dressed in a winter white heavy sweater and matching skirt, her hair was cut in a stylish bob. A cold winter rain fell outside the glass doors as we began.

A willing participant, Bess began by talking about the faith of her family of origin and her story flowed easily. By her presentation, Bess appeared to be a responsible, stable individual, gentle in her demeanor but focused and attentive.

A faith filled grandmother was an important cornerstone of the family’s Roman Catholic faith tradition. A personal relationship with God was seen as important while growing up. Bess remembers always having a sense of a spiritual connection. Her maternal grandmother always had a close relationship with the parish priest and the church was an important part of their life, not so much the formal aspects but living out the faith. Spirituality was integrated into their lives. Extended family celebrations accompanied milestones in each person’s faith life such as First Communion, so family parties were a tradition on special days. Feast days in the church were celebrated. When people were injured or became ill, prayers were started.

As a Presbyterian, Bess’s father did not attend church with them and their family was seen as having a mixed marriage. At that time, Bess recalls it being a big deal. She felt very good about seeing him at the back of her church for her First Communion ceremony. The maternal side of the family was very involved in cooking and meal preparation for all the church occasions. Thoughts of the day-to-day connection her
family had with the church brought a smile to her face. She noted that if she were still in the area, she would be cooking for the church alongside her family.

Church was comforting. Since it was a small town, the family knew everyone. Church was a social network. People were very close knit – working and worshipping together. Bess always kept her faith, even through personal difficulties and challenges. The church had rules against birth control and Bess made a choice to follow her own conscious. She attended a Catholic university. It was a pleasant surprise for her to be required to do a critical thinking exercise instead of just the recitation of facts, like high school.

Life challenges provided opportunities for Bess to see how people make choices and that life can change you. A former college roommate had an abortion. Ten years later, the two women’s path crossed again. The other individual had four children of her own and worked in the pro-life movement and struggled with the emotional turmoil still present within her due to her earlier decision. Another college friend became an atheist but had a fake baptism, taking pictures in front of a church to mail to her parents.

Bess graduated from college, married and stayed home raising four children. Her second child was born with club feet and she recalls crying for all the disabled babies in the world. Her third pregnancy resulted in premature twins being delivered through emergency C-section. She recalled being concerned because a friend had died giving birth to twins just a year before. Most recently, Bess had the health challenge of discovering an unknown virus caused serious heart damage, resulting in dilated cardio-myopathy. Not angry at God for these incidents, she states it is just something that happened and she is dealing with it. She recalled the thought, “Instead of asking why me,
ask why not me.” She’d been healthy all her life and with the new diagnosis finds she needs to attend to self-care in a more diligent manner.

Earning a nursing degree to teach natural childbirth classes was a satisfying career for several years. When an opportunity arose at a woman’s center, she returned to school for training in counseling. She had decided she liked talking to people better than giving shots.

After twenty-nine years of marriage, Bess experienced a traumatic divorce situation, praying and agonizing for months. The message she received through prayer was that she had to do what she needed to do. She divorced. Returning to school again, she completed her doctorate in counseling.

Her first husband had mental health issues and was hospitalized many times. When two of her children reached their adolescent years, they also began struggling with mental health issues. She was always required to be the problem solver and the caretaker in the family and never experienced the option of being carefree.

Realizing the early faith that is given to you by your family is tested by life circumstances and challenged, then your values truly become formulated into your own. One of the beautiful things about spirituality, she believes, is the moral base that you have from which to discern the right path. Bess clearly feels her faith sustained her and that she would have ended up hospitalized herself without it.

Bess sees suffering as a part of life and people can come to recognize there is some meaning in this. She would like to see more recognition of the meaning of suffering. Having heard many stories of trauma in her twenty years of counseling in the field, Bess believes people do the best they can. She suggests individuals can pause to
reflect when they are going through difficult times and recognize the underlying meaning. What can be learned from the situation? What can be gained? Are changes needed? What is the situation telling me? Reflection on these topics can be fruitful. Once enlightened, then the person could make a choice to change to help them self. Struck by the behavior of Pope John Paul who wrote about the meaning of suffering, the Pope recognized suffering is a part of life and offered his suffering up for the people.

P. 4 I think having that better understanding about the mind, body, spirit connection. And that’s one of the things that I teach in my class. . . And people come out of it going, “Wow. I didn’t know all of this was connected. And so, getting that sense of being a whole person, in mental health, is so significant . . . helping to restore a sense of the mind, body experience and helping the person to discover that on their own what they need to do to feel like a whole integrated person.

Question Two – Definition of Spirituality

Bess sees spirituality as a personal belief in a power beyond herself and this world contributing to purpose and meaning in life. Spirituality is a faith thing. Spirituality gives meaning to death, too, because of her belief that she would be reconnected in some way to her loved ones who have gone before her.

P. 4 God is . . . if I could describe it, it would be more in my strength. I think I’ve been able to deal with a lot of life crisis in a strong way, which comes out more as a calm manner . . . of being able to handle it. And more of a comforting way to say it’s going to be okay. You’re going to get through this.

Question Three – Spirituality’s contribution to health and well-being

Due to her current health crisis, Bess recognizes she probably pushed herself over the years. Now, she is doing better self-care by taking naps, using her prescription medication, taking overall better personal care of her health and focusing more on family.
Spending time with grandchildren has been a pleasurable joy. Acknowledging that often in society and religion if you think about yourself, it is considered selfish, she had to actively work on that issue. By re-framing her thoughts and calling her acts of attending to herself as self-care, she refuses to think of them as selfish. She believes it is a spiritual connection for her to realize the positive focus of self-care.

Question Six – Purpose and meaning in life

Bess’s family brings purpose and meaning to her life. She reports loving her grandkids and just spending time with them. Work has evolved for her to part-time; however, she’s not ready to give it up entirely. She continues to teach part-time at a university in the graduate counselor program. She believes she is being led to do more writing. The relationship with her current husband is very important to her and she spends time sustaining their marital relationship.

Question Seven – Influences on career choice

As the eldest of four children, she recalls always being a serious child and helped with the child-care and family needs. The maternal women in her family role-modeled altruistic behaviors from teaching the immigrants English to making bandages for lepers in Africa. Bess believes she had those traditions in mind when she came to college and planned to become a social worker.

Question Nine – Spirituality’s contribution to counseling work

Spirituality definitely contributes to her counseling according to Bess, from the aspect of being hopeful and optimistic. She expresses the belief that people can grow and change. Thus some will surprise you. Focusing on preparing people the best that she can to face their life challenges, she recognizes that each person has free will. In the
counseling field, Bess believes it is very valuable for the counselor to be grounded and to understand her/his own beliefs while not imposing them on others.

Interview Five

Chad, 56, has been practicing counseling for 24 years. Achieving his Bachelor’s Degree in Religion in 1975 at a faith-affiliated college, he also completed a Master’s Degree in Religion at a non-faith based university. Completing a one year training program through the Gestalt Institute in 1991, Chad furthered his education by completing the Advanced Graduate Studies program in clinical counseling in 1995 at a non-faith based university. He reported his ethnicity as Finnish and Lithuanian and he is the 3rd of 3 children in his family of origin. His theory preference is Rogers and Jung, and personality characteristics which might be related to his spirituality were listed as INFJ (Myers Briggs Personality Type), curious, and skepticism. His childhood religious affiliation was listed as Roman Catholic and his current religious affiliation is Natural Mysticism. Regarding how much time per week he spends involved in spiritual activities, he wrote, “My life is infused with my spirituality.”

Chad has a vibrant interest in spirituality which he has explored through two religion degrees and a wide array of reading materials. We met for the interview in his book-filled study lined with many windows. Later in the interview, he shared that this was a favorite morning meditative location for him as he drank his coffee and watched the birds outside. Tall and wiry, there is a sense about Chad that he’s always exploring and seeking on the topic of faith.

Beginning the story of his faith journey by speaking of his family, Chad remarked that he was raised in a family of Roman Catholics. He had 12 years of catechism. He
desired to be a priest around age 13 or 14. At age 16, though he began to disagree with some church principles and essentially stopped considering himself Catholic. At 19, he started exploring other traditions, including reading eastern philosophies. In college, his path meandered through 3 ½ years as a sociology major and then paused his education before returning and designing his own coursework for a comparative religion degree. He began to read about Taoism, Zen Buddhism, astrology and works by Alan Watts. After graduation, he traveled west, returned to Ohio, married and moved to New England. Eventually, he ended up in Ohio working on his masters in religion, weaving counseling classes into the coursework. His meditation practices began in college and continued throughout most of his life.

In the eighties, Chad became immersed in Matthew Fox’s creation spirituality and gave sermons on the topic at the Unitarian church. Thomas Moore, Jim Hillman and the Rhineland mystics were also predominant influences on his adult spiritual life. It is interesting to note that both Fox and Moore were priests and many of the Rhineland mystics were from the Roman Catholic tradition. Their work is focused on living in the real world, connecting with nature and others, being reflective and aware.

Chad calls himself a private religionist now and his faith base is Natural Mysticism or Nature Theology. Remarking that he has looked through the supermarket of spirituality and made his choices, he cannot imagine his life without a religious perspective. He believes in Tillich’s notion of God as the ground of being. Chad explains the Ground of Being is the Emptiness that allows for the somethingness to be. He feels it is idolatrous to attach a name and thus limit God to a label. Attributes cannot be attached
to that which is nameless. The mystery which he sees as the source of all cannot be labeled. He cites the Tap Te Ching and a Rhineland mystic, Meister Eckhart.

P. 5 The name that can be named is not the eternal name. The way that can be wayed or walked is not the eternal way . . . Meister Eckhart called it the Godhead, to the god beyond god.

All is sacred - every thing, person and creature is sacred. We live in a sacred world. He believes that we have a lot of holy ground and we are all in the same boat together. Chad sees humanity as all are expressions of God and gravitates towards panentheism, which means all is in God. There is nothing that is not God. He describes God as eminent. Although Chad is aware some listen for God’s voice in their prayers or scripture, he listens for God speaking to him through the events and happenings in the world around him. He treasures the word faith which means a willingness to accept the world as it is presented to you without wishing it to be otherwise.

When asked how he conducts his life according to his faith, Chad explained that he has four guideposts. The four corners of the framework of his life are reverence, gratitude, celebration and wonder. The reference is held for life and all that he meets. The gratitude is for being here and being able to experience the wonderful mystery of life. Each morning he is in awe of the ability to have a comforting morning routine and go to work, so the appropriate response he sees for this gift is celebration. He attempts to savor life. Returning again to Matthew Fox’s writing, he likes Fox’s notion of the idea of different wells, but all the wells come from the stream . . . the same pool or pond or underground stream. Another metaphor he likes is the river of life and we whirl into existence for a brief period of time and we whirl out of existence. We come out of the source as a form and then go back into the source unformed without a trace. But the
substance of the form was still divine. Chad notes that he rarely articulates his
customs of faith with anyone and it’s something that he experiences more than
something which is a product of his mind. He sees it as a blessing. Chad orients his life
around compassion for others.

Suffering helps us to create soul from the standpoint of a particular perspective, a
way of seeing things. It’s seeing through things into the depth of things and it is in the
depth where meaning resides. The meaning can be just in the fact of its existence. He
does not believe in soul as an entity with a pre or post existence. He believes we create
soul by cultivating imagination.

Chad’s primary life occupation has been working in a prison. The population
often presents with depression. When he is consulted, he encourages them to explore
their depression and examine it, seeking meaning. Diving into the experience of
depression can enrich the life of the individual processing it. Chad will ask his clients to
spend a certain period of time daily being reflective and journaling about what rose to the
surface. Then the client is to put his thoughts and the journal away until the next day. He
believes that observing and exploring the process you are going through will prompt
healing and growth to occur naturally. He sees this as a part of the spiritual life – to
observe and recognize the divine capacities for healing and wholeness. The prison houses
some individuals who are so psychologically misshapen and morally malformed that he
believes no human agency can provide any aid for them.

The kind of individual Chad likes to work with is the one who is not getting out of
prison and has to construct or discover a meaningful life within those walls. From his
viewpoint, it’s a pretty devastating view of the future for those individuals. But it is one
of the most powerful experiences Chad has at work, to journey along with those who seek to construct a meaningful life when they know they are not going to go anywhere. It’s an epiphany of the state of radical wonder when he observes an individual has found a way to create a life with some significance. There is something about working with the shadow or darkness that is nourishing for Chad. He enjoys his work.

Chad announced he didn’t like Kohlberg’s moral development, nor Carol Gilligan’s work or Fowler’s stages of faith, because he senses a moral quality inherent in their work that suggests one stage is better than another. Stating he has never been comfortable judging someone else’s spirituality, he chooses not to be involved with hierarchical thinking. Living with depth is a concept from Matt Fox, which he sees as dovetailing nicely with Jim Hillman and Thomas Moore. Along with Tao Te Ching and Zen Buddhism, they have been predominant influences in his adult spiritual life.

Afterlife.

Regarding an afterlife, Chad stated he has no evidence of one. He feels considering the possibility of an afterlife is a distraction from experiencing the current life. He’s an adherent to Ram Dass’s phrase, “Be here now.”

Question Two – Definition of spirituality

Chad aligns his definition of spirituality with Matt Fox (Fox, 1980) and calls it a way of living with depth. Soul as a perspective is a particular way of seeing through things in to the depths. He interprets this as a way of moving into the depth of your life. It is in that depth where meaning resides. Again, aligning with Hillman, suffering is a way of making soul. Meaning can be just in the existence of something which comes into your realm of awareness. He finds his spirituality in these deepening experiences. Since he
prefers the deepening metaphors, he finds people become more engaged, more passionate, more attached to life by delving into the depths. He sees those individuals willing to take the plunge as embracing life more richly and deeply. In his morning solitary, contemplative period, Chad feels joined with God and the world. He believes we are all connected.

Question Six – Purpose and meaning in life

When asked what brings him purpose and meaning in life, Chad responded that just experiencing life and knowing that somehow it all fits, it’s all perfect in the moment despite the suffering.

Question Seven – Influences on career choice.

Chad was named as the number two contender out of a field of 77 candidates applying for a position which he saw as ideal. The post was to teach religion in a New England College nestled into a beautiful location. When the first candidate accepted the position, he picked up the local newspaper and looked at the want ads. The prison position caught his eye.

P. 5 There is something about the prison that I find nourishing. Something about working with the darkness, working with the Shadow. Somehow I’m fed in that context. I’m nurtured.

Question Nine – Spirituality’s contribution to counseling work

Chad believes we are all in the same boat together. Even working with the prisoners who are the most misshapen and twisted people he’s seen, he can find compassion for them because he knows they are suffering. Remarking that the first noble truth in Buddhism is suffering, Chad clarified suffering can be defined in many ways from agony to personal dissatisfaction with life. Everything that exists will pass. Being
able to acknowledge and accept that is a helpful way to be. He believes we all have a sacred duty to be compassionate and helpful toward one another.

*Interview Six*

Teresa, 62, started counseling in the 1970s and practiced more than fifteen years with breaks due to taking different job positions. Teresa earned dual Bachelors Degrees from a faith-based college, one in religious studies and one in music education. Continuing on for two Masters Degrees at a faith-based university, she earned one in theology and another in guidance and counseling. She completed her doctorate in Women’s Studies with concentrations in spirituality and literature from a non-faith based university in 1997. Her childhood religious affiliation is the same as her current affiliation: Roman Catholic. As a Catholic Sister, spirituality is a constant in her life and for the amount of time she spends each week involved in spiritual activities, she writes, “I see no separation – all is integrated with God at the core of my being.” On the line about personality characteristics which might relate to their spirituality, Teresa wrote INFJ, which is the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) for Introvert, Intuitive, Feeling, and Judging. Her ethnicity is indicated to be Euro-American/Caucasian. Regarding theory preference, Teresa specified she uses a conglomerate of approaches with listening skills, helping with insight, accepting people but pushing with key questions.

Meeting me in the lobby of her building at the college where she is employed as professional staff, students and facility greeted Teresa with smiles and casual words as she passed and she responded in kind. Teresa seemed genuinely interested in each person. We walked to her office where the interview was conducted, while sunshine streamed in the bank of windows. Her desk was on one side of the room and we sat at a table and
Teresa was curious about my research and willing to share her faith development story. Readily offering her vita and Myers Briggs type, Teresa helpfully volunteered other information to aid this study.

As a member of a religious order of nuns, she spoke of God as the center of her being and her conversation was generous with examples of how her faith lives out in her daily life. Teresa is one of two individuals in this study who had the unique perspective of not only being a trained, experienced counselor but also was educated in religion and practiced in that field as well.

Teresa believes her spiritual development began in her family. Raised Catholic, her parents were described as having a very committed faith. The family worshiped together at Sunday Catholic mass, said the rosary together and would pray before meals. God was an essential part of their daily lives. In the 7th grade, Teresa began playing the organ at church for daily masses. The masses were old Latin then and she was required to sing certain Latin parts of the mass. When it was her turn to be organist, she often got her sisters to come help her sing because she believed her singing voice was not great. On Sundays, she played and sang some of the masses until she graduated from high school. She recalls the women in the family, including aunts and grandmothers, particularly had a deep, committed faith. The females were committed to their families and to whatever else they were doing to build integrity out of their value-based system. Making the decision to become a nun immediately out of high school, she joined an order and went to a Catholic college, both of which gave her a lot of training in spirituality, and she continued to learn throughout the years.
Some of the greatest spiritual development leaps occurred during periods of dark or periods of light in her life. Opportunities for enlightenment and growth came during times of great tragedy, coping with problems, and also during the yearly, quiet retreats. Awareness of issues at both ends of the emotional spectrum provided opportunities for major breakthroughs over the years. So, it was both times of darkness and times of light that provided the greatest impetus for spiritual growth. Each year, the nuns are strongly encouraged to take anywhere from a 6 to an 8 day retreat. There are a variety of ways to do this: silent retreats, preached retreats and guided retreats. A form she describes as wonderful is a directed retreat where you meet with a spiritual director for 45 minutes each day and the rest of the day – perhaps 6 or 8 hours – are spent in prayer and contemplation. The contemplation time can be spent quietly in your room or out walking or sitting or whatever. Travel and participation in major cultural diversity experiences out of the country as well as within the USA were growth opportunities.

A breakthrough came for her when she was working on her doctorate and was required to do a project demonstrating excellence, which was seen as equivalent to a dissertation. The expectation was she would do something she thought would be unusual in her field. She chose to do a phenomenological study on alternative forms of spirituality that people in many tribal areas used. For her doctoral study, she actually worked with The Foundation for Shamanic Study and eventually trained a group of people in the methods she had learned. Her research statement was that throughout the ages, the shaman person was supposed to be helping their tribe as kind of a spiritual and mystical leader. Teresa’s contention was that through the ages and in various religious congregations, there were women who functioned as the shaman of their tribe, even
though they might not have received that name. Teresa of Avila, Hildegard of Bingen, and Catherine of Siena all had experiences which compared to some of the experiences in the work she did. For her study, she began with a group of approximately 15 individuals and eventually whittled this number down to a core group of 5, whom she felt were more intuitive. Teresa recorded each individual’s spiritual journey and tied it into Catholic spirituality because of what they had seen. In doing this study over a period of several years, she experienced major breakthroughs in her own spirituality.

An advanced spiritual technique is called visual meditation, which involves taking a Bible story from the New Testament story of Jesus. You let yourself fall into the story and see where the story takes you. The belief is that where the story takes you, is what you need to work on spiritually. It may take you in directions that the story doesn’t even go. This technique is one she has used with some of those who come to her for spiritual direction. When doing soul work, the individual lets himself fall into the same kind of space. The belief is that you actually may move out to gain knowledge which will help your tribe or your group that you’re trying to help or individuals. Catholics have a strong belief in the communion of saints and the help of the angels, saints, Mary and Jesus. Following a soul retrieval experience, individuals are expected to work in counseling as a good follow up. People have had amazing insights. She did not do this work with her counselees. Individuals were referred to her for spiritual direction who have asked her to work with them on the shamanic journey.

Afterlife.

What exists beyond death is a major question for people at a certain age. When faced with major physical problems, they’ve got to find a way to move from intellectual
thoughts to grappling with the emotions and issues of the heart. When their faith tradition believes there is life beyond death, then they can begin to see death as a doorway into a better life in which there is a loving, compassionate God who is just, not condemnatory.

P. 6 A God who is who says, “Yes, you made some mistakes and maybe these are the implications of it. But there are a lot of good things you did. Here are the good things you did.” . . . So anybody who comes to me, I’ll say, “God loves you. But let’s try to make better choices. I’ll tell them, some of the choices are not yours. Would you blame your 8-year-old daughter if she was sexually abused by an adult male? Then why are you saying it’s your own fault? Why would God blame you? If humans would say, “My God, I wouldn’t blame you for that.” Why would God blame you? If they can get past God not blaming them sometimes they can get to a higher state and recognize it was not their fault.

When Teresa prayed for people in the Oklahoma bombings a number of years ago, she had this sense that spirits were being torn and not able to let go because they had young children. She recalls praying that they would turn to the light and notice the light is sending them love and warmth. She’d pray for them to just let the light love them. These thoughts come from her belief that love and light are energy, which comes from God.

Question Two – Definition of spirituality

Teresa states simply that God is love. Love, light and prayer are all seen as energy by Teresa. For individuals who don’t necessarily believe in God, she’ll use Carl Jung’s image of the collective unconscious to show a way that a deep connection could be made through which energy of some kind might occur. Her belief is that energy is rooted in God. Teresa suggests the major question to ponder is “Will I let God in?” Can the individual accept that God is the very core of all life? When teaching world religion or
Christian scriptures class, Teresa would tell the students they could never be any closer to God than they already are.

P. 6 God is the very core of your life and being. Our task here is more about becoming aware of that and whatever tools you can use to help you become aware of that then that’s up to you. Even if you are not sure that you believe in a God then if there is something like nature that shows a beautiful splendor of the great creator or even something like the miracle of an egg and sperm becoming someone like you and me. The difference between you and me right now and somebody who is planning a murder, isn’t in terms of whether God is close to us or to them but how have we responded to that fact that God is the core of my being. It’s not that God loves that person less. It’s not that God does not love somebody like that. It is our awareness and cooperation with God’s love.

Question Three – Spirituality related to physical and emotional health

Spirituality is seen by Teresa as enhancing her mental and emotional health and contributes to her well-being. Being post-menopausal contributed to adding extra weight to her body, with which she feels dissatisfied and continues to struggle with. Jokingly, she said she has some questions for God when she gets to the other side. She has promised her friends to ask God why it is that heavy people tend to gain weight during stress and crisis, while thin people tend to loose weight.

Question Six – Purpose and meaning in life

Teresa finds purpose and meaning by bringing the love and peace of Christ into the lives of people she works with, regardless of what she is doing. A simple defining statement for her is that the love of Christ impels her. Having been a music teacher, music is an important part of her being and frequently she awakens to find a song in her head. Sometimes in counseling, she will be sitting and talking with someone and a song will pop into her head which will be an insight into how to deal with the individual. Surprisingly, her two favorite songs are not directly from the Catholic tradition. One is
from an old movie “Goodbye Mr. Chips” that was titled “Did I fill the world with love my whole life through?” The other is a popular Beetle song from the 1970s, “Let it be.” At the time the song was popular, she thought the beautiful words referred to the blessed Mother speaking words of wisdom, “Let it be.” To this day, when she hears that song in her head, she knows that she needs to sit back and see what unfolds, not to say something or take any action until it is clear. Years later, she was discouraged to discover the song was about marijuana, but her original understanding of the meaning of the song is what still instructs her from time to time.

Question Eight – Evolution of Therapy

Beginning to counsel in the 1970’s, Teresa recalls being much more Rogerian then. As a counselor coming from a spiritual perspective, Teresa believes she helps clients to feel safe by appropriately loving them as they are, whatever they say, whatever they do. Listening to the client and then asking questions will help the client to achieve a deeper perspective on themselves. Tending to return to the book of Genesis in the Bible, she notes it says all God created is good. So, if there is evil present, it is because the individual made choices. More often, it’s an example of choices coming out of acting out of emotion or not thinking about the impact. One of the individuals who influenced her during her doctoral studies, spoke of spirits of the deceased which were not settled nor at peace, perhaps because they didn’t have a faith to lead them. They would work to discover who loved this spirit and would help the person make their way to peace or lead them to the light or to God.

Through insight, she began to recognize in the early years there were a lot of people who just wanted to be saved without doing the work. Teresa recalls the
ponderings of an educated friend who suffered a lot of trauma in her life. The friend wondered when will clients stop blaming their mother, start to take responsibility for their own choices and begin to do something meaningful with their life. Teresa sees some merit in the friend’s advice. Recognizing you can offer five people what they need, who will not take the steps they need to get well. Occasionally she has seen miracles happen, but most of the time she believes the miracle happens because you do the things that you need to do and something shifts inside so healing can begin to occur. Essentially, miracles happen because people do the work they need to do.

Question Nine – Spirituality in Counseling Work

Teresa did counseling at a Christian family center where individuals did not have to be Catholic to receive services. She had to disclose to her counselees that she was a Catholic sister, which then often created a freedom for them that they felt comfortable talking about spirituality. She did not initiate the conversation on spirituality. The counselee had to introduce spirituality, and then they could move forward with the issue. Very often it seemed that counselees desired spirituality as the link they needed.

Having studied and taught the general topic of Christianity, she has also studied different world religions. Regardless of the individual’s faith base, if they chose to talk about what was going on spiritually in their lives, then the counseling could proceed because Teresa was knowledgeable on the topic. An example of a faith concern was when people would offer their belief that if they had enough faith in God then they wouldn’t be upset over the issue going on in their life. Teresa would proceed with the fact that we are humans – mind, body, soul and connection with God and others. She would explore their belief about God and God’s expectations for them. Individuals who
had been sexually abused, perhaps by a pillar of the church would often reject
religion and God because of their trauma. Through building trust in their relationship,
Teresa would work to get to the point where just one breakthrough would occur on the
topic. Then she would ask if they wanted to explore it further and see where it goes.

One individual with a cancer diagnosis was struggling with a person in her life
who kept telling her that their faith tradition believed she didn’t need medical care, that
God would heal her. The cancer patient was very uncomfortable with that and Teresa
immediately affirmed it. With a chuckle, she cites an old Middle Eastern saying, “Trust
in God but tie up your camel.” Another way of saying that is God helps those who help
themselves, so you do what you need to do and also have God support you.

Individuals who exist in state of shame become immobilized and cannot move
forward with choices that will aid their getting well. She found that if the individual
could acknowledge that they as a parent wouldn’t blame someone they cared about for
the particular incident, then they may be able to see God doesn’t blame them. Perhaps
they can conclude they should not be beating themselves up and would move forward to
take the needed steps to make decisions and move toward health.

It is Teresa’s belief that healing always occurs, sometimes just not the healing
they want. Each individual must first decide that they want to get well, then secondly,
they can proceed with the steps needed. Recalling an incident where a troubled woman
cought her in the hall near chapel and told her of a new diagnosis of breast cancer,
Teresa’s response was a surprising one.

P.6 Normally, I would have been “Oh, my, how horrible. Oh, my God.” But
out of my mouth . . . and I thought this was kind of like what I call the
hand of God hitting my back. And this sometimes would happen in
counseling, too. Out of my mouth came the words, then you have to choose whether you want to live or whether you want to die.” And it just shocked her to the core so much. Then she began to realize that she did have a lot of those issues. It wasn’t my words . . . she got outside help and did a lot of the work she needed to do with the issue of do I want to live or do I want to die. She just passed the five year mark.

In general, Teresa reports that her training, experience and continuing education helps her to know what to do in counseling. However, every once in a while what she thinks she should do changes 180 degrees. Then she figures it is God working through her. A majority of the time in counseling, there is something that rises in Teresa which she feels is like the Spirit offering her the question that needs to be asked or suggesting the place to investigate. Occasionally, she will pray to God when she has no idea what to do at a certain juncture and asks that if God wants something to happen, then please allow it to happen.

Interview Seven

Claire, 58, is now retired from her counseling practice, after 25 years in a variety of settings, most recently private practice. Having earned her Bachelor’s Degree in Social Work, Claire also completed a Master’s Degree in Psychological Social Work and is licensed as an LPCC. In 2002, she finished her doctorate in Human Development and Family Science at a non-faith based, CACREP institution. Her choice of theory preference is object relations. For personality characteristics which might relate to her spirituality, Claire listed thoughtful, kind and open. Regarding her Myers Briggs Personality Type, she is a MBTI Introvert, Intuitive, Feeling and Perceiver (INFP). She is the oldest of 4 female children in her family of origin. Childhood religious affiliation was
listed as none and current religious affiliation was Jewish. She sees all of her life involved with spiritual activities.

Claire met me at the door to her lovely Frank Lloyd Wright style home situated on a shady, treed lot. We settled into easy chairs in the main living area for our interview surrounded by bookshelves full of texts on several sides. A wall of floor to ceiling windows allowed the bright light to drift in. Claire is retired from twenty five years of private practice doing clinical counseling and enjoys her current, active involvement in her faith and a hobby of food preparation. Soft-spoken and pleasant, she tends to insert humorous little thoughts or insights into her conversation that make her smile gently. Casually dressed in jeans and a turtleneck, with short hair, Clair appears trim and fit.

Claire begins to share her spiritual development story by talking about her family. Her father was an atheist and her mother was an agnostic. Claire chuckles as she reports her rabbi’s comment that it was an interfaith-less marriage. The maternal grandmother did influence her mother to send Claire and her sister to Sunday school for awhile. The two young girls walked the few blocks to the Methodist church together. She recalls that at some point, church teachers wanted the children to begin taking some kind of classes which would result in a ceremony where they would become Christians and church members. Claire boldly spoke up and said she wasn’t going to do that because she didn’t believe in that stuff. Everyone else went on with the classes and went through the ceremonies. Surprisingly, Claire’s mother didn’t say anything about her spiritual decision, but asked her why she always had to be so different from the other children. As an adult, she recognizes that her refusal to commit was a decision to just be firm and not
pretend in front of God to believe in something which she didn’t. Soon afterwards, the girls were not made to go to Sunday school any more.

There was no religion in their home whatsoever growing up. Christmas was celebrated but it was Santa Claus and gifts. Easter was acknowledged, although it was about getting a new dress and the Easter bunny. Spiritually, the holidays held no meaning for Claire.

In high school, she began reading about existentialism and began to think of herself as on the continuum between atheist and belief in God at the agnostic standpoint. While working on an art project after school one day when she was 16, her Jewish art teacher began talking with her about faith and loaned her a book on the history of Jews. She read the entire book at home and started thinking that was what she was like and that she should have been Jewish.

In college she trained in social work, and then went on to get her counseling licensure. Claire married, had children and was quite busy for a long time when she had no time to think of spirituality. During that period, she was more interested in relationships, psychology, humanism and philosophy but occasionally dipped into reading books on Judaism. In 1981, she gave birth to a daughter who died two days later. This unfortunate happening re-vitalized her spiritual searching and questioning at a much deeper level than it had been on before.

When she turned 50, she happened to mention to a friend her interest in the Jewish faith and he said she should speak to his Rabbi. She’d always had Jewish friends and often spoke to them of her interest and they would just loan her books. But this time was different and she told her friend she wasn’t ready yet. Upon returning home and
pondering that she had been thinking about this for 34 years, she did call her friend, said she would like to speak to the Rabbi and made an appointment. At the initial meeting, she just said she just thinking of converting and wasn’t ready yet, so the rabbi agreed to study with her. At the next meeting, she brought a full list of all the books she had read and he remarked that she had read as much as many rabbis he knew. She made the decision to convert then and the date was set for a few days away. Several months later, she wanted to do the rest of the conversion and had a Mikvah, which was immersion in a body of water with prayers and sacred readings. Since that point in time, Claire has become quite active in her synagogue. She completed a two year training program on Judaism at a special school.

Claire’s husband did have a childhood faith but only rarely attended church services during their marriage. He began attending synagogue with her, learned the Hebrew chants and made the decision to convert about one year ago. On their 25th wedding anniversary, they had a Jewish wedding, at their home, with all of their friends present.

In the past year, Claire, her husband and a group of 60 or 70 people separated from the synagogue and began to start their own. Renting a room in a local church, they have Friday evening services once a month. Each Saturday morning, the Torah passage is read for that week followed by study and discussion. A full program of holy day services were carried out this year. All the holidays were celebrated together and there are social gatherings and dinners together. They often do meditations as a group or attend adult education classes somewhere in the city. The group is studying how others have formed their own synagogue. Especially interested in the social action committee, Claire is
active in it, as well as being the newsletter editor. Claire’s deep connection with people of this faith group is evidenced in her declaration that she really loves her group. She’s even entertained the idea of becoming a rabbi but with two years of college Hebrew required prior to beginning the program, then five years for the actual training, she realizes she would be 65 when she completes the program. Five years ago she completed her doctorate with a qualitative dissertation on individuals converting to Judaism.

Afterlife.

A rabbi that taught Claire at the Milton Mini-school believes in an afterlife. Hoping he is right that something will continue, she is aware that Judaism is mixed on the topic. A smorgasbord of different beliefs exist, with some believing in reincarnation and some thinking once you die, you are just gone.

Question Two – Definition of Spirituality

Claire began by describing experiences she had in nature when she would have a feeling about a life force that is in each person. But as she began to move more toward a belief in God, she realized it was more than just being alive, there was a transcendent quality to it. She began experiencing a connectedness to other people, to the world, to something more than that. Her sense of God has to do with this life force.

Question Three – Spirituality and Physical and Mental Health

Tending to her health is a normal part of Claire’s life with walking five times a week and watching her weight. Claire rarely eats meat and with her husband being a vegetarian for 32 years, they do not cook meat at home and seldom eat it away from home. Claire feels there is a spiritual aspect to food choice and preparation. Within the
last 7 or 8 years she has been more health conscious and acknowledges there probably is a spiritual component to that dimension, although she has not pondered the issue until now. There is a sense of peace that she enjoys just being in relationship with people she feels in sync with and again in nature.

Question Five – Satisfied and fulfilled with life

Since she retired, Claire feels great and is really contented with life.

Question Six – Purpose and Meaning in Life

The Hebrew word Tikkun olam means repairing the world. To Claire, this clearly translates to social action and the work she is doing with her group, serving food at Ronald McDonald house, preparing a Christmas meal for the workers at a Jewish nursing home. Additionally, connections and relationships are crucial to her. She desires to help others even in her day to day interactions and to allow others to help her, which helps them.

Regarding the many years of her counseling practice, Claire found the work fulfilling and meaningful. Often there were challenges, sometimes boring, sometimes fascinating, but she found it to be a good and interesting part of her life. But now she is glad it is over, may never want to do it again and is relishing her retired status and what the future will bring.

Claire believes God gave her some talent in the area of writing. An avid reader from the age of 12, she has become very familiar with words and how to use them, but wants to move away from the diagnostic therapy way of thinking she has been doing in her practice for numerous years. Additionally, she’s trying to move from the therapist’s stance of listening, reflecting, thinking, making comments to help people think a little
differently or offering interpretations to learning to speak and interact in a different manner.

P. 7 In my life, I’ve spent the first 50 years listening and taking in and am still doing that. But now I’m starting to be more ready to sort of make interpretations or say something. I’m starting to be ready to say something in my life, too.

Question Seven – Influences on career choice

Claire saw a counselor herself when she was 16 due to her parents pending divorce and found the experience very helpful. She began reading psychology then and started writing. Both aspects have been a prominent interest throughout her life. Initially, Claire was torn during her undergraduate years regarding whether to pursue a creative writing or an English major versus a mental health career. The later focus was her primary one but at the time, she experienced some initial turmoil over wanting to use mental health practices ethically. She chose to get a bachelor’s and master’s degrees in social work and became licensed in that field as well as counseling.

Question 9 – Spirituality’s Contribution to Work

Everyone is created in the image of God which makes them have some worth in Claire’s eyes. She sees a spiritual basis to being able to see something worthwhile in everyone and to build on that. However, she notes that some people are literally so damaged that they have nothing to contribute. Open to prayer in sessions, she reports praying once with a client.

Interestingly, Claire reports that doing therapy is like a meditative experience for her and she feels a sense of spiritual connectedness. When doing therapy, she felt like she entered into a different state. Now she notices a similar state sometimes with friends but
notes she’s not being a therapist with friends. She reports people often get the idea that she is more spiritually developed than she is aware of, because she never belonged to a spiritual institution until 8 years ago. She does believe that you can be spiritual and not be a part of an institution.

The concept of a meditative state sounds very much like the concept of flow. Saying she consciously has to slow down to pay attention to God for this spiritual connection to happen, Claire seems to be saying that’s one way she focuses on God.

In her ponderings about the Holocaust and how people could have committed those crimes, she has a sense that some people grow up with little connection, who feel nothing and there is no spiritual or emotional connection. When they’ve been damaged with much of the humanism driven out of them, it’s almost impossible to reach those people.

*Interview Eight*

David, 59, has been a school counselor for 36 years. He earned two Bachelor’s Degrees, one in Education and the other in Comprehensive Social Studies in 1970. In 1972, he completed his Master’s Degree in Guidance and Counseling. All of his degrees are from a non-faith based institution. Childhood religious affiliation is the same as his current religious affiliation – Lutheran. David is the oldest in a family of four siblings in his family of origin. For personality characteristics which might relate to his spirituality, David listed generous, caring, thoughtful, and honest. His Myers Briggs type was given as ISTP, but he’s not altogether comfortable that it truly reflects his personality accurately. For theory preference, he wrote, “Spirituality is our relationship with God and with others. It is how we respond to what we are called to do.” On the inquiry as to how
much time he spent weekly involved in spiritual activities, he wrote “Hard to say – so
many things happen which I consider spiritual.”

Chatty and friendly, which David described as very uncharacteristic of himself, it
seemed apparent spirituality was a topic about which he loved to speak. Casually dressed,
with gray hair, he was animated about faith and his relationship with God. We met in the
living room of his home, where the Christmas tree with the family train circling the base
was still the dominant feature. His wife was present in a nearby room and had also
exhibited interest in the topic at hand.

David’s parents created a faith structure for their family that closely united them
with their faith and church community. Becoming busy with church activities at an early
age, David continues to be quite active, holds leadership roles and has a seat on the
church council. Throughout his life, he remained steadfast in his faith and never wavered
from the path of his early years. After thirty six years as a school counselor in the same
institution, a large metropolitan high school, David is planning to retire at the end of this
year.

David began by speaking of his family of origin and how they fostered his
spiritual development. He reports them all as being very devoted with prayer, Bible
reading, Sunday school, church services on Sunday and Wednesday evening services
during Lent and Advent all a part of their family life. The church was a hub of activity for
the community, often hosting fun family activities for the afternoon or evenings. During
childhood, David belonged to the Luther League, the youth group at his church. He never
wavered in his faith and attended Lutheran campus ministry throughout his college years.
When he met his wife, a Catholic, they began a practice of attending one of their church
services one week and the other the next. They have maintained this habit of alternating churches throughout their long marriage.

Many examples of events and people who contributed to his spiritual development were offered. He recalls attending a Billy Graham Crusade at age 16 where he did feel called. Working with people who have a sense of God and what God means in their lives, provided support for him and reaffirmed the idea that God is at work anywhere and everywhere.

Both grandfathers loved to discuss the Bible and what the Bible meant and engaged him in those conversations at an early age. As he understands it, there has been a strong family Christian faith from his great-great grandparents on down. All were very strong German Lutherans with a lot of pride in their “German heritage as well as commitment to the faith. David has continued this historical family pattern by continuing to love to dialogue with friends, his Sunday school group and others about the historical Bible and Biblical meanings. He enjoys reading historical Biblical fiction. His parents were attentive to the faith growth of their children, always ascertaining they went to services or watched them on the television if ill on Sunday. When parenting their own children, David and his wife continued the faith-filled family traditions passed onto them and had many family-oriented activities such as the Advent wreath and Lenten activities. Now they see their children beginning to do these traditions and activities in their own families. David notes that his youngest daughter cherishes her great grandmother’s Bible, having read it completely and pondered the notes her great grandmother made in the margins.
Regarding prayer time and connection to God, David will often sit and picture God sitting across from him, carrying on a conversation. He will dialogue about why he is doing something particular in his life and ponder whether it is the correct path for him. He also pauses to pay attention to and reflect on what he calls the still small voice that may be offering him guidance. As a youngster, he would love being in the woods, just listening, feeling God’s presence and being in relationship with God. Definitely viewing his relationship with God as personal, he often compared his parents and God, reflecting on whether he had been as attentive as he should be.

Their Lutheran church recently did a gifts inventory and he discovered he had five strong gifts: Faith, Music (vocal and instrumental), Giving, Writing, and Service. He was surprised and pondered the results before acknowledging they must be right.

Struggling with why suffering occurs, he finds it one of the most difficult topics about God to comprehend. He doesn’t believe God wants us to suffer. But he hears other people say we are supposed to suffer. However, David believes God suffered for us so we didn’t have to go through these things. He wonders why he is healthy and other people are not. He doesn’t believe it is related to the depth of your faith commitment.

At the conclusion of our interview, I asked David about the concept of God’s gift to us of free will and how that entered into his concept of suffering. He noted he doesn’t believe God controls everything and that humans do have decisions to make which affect the way we do things. He returned to his earlier idea of metaphysics and cause and effect, like a pebble being tossed in a pool that creates on-going ripples. He feels there is disharmony in the world which contributes to existing illness and sickness.
Question Two – Definition of Spirituality

Immediately, David reports spirituality is your awareness of your relationship with God and God’s direction and purpose for you in life. He believes God is behind everything. He is aware some individuals deem spirituality as your awareness of your relationship with the forces of nature. When he was a child, he believed you had to be Christian to be saved. He was struck by the fact that Jesus saved us through his actions. He sees that Hindus and Buddhists can be spiritual, too. He has wondered about the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives and sees that there are people who don’t believe in or know Jesus yet live a “Christian” life. Pondering that spiritual aspect, he speculates that it’s not his place to declare the others’ position. “Who’s to say the Holy Spirit isn’t in them? It’s for God to decide who is saved and who isn’t.” His wife reminded him of the phrase, you will know they are Christians by their love.

Question Three – Spirituality’s contribution to health and well-being

Believing that God wants us all to feel good and be healthy, he states that we were made by God in God’s image. David’s view of God is one of perfection and health. So, his logic says that if we are God’s image, then God wants perfection and health for us.

David believes God wants us to look at things that would contribute to our health and well-being. Because if you take a positive view of things and believe that this is the mind working with you, you will be healthier. His view is that God wants us to be healthy individuals. The idea of this positive view is interconnected in David’s way of thinking with the idea of metaphysics, where everything we do affects everything or everyone else. Thus, taking a positive attitude will contribute to better holistic health and
well-being for all. Working and coaching in a large school, he has had the opportunity
to be a healthy role model.

**Question Five – Satisfaction and fulfillment in life**

David states he feels very good about who he is. As he moves towards retirement in a few months, he’s reflected on what he has accomplished. He notes in his occupation that he doesn’t always see the end product. Adults who were his former students, will come up to him in the community with a bright, positive outlook and be happy to see him. This is confirmation that he has done some good things. As a long term coach, he recalls all the kids that grew up under his direction and occasionally will get an affirmation from someone with a vivid memory of something he did. Connecting with others is fulfilling for him. Recalling an early message requiring humility for all Christians, David is coming to terms with the idea that it is okay to feel good about the positives that you do and to be able to share those with people.

**Question Six – Purpose and meaning in life**

It’s David’s belief that we are all here to love and serve God and we are all here to love and serve each other. When people are unhappy with their lives, he believes it is because they have not discovered that relationship yet. Individuals who become isolated from the world loose the ability to relate as well as their relationships. David tells of youths who have no one there for them at home. For example, one youth said his mother works nights then goes for a drink and sometimes stays over with a boyfriend. So, the only time he has anyone is when he comes to school. The student struggles with wondering what the purpose of his life is. David thinks this is where purpose and fulfillment come in and it has to do with relationships. God wants us to relate to Him and
to relate to other people. Recalling a pastor’s words, David offers the analogy of the cross – the vertical bar is our link to God and the horizontal bar is our link with each other.

Question Seven – Influences on career choice

David believes what led him into guidance and counseling was the experience he had as a Bible camp counselor for 12 years at Lutheran Memorial Bible Camp, beginning at age twelve. The opportunity to interact with kids in a Christian setting was a valuable experience for him. He was able to see he was good with kids and could develop a relationship with young people. There was a spiritual relationship present. He realized just being a part of their lives and being a role model was part of the spiritual growth and development for him as well as the young people.

When David was in college, he entertained the idea of becoming a minister and discussed it with his soon-to-be bride. He finally concluded that he could serve God as a teacher as well as he could as a minister. After getting his bachelor’s degree in teaching, he worked one year teaching in the classroom which was frustrating and he concluded he wanted to talk with students more. He returned to school for his Masters in Counseling.

Question Eight – Evolution as a counselor

The problems, issues and degree of difficulty were quite different when he first began his position as a counselor. Only rarely did he find a kid who was thinking of harming him/herself or who was on drugs and alcohol. In present times, the number of kids from dysfunctional families has grown dramatically in his district, as well as the number of youths involved with drugs and alcohol and those who are contemplating harming themselves. He reports having had to grow in how he related to those
individuals. Early in his career, he had black and white or all or nothing thinking about people. As he’s grown spiritually, he had been more accepting of others and able to see that there may be good parts to the individuals that can be developed. He now feels better able to relate to distressed youth than when he first began. Recognizing that God loves him regardless of his character and actions, then he wonders how he could not care about the troubled youth and what they are going through. He feels he was given a lot and is expected to give to others. He accepts the awareness that we are instruments of God.

Question Nine – Spirituality in Counseling work

David finds opportunities to speak with the students he works with about God. When the student voluntarily tells him that they go to church or have a church connection, then David sees that as an option, offering another way to relate to the youth. He will explore the area of spirituality for its use in the topic at hand. Sometimes he can get them to ponder the question of what do they think God would think about a certain activity or behavior.

Interview Nine

Esther, 56, has been practicing counseling for sixteen years. In 1979, she earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Social Work from a non-faith based university. In 1990, she completed a Master’s Degree in Counseling at a faith-based university. In addition, she finished another ten semester hours of graduate work from a non-faith based university in Community Health Education. She fulfilled her clinical endorsement classes in 1997 with graduate hours from a faith-based institution and achieved her LPCC in January, 2000. Her theory preference was listed as Cognitive and her childhood religious affiliation was given as Presbyterian. Her current religious affiliation is listed as none while the number
of hours spent involved in spiritual activities per week is given as fifteen. Her Myers Briggs Personality Type is INFJ and personality characteristics which might relate to her spirituality are initiative, explorative, and nurturing. She was the second of three children in her family of origin.

Esther greeted me at the door of her home and welcomed me into her living room, where we conducted the interview. Esther has transformed her work life from an active counseling practice and teaching college into a part-time, short term practice, operated from her home. This affords her ample opportunity for travel, reading, enjoyment of solitary time at home and in nature, and tending to family relationships. Dressed casually, Esther settles into a comfortable leather armchair with a footstool that appears to be a place she enjoys for quiet activities. With a welcoming and hospitable demeanor, Esther seemed to welcome the opportunity to discuss the spiritual topics at hand.

Believing that we come into this life with a purpose and a plan given to us by a higher authority which is not fully disclosed to us, Esther sees our life goal as recognizing people, places, events and circumstances placed in our path to guide us to that purpose. Awareness of her purpose and plan began with reading authors such as Kierkegaard, M. Scott Peck, Deepak Chopra, all of whom she thought shared a common denominator in their perspectives. The common foundation was that we are not alone and there is a spiritual evolution. Kierkegaard, she explained, believed that each of us are born with God’s instructions inside which we must struggle to understand and act upon. She has always felt as if invisible hands were directing her. Growing up on a farm and thus being very close to nature, provided Esther the opportunity to see the essence of God when she would walk in the woods and experience the wonders of little discoveries of outdoor life.
Experiencing the environment was a catalyst for her. In retrospect, she believes her early life was idyllic.

Mr. and Mrs. Jones bought the home place, while Esther’s family lived in the tenant house on the property in the early years. These two individuals were crucial mentors and instructors in her growing life. As an intellectual and artistic couple, they taught her to see and experience beauty and form as God among us. As a child, she watched for many hours as Mr. Jones painted and they talked of the nature of life and love. His influential teaching was that we are searching for events and people which make us feel alive. Much later, she read about similar concepts in the work of Joseph Campbell. The experiences of listening to birds sing, putting your hands into the soil, and events of travel were all kinds of transcendental moments that made her feel alive. In looking back, she felt honored to have had them both in her life and felt they were catalysts to her spiritual and intellectual growth.

Other meaningful people in her life included Reggie, an elderly man who was a clairvoyant medium, and her oldest daughter who began exploring eastern philosophy and the concept of Zen. Esther felt loved unconditionally by these individuals and loved them also unconditionally. She reports her own parents were the salt of the earth but very busy with the activities of making a living and keeping a home and emotionally distant. So the older friend mentors in her life recognized the good qualities in her, nurtured them, and encouraged her to believe in herself. Esther deems those experiences as having had the seeds of God in them. This clearly relates to her earlier statements about God placing people, events and circumstances in your path as opportunities for growth. These major relationships remained very important to Esther throughout her lifespan.
A formative event in her development was going to California after high school to visit a friend who moved there and staying for five years. There were very different ways of looking at things in California, than in her rural Ohio Valley home area. Attending a university there, she accomplished most of her basic classes for her degree before returning home and focusing on the completion of her Bachelor’s degree. She was very proud to be the first person in her family of origin to get a college degree.

Attending the Presbyterian church in early life, Esther recalls several Biblical passages that are of significance to her today. These passages she feels relate to a commonality with more modern writings by M. Scott Peck, Deepak Chopra and others.

P. 9 The New Testament Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand. It is Within you.” . . . I think it is in the book of Isaiah, there is a passage where It says “today before you I lay pleasure or misery, health or illness, life or Death, now choose.” . . . Seek ye not the kingdom of heaven outside of you. It is within you.

Esther had previously been quite active in her church, serving as an Elder and on numerous committees. The church had determined that there were a core number of people who essentially were asked to do everything. She went through a process in recent years of figuring out that her spiritual needs were not being met. After weighing the cost versus the benefit of all her current church activities and deciding they were just draining, she left the church. She determined she needs to reach out in other ways currently to get her spiritual needs satisfied.

Question Two – Definition of Spirituality

Esther remarks that spirit and soul are part of our multifaceted self. She believes we are as much spirit as we are physical and emotional. Citing Lawrence Kohlberg, she aligns spirit with our moral fiber. Her belief is that the spirit lives on. Esther comments
on the evolution of her long term marriage relationship and how both she and her husband have had to grow independently and together. In her eyes, love is an action.

Question Three – Spirituality’s contribution to health and well-being

As a voracious reader, Esther meditates, and does self-hypnosis. These endeavors contribute to opening her awareness. While seeking a method to control lower back pain, she took a workshop to learn about hypnosis and became fascinated. So she completed the training needed to become a certified clinical hypno-therapist. She strives to become aware, which is an intentional effort and then living by intent of choice. The mind body connection is integral to her philosophy “we are what we think.” This translates to controlling the thoughts she chooses to think. She chooses to be optimistic. There are an abundance of mantras which she places in her mind.

P. 9 I’m doing better and better in every way every day. The universe is an abundant place, whether you realize it or not, there is enough to go around. I gratefully receive mine now.

In therapy, Esther believes you can use the same focus by being with the client where they are and facilitating growth and willingness to accept the philosophy that they are not powerless and they can aid their own development. She has had some clients become afraid and interpret it as the idea that they have attracted some life events to themselves. As a therapist, she would look at using that particular moment in time to empower clients and help them begin to see things anew.

Question Six – Purpose and meaning in life

The type of work Esther chooses to do now is working with individuals in more of a lifestyle coaching approach. She sees individuals who want to get clear of their issues which have been preventing their success. Gravitating towards that more positive
approach is bound to engender mountaintop experiences. She loves the interaction when she feels she has been an integral part of the other’s growth as they have been for her and finds this work enormously satisfying.

Secondly, she enjoys being in the present moment with her grandson and finds enormous satisfaction playing and caring for him. Walks with her dog in the woods are also enjoyable and rejuvenating and energize her.

Question Seven – Influences on choice of career

One of Esther’s older friends, Reggie, encouraged her to become aware of how well she seemed to put people at ease when speaking with them. As her catalyst for personal growth and exploration, she began to gravitate toward the counseling profession. Tying in with her earlier comments about choice, Esther sees her past decisions as necessary components of where she is today. She believes her searching and yearning for personal growth is a universal characteristic.

Question Nine – Spirituality’s contribution to counseling work

Esther believes the interpersonal relationship is what moves counseling forward. She cites Carl Rogers’ work based on unconditional positive regard and the importance of the counseling relationship as the dynamic that influences change. Additionally, she feels the spiritual exchange or energy is vital in therapy. This aspect sounds like the concept of Flow, when the work is enjoyable and the individual feels energized by what they are doing.

Today she tends to work with individuals on facilitating and directing growth as opposed to some older models of fixing the problem or the client. After she has offered
comments to clients about what would facilitate results, she tends to let go of the results and ties this back to a Biblical basis.

P. 9 That’s Jesus’s philosophy again. He would dust off his sandals and walk away after he gave his pearls of wisdom. Would you agree? You either take it or you don’t and I’m not going to cast my pearl. I’m going to pull myself up and go. But I’ve offered it to you. Do you want it?

Interview Ten

Grace, 50, has practiced counseling for twenty years and is transitioning into a new phase of life. Completing a Bachelor’s Degree in Dance Performance in 1978, she also finished a Master’s Degree in 1986 in Movement Arts, now called Somatic Studies. Both of those degrees were from non-faith based universities. In 1994, she completed another Master’s Degree in Agency Counseling at a faith-based institution. Her childhood religious affiliation was listed as Catholic and her current religious affiliation is American Baptist. Theory preference was indicated as existential, Cognitive Behavioral, Systems and Integral. Personality characteristics which might relate to her spirituality were recorded as ENFJ, need for connection, and always searching. She is the fifth child of seven in her family of origin. The amount of time spent weekly involved in spiritual activities was listed as 20 hours and also had this notation, “It’s all related – I offer daily activities as dedicated practices in honor of people and causes.”

Grace had offered to meet me for the interview on a day she was driving into a town an hour from my home, for later activities with friends. We agree to meet at an apartment loaned by a family member for this purpose. Grace appeared a bit distraught when she first arrived and we spent a few moments processing the concern. As a breast cancer survivor, she had just learned of a friend’s new diagnosis with the disease and was
worried for her. Giving vent to the issue and concerns helped Grace let go of her concern for her friend for the period of our interview.

Grace has clear skin, wears her dark hair short and has a prominent smile and sense of impishness about her. Appearing to have a lot of energy, I learned during the interview that she was trained first as a dancer and has continued dance and movement as part of her life. She began working with a psychologist in private practice doing stress relief training for the clients. Eventually, she studied counseling and became licensed. Currently, she has left private practice after approximately twenty years in the business. While teaching counseling practicum at a college, she also teaches yoga and is exploring her new role as wife of a full-time minister.

When asked about her spiritual development, Grace identified two ways of exploring the topic: chronologically and in categories. She began by sharing events and issues that had an impact on her life. As the daughter of a man who had studied for the Catholic priesthood, many of his former peers, who became priests, were good friends of the family. Grace was named after one of those priest friends. Memorable faith experiences included when the Franciscan Friars would visit her home town and perform theatre and music. Interestingly, later in life, she married a minister who does theatre and music, reminiscent of her early childhood experiences.

Growing up in a Catholic family very active in its faith, she attended twelve years of Catholic education. One of the major influences she recalls and uses in her current life was the offering or dedication of activities for the good of individuals in need of God’s grace. In the past, the church taught that you could do good things and dedicate your activity towards the release of the poor souls in purgatory. She’s evolved on that line of
thinking but kept the concept of dedicating or offering up some part of the good work that she does for the service of others. She includes it by dedicating her yoga practice or the completion of common household tasks such as washing the dishes, to the honor of others, giving it a greater meaning.

In 8th grade, Grace received an award from the Knights of Columbus for treating people with equanimity. She recalls being shocked and would like to go back and ask them to share what it was they were seeing in her at the time. Although she does recall befriending a peer who had a disfigurement on his face and suspects this may be what earned her the award. When she graduated from high school, the Knights again honored her with a scholarship. While in 8th grade, Sister Carol asked her if she would think about teaching theology. Her response was that she couldn’t do without the love life if she became a nun and so she didn’t think she would be doing that.

When she began college, she attended weekend mass at the Newman Center on campus. At the end of that week, she went home to visit parents. A letter arrived from the church asking her parents for money. Offended, she left the church. After graduation, she moved to the New York City area to dance and began exploring new age writing and self-help books. Returning three years later to her home area, she began studying yoga and her instructor read tarot cards. Exploration of different spiritual activities and experiences continued for nearly ten more years. She became part of a Goddess of the Month Club, where a conglomerate of female healers shared on a wide variety of topics and became friends.

Achieving her first masters degree in the movement arts, where mind-body-spirit were incorporated into the training, she completed a second masters in counseling in her
early thirties. Then she was hired to work with a psychologist and did so under his license for a number of years.

Diagnosed with breast cancer in her forties, after treatment, friends got her involved with substitute teaching yoga classes pretty quickly. This helped her complete the healing within her body. Feeling a need to find her voice, she began chanting at the end of the yoga classes. Soon chanting became a part of her spiritual practice.

Sacred dance came into her realm of awareness and she felt it might be a good fit for her. Impressed at the first spiritual dance conference she attended, she saw individuals who incorporated mind, body and spirit together into the sacred dance. Again, she became involved with a woman’s group where there was praying, sharing, singing and supporting among the members bi-monthly for several years.

After nearly twenty years of private practice, she found it difficult to continue the hard work of aiding patients with traumatic or abuse histories with pain management. The agency was changing it’s focus to a direction more in sync with conservative Christian values, while Grace’s person spiritual philosophy was opening to new avenues. She became familiar with books on Esther Hicks, who channels spiritual beings. As she did some of her own growth work related to Hicks, an opportunity came for Grace’s husband to move into full-time ministry in an ideal location for them. They moved and Grace left private practice. With much of her own personal identity involved with her past life of counseling work, yoga practice, support group and friends, the transition to a new home three hours away created a challenge with which she is still dealing.

Yoga, dance, being married to a pastor, learning her new role and how to set boundaries are current issues provoking spiritual growth. In her professional life, she
began to feel as if she is on the brink of establishing ways that will bring her gifts to
the forefront. In her personal life, Grace is experiencing a call to be more available to aid
her husband in ministry duties such as visitation of the sick.

Question Two – Definition of spirituality

Simply put, Grace believes it is things that lift her spirit. During past training for
reiki, she began to acknowledge an energy working through her. She feels it now when
she performs her sacred dance.

P. 9 When you quote “get attuned in reiki” you can feel this other energy
working through you. And when I perform sacred dance, it is the same
thing. You can feel it. It being the power of the Spirit, the life force . . . It
moves through me. I’m actually channeling creative life force . . . It’s the
same thing when you look at nature . . . you see beauty and it lifts you. It’s
supportive. It’s awe inspiring.

Further, she believes spirituality has nothing to do with religion. Religion has
been used on occasion to harm others, leaving people feeling betrayed. As part of her
spirituality, Grace honors other people’s spirits and pathways. She recalls the old saying,
“One road, many paths.”

Question Three – Spirituality’s contribution to health and well-being

Having yoga helped her recover from cancer. Having the luxury of a little more
free time has influenced how they choose food and what they choose to eat. Just as Esther
in the interview before, Grace speaks of focusing on the positive and things that are
pleasing to you. Focusing on the positive, shifts your energy into a more positive realm.
She believes life force is in everything. Making healthy choices and focusing on the
spiritual are all a part of health and well-being.
Question Six – Purpose and meaning in life

Grace quickly responded with, “Teaching, service, feeding people.” Relationships are very important to her. As half Italian, she smiles and makes the statement that food is love. She enjoys creating fellowship opportunities to bring people together and help them stay connected.

Question Seven – Influences on career choice

To explain how she feels the universe shaped her career path, she shares from the book *The Soul’s Code* the idea that some people always know what they’re going to be, just as the acorn always knows it will grow up to be an oak tree. Others are more like leaves on the stream of life that just float downstream and sort of go where they are taken until they run into things that shape what they will become. She believes she was the later version. She began her career in movement therapy, moved into assisting clients with chronic pain and found she was pretty good at it. When the licensure law went into affect, she trained to become licensed.

Question Nine – Spirituality’s influence on counseling work

Grace reports she always included questions about faith in the history she took with her new clients. She would ask them if they had a belief system or a spiritual grounding or a religion. Then she found a way to use what was offered to her. Having been raised in the Catholic faith, changing to another faith when she married her pastor husband, having studied eastern traditions and yoga, and explored Native American traditions provided her with flexibility to be able to walk different paths with her clients. Essentially, she looked for what the client found meaning in and what that said to them and how it could be used to work towards healing.
Interview Eleven

Jesse, 49, has practiced clinical counseling for fourteen years. His Bachelor’s Degree in 1980 was in Bible and Pastoral Studies at a faith-based institution. He earned his Master’s Degree in 1992 in Pastoral Counseling at an institution associated with an organized religion. In 2002, he completed his Doctorate in Counselor Education and Supervision at a non-faith based, CACREP university. Personality characteristics which might related to his spirituality were noted to be artistic, philosophical, and semi-extrovert. His Myers Briggs type is INFJ and theory preference is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. He is the middle child of three in his family of origin. His childhood religious affiliation was recorded as Assemblies of God (Pentecostal) and his current religious affiliation is non-denominational. For the amount of time involved in spiritual activities he wrote, “I view my entire life as a spiritual activity but includes specific times utilizing the spiritual disciplines noted above.”

Jesse meet me in the lobby of the counseling center on the university grounds where he is employed. He is casually dressed in business khakis, button down shirt and sweater. As we enter his office, his desk is along one wall with storage space, computer and television. Another bookcase flanks the opposite wall. A comfortable couch with a coffee table sits underneath a window where large snowflakes are floating to the ground outside. Jesse has gray hair and is amicable in his behavior. His calm, focused demeanor implies he would spend whatever amount of time might be needed with the person sitting in front of him.

Jesse began his career studying for the ministry and then serving in that role. Later, completing a master’s in pastoral counseling, he worked towards licensure and
practiced in a Christian agency. Continuing his professional growth, he completed
the doctoral program in counselor education while still counseling. Currently, he works
as a counselor educator at a faith-based university. In his faith life, Jesse moved from the
very conservative faith of his childhood into a non-denominational faith practice today.

As he tells his spiritual development story, he begins by announcing he was born
into a Christian family that was very involved in the church. His family read the Bible,
and he recalls kneeling down in their living room and praying together. They had a
conservative approach to spiritual life and believed faith should be a part of who you are.
He was told his life would be different and it was viewed at the time as not having fun
anymore. Around age 15, he asked for forgiveness of his sins, for Christ to be the center
of his life and felt like it was a more personal journey after that. He chose to attend youth
group and made service a part of his life, becoming involved in all aspects of the church.
He taught Sunday school classes, sang in the youth choir, did bus ministry, outreach
activities, and church services. By the time he was a senior in high school, he felt he
should be giving his life more to full-time Christian service. Out of all this experience, he
really wanted to provide pastoral care and counseling. The pastoral coursework provided
only two classes related to what he really wanted – one psychology class and one on
pastoral counseling. Jesse began his ministerial career by working with youth. The initial
position didn’t feel quite right, so he moved into a minister of care position and had a
broad range of pastoral care activities. The counseling piece became even more
marginalized. He decided to pursue a masters in pastoral care program that would afford
him eligibility for state licensure in counseling.
Although his vocation began as serving in the ministry, he believes his spiritual development continued independently throughout his life. Now he feels more intentional about his spirituality and feels closer in his relationship with God. Recalling Fowler’s stages of faith, he would have placed himself on a lower stage early in his life and is cognizant of the fact he would have had to shake up his old self and push for him to get up to speed, if he had remained there. Today, he would place himself on one of the higher stages of Fowler’s scale. Early in life he recalls thinking he would feel more comfortable if he spiritually had all the answers. At this faith level, his belief system affords him a sense of comfort in not having all the answers. He feels much more secure knowing he doesn’t have all the answers and that it is about having a relationship versus right answers.

Along life’s path a number of presuppositions Jesse held were challenged and his conceptualization of God changed as a result. Views of God that Jesse formulated in his early years were discovered to be not valid. Thus, those interpretations of God were altered. Currently, his relationship with God has outgrown past impressions. Jesse makes a conscious effort to let go of trying to place God in a box where he’s not designed to fit. Jesse concluded God designs no box to fit into. Jesse believes his family of origin issues no doubt promoted his conceptualization of God in such a manner that structured what he thought God wanted of him. Adjectives used to describe God now are more positive than before: gracious, kind, understanding broad-minded, and trustworthy. Before he was somewhat unsure that he was pleasing God and so never felt completely at ease in the relationship. Social constructionism literature helped him understand that a lot of his realities were created for him through conversations and groupings with whom he was
involved. The adage, it must be true because we all say it’s true, came to his mind.

Challenges were provided through interaction with other people and other voices offering different views.

P. 10 Some of those experiences forced me to really think about . . . there are some really screwy views out there. Maybe some of them are mine, too. . . What screwy theological views do I hold that I’ve not even sniffed out yet? And part of my spiritual development has been doing a lot of reflection, thinking, praying, studying, talking, interacting, back to reflecting and thinking and praying and just maturing, too.

An example of one of his childhood faith, Pentecostal’s beliefs was termed ‘the perfect will of God.’ If you were really close with your relationship with God you would know basically every step to take in life. If you weren’t properly aligned, then you would not be following the exact path that would lead you to a really good part of heaven. You might instead end up in a lower part of heaven instead of an ideal location. Also, if you made the right choices, life would go well for you and if you didn’t, the tensions and issues in life would point out you must not be on the right path. Jesse and his wife were never able to have children and had to wrestle with that belief, wondering if they did something wrong in life that they weren’t blessed with children. Presently, he believes that God redeems difficult things in life that shape our character and God is with us during those times.

Jesse’s faith is more centered on reflecting the nature of Jesus Christ when he walked the earth. He cites a Russian proverb that says, “Pray to God but row for shore.”

P. 11 I truly believe the two greatest commands that Christ pointed out – Loving God with all your heart, soul, mind and being; and loving your neighbor as yourself, which also informs my approach to mental health. Because there is a theological bent there . . . Loving your neighbor as yourself touches on healthy self-love, which is a psychology of itself and healthy social
interaction skills, sociology. So to be healthy, I have a good balance of theological, psychological, sociological.

New CACREP standards were changed from spiritual and religious preferences to spiritual and religious values. Jesse is grateful that CACREP has recognized the value of spirituality within counseling. This concept acknowledges the worldview that many individuals have their own version of who God is. Breaking out of the box, or tearing down the walls, helps to bring us closer to kinship with one another as just believers in God.

Question Two – Defining spirituality

Jesse believes a broad spirituality is reaching out to the belief in something that transcends us, guides and governs our lives, who many refer to as God. Personally, spirituality is situated in the being of God with His triune nature and being creator, redeemer and friend. It’s a relationship.

Question Three – Spirituality’s contribution to health and well-being

Jesse desires an ideal balance of the theological, psychological and sociological aspects of self and feels that defines health. He believes spirituality absolutely contributes to health and well-being. Having worked with Christian faith-based people, he sees that as an important component of overall health. He states there is something that transcends who he is and impacts who he is. His belief is that we are spiritual beings, not just physical or social.

Question Six – Purpose and meaning in life

What brings purpose and meaning to Jesse is knowing that he is connected with that other and that’s the journey, which impacts every aspect of his life. The relationship
with God gives us guidelines on how to conduct ourselves with others, such as the
‘loving others as our self.’

Question Seven – Influences on choice of career

During the adolescent ups and downs of his own childhood, he was comforted by
being able to go to the pastor of his church for counseling. He felt they valued his faith in
the midst of the turmoil, so his faith was embraced and encouraged in the counseling
issues they were dealing with. Jesse never really wanted to be a preacher. His desire was
to serve in the capacity of helping others through difficult times. He desired to be a
counselor that valued the faith of others and could include it in the work he did. At the
time he began making initial career choices, he didn’t know he could have just chosen to
move into pastoral counseling.

Question Nine – Spirituality’s contribution to counseling work

Jesse believes in a bio-psycho-socio-spiritual approach where all dimensions are
acknowledged as valuable. This integrationist approach fits him perfectly in his
assessment. He notes the many years of separation for psychology and faith over issues
of the spirit and heart, thus the newer integration of all the concepts still hasn’t dawned
on some individuals’ awareness.

Interview Twelve

Lily, 58, has been a high school counselor for 13 years. Lily achieved her
Bachelor’s Degree in History education in 1974. She finished her Masters in School
Counseling in 1993 at a non-faith based CACREP university. Her childhood religious
affiliation was listed as Methodist and her current religious affiliation is Church of God
(non-Pentecostal). She spends approximately six hours weekly involved in spiritual
activities. Her theory preference is Reality Therapy and her Myers Briggs type was given as INFJ. Personality characteristics which might relate to her spirituality were recorded as quiet, caring, and helpful. In her family of origin, Lily was the oldest of four children.

The scheduled interview with Lily, occurred on what had turned out to be an incredibly full and difficult day for her. I was shown to her office and we walked to a small room off the school library. Despite the turmoil on that day, she was able to focus in the interview and share her spiritual story. The high school is a modern, handsome brick facility which is only a few years old. It’s an asset for the individuals in this rural community. Lily was a teacher for eighteen years prior to becoming a school counselor, a position she has held for thirteen years. She anticipates working one more school year and retiring in June, 2008.

Lily appears to be a very quiet individual with a deep, genuine interest in her students. Her desk was filled with papers. She mentioned the enormous amount of paperwork that needs done, especially for graduating seniors seeking admission to college and scholarship funds create tremendous pressure as deadlines approach. Dressed in navy blue slacks and sweater with a lime green tank top, she is professional appearing yet casual enough to fit in well with her students. Lily’s dark, curly hair surrounds a calm face with alert and attentive eyes.

Lily’s personal spiritual development begins with her speaking of her family and their involvement with their church. They always went to church on Sunday. At the age of 15, at a church revival, she was born again in the traditional belief of her church and that was the beginning of a more personal spiritual journey for her. When she married,
her husband was in the military and she traveled with him, attending churches in the areas where he was stationed. When they moved back to their home area, they became affiliated with the First Church of God, which is non-charismatic.

One of the speakers at another church revival challenged them to spiritually dig deeper and to look at their actions. They were encouraged to be deeply involved, not on the edge and doing something to be proactive. As a result, they were involved with team missions doing missionary work in the United States during the summer with teenagers. She’s also been called to come out of her comfort zone and participate with the church board and in Bible school. Periodically classes would be conducted at the church, such as what it means to be a Christian, what is God like and looking at their relationship with God. More recently, they did a program on the Purpose Driven Life. Lily has also served the church by teaching Sunday school and assisting with food preparation for fund-raisers to aid needy families.

Lily notes that sometimes people make mistakes and are humbled a lot. She finds she has been hard-headed about some issues that she doesn’t seem to get it the first time and so she has to repeat the same broken record until she learns. Pondering how she has grown, she realizes she can’t expect that others will have grown in the same manner, so she states she won’t judge where others are. She believes others’ choice of spiritual journey is between God and the individual. As she reflects on her spiritual life path, she can see where older people have helped her along the way and now she can be a helper or offer support to others who are in need. The aid from others would come during a period when she didn’t know what direction she needed to go or if she was going through a difficult situation in her life where she had to make a choice, with options leading to very
different avenues. There were other times when she recalls being angry and had to learn it was okay to be angry with God, but to learn how to work through it and let it go. So, she learned to make healthy choices. The older people were there just to support her and check on her so she knew she wasn’t alone.

Now, when she attempts to help others in her life, she may tell them she has no idea what they are feeling but they could come to her and she would always listen to them. If it is a church family, then it is someone she could pray with. Sometimes in her work setting, she doesn’t always have the freedom to speak about prayer. But she encourages the children that they are not alone and she will listen as they go through their situations and help explore the different choices they have. Regarding difficult situations, for example, on the topic of being gay, Lily will tell the student up front that she may not be the best counselor for them and tell them her values are different from theirs.

Lily reports she loves to work with the high school students. However, she finds the responsibility at the high school overwhelming at times. With retirement looming on the horizon in another year and a half, she is pondering other viable options for part-time work. When in school for her school licensure, she was contemplated a clinical license as well but was unable to do another internship to achieve the clinical status at that time. It sounded as if retirement work would take her into other work venues such as perhaps operating a bed and breakfast or the creative arts.

When she is dealing with a frustrating or stressful situation, she tries to spend more time with God. She will often walk in the woods near her home and articulate her concerns verbally, carrying on a conversation with God. Walking is a release. Being alone in the woods gives her an opportunity to cry or express her emotions, if she desires.
Processing her apprehension in such a manner helps her to release the turmoil and to see hope for resolution in the future. When attempting to hear God’s message for her about a particular situation, she may read scripture, pray, be quiet, open, reflective and wait for an answer. Additionally, she will fast if it is an extremely difficult situation for her.

Many students are in transit, having been placed temporarily with foster parents in the area and she may only have brief periods to work with them. Lily has learned over the years to listen more and work on the relationship. It’s been humbling for her to hear their stories and to recognize the strength within that has helped foster children become survivors, often without realizing how very courageous they have been. Lily will attempt to plant some positive seed thoughts for the student to consider. She hopes that they will continue to consider the positives. Perhaps the next counselor will take those seeds and help grow them. Once in awhile she will get a letter or note from a former student demonstrating some positive aspect of change in their life and that makes all Lily’s efforts to help students worthwhile.

Question Two – Definition of Spirituality

Spirituality is a personal, individual experience, a relationship with God that Lily feels you learn to grow with. Lily uses the analogy of God weaving fabric squares into a quilt of her life. She feels sometimes He’s woven her path to go one way but she may have chosen an alternative, but she feels He is patient with her and that’s why it is such a personal connection.
Question Three – Spirituality’s contribution to physical and emotional health

Because of her spirituality, Lily does not smoke or drink and she’s found that to be a tremendous advantage regarding health insurance policies. When stressed, it helps her to know she is not alone and she will turn to the Bible, to find a story similar to her situation. It helps for her to read that others have survived a comparable situation. She gains hope from her Bible and reflection upon its messages.

Question Seven – Influences on career choice

When Lily was a teacher and had students in her homeroom, she got to know them and they became like a family. It would seem like they would bring their problems into school in the mornings. She began to think realize she would like to have more time to talk to the students and thought a career change would work. Unfortunately, she found out with all the paperwork involved in the counseling department, that the sad realization is she may have had more time in the classroom to talk with students. That has been a negative for her about obtaining the position of high school counselor.

Question Six – Purpose and meaning in life

Lily quickly and succinctly responded to this inquiry. She replied God, her family and her work bring purpose and meaning to her life. Lily pronounces that she has been seeking the real purpose of her life since she was a teenager. One of the big things looming in her life is retirement with the resulting financial changes and security as far as a structured, stable work environment. She ponders what purpose God has in store for her then. She feels a strong need to give back to society.
Question Nine – Spirituality’s contribution to work

Since attending one of the sessions at the All Ohio Counselor Conference where a presenter was talking about values and how they affect how we counsel, Lily pondered whether her values were influencing the work she does. She’s wondered about whether she has been in a place to help others but failed to do so. Carefully, she tries hard not to judge and will tell the student that she is not perfect and doesn’t know anyone who is.

Frequently when a child comes to see her and shares about her/himself, Lily can hear in their conversation that they have a spiritual value system that is very similar to hers. Then she will acknowledge that she understands prayer is very important to them. But she does not feel comfortable praying with them at school. She will encourage them to find prayer partners in their church that will help them. Sometimes, she will receive questions such as, “Does God love me?” She will respond to them that God does love them and will dialogue with them in this vein, when she knows their values are the same. For kids without a church background, she focuses on trying to help them find something positive in the negativities surrounding them.

Lily volunteers that a lot of her high school students have sexuality issues now. Due to her faith background, being gay is difficult.

P. 12 Not that I feel that gay people are bad or anything like that. They need to be accepted and they need to be understood and they need friends. But when I have a gay student come to me and express that they are gay, I tell them upfront that maybe I’m not the best counselor for them and I tell them why – because my values are different from their values. I will listen to them and if they want to continue to come, that’s fine. But I want them to have the opportunity to know that if they feel uncomfortable with me and my values that they can go – have another counselor.
Overarching Themes

Introduction

With the essence of participants’ stories reported above, and an overall view of the resulting first order themes presented, this chapter now pursues a more in-depth look at the higher-order themes that emerged from the analysis. Participants’ definitions of spirituality are investigated and compared to the working definition of this study. An analysis of the first order themes and categories led to the discovery of two overarching themes: core and connection that contributed to making meaning of life’s events, and the importance of relationships in the participants’ lives. This study’s results provide support for the concept of spiritual core and connection providing a lens or framework from which to make meaning of life events, inspiration to create a purposeful life which brings holistic health, and satisfying relationships and opportunities to be in flow or in sync with that spiritual energy.

Core and Connection

Eleven of the twelve individuals were nurtured in their young faith lives by immediate family. Most of the participants also mentioned the influence of extended family, the church atmosphere and church personnel and/or the culture or community in which they lived. Even the participant without a faith base at home discovered a dormant spirituality at age 16, explored Jewish books and sacred texts for forty years until she made a commitment to become a Jew. The solid faith foundation in the early years of life may have contributed greatly to the establishment of the sense of a spiritual inner core. The family-filled faith life seems to provide a groundedness that anchored the
participants in a solid sense of who they are and where they fit in their spiritual frame of reference. Early faith life will be explored more under the theme, Influences.

All of the participants explored new avenues to deepen their spirituality, either within their faith discipline or in other spiritual traditions. Each gave examples of growing and developing in their understanding of spirituality over the course of their lifetime. The naturally quiet, reflective nature of the ten introverts may have aided the study and pondering of different aspects of faith. To examine the aspect of core spirituality or connection, it is important to review the spirituality definition with which the study began and compare it to the participants own words.

*Spirituality Definition.*

Recalling Koenig’s (2005) definition of spirituality as a person’s quest for understanding the meaning of life, counselors are uniquely poised by the work they do to accompany their clients as they process the events of their lives to seek a perspective which brings meaning to their life. Wiggins Frame (2005) suggested meaning, purpose and values could be substituted for the word spirituality if needed. Synthesizing all the definitions of spirituality, one could say spirituality is an experience which brings meaning and purpose to life, moving the individual forward in positive growth. The growth and positive change aspects are aligned with the purpose of counseling. The personal quest for on-going growth and development is apparent in the language of these counselors who also find great personal meaning in their work and relationships.

The working definition of spirituality with which this study began was a relationship with a higher power or God which contributes purpose and meaning to life and influences positively the way the individual lives out his or her life. The research
definition was not shared with respondents prior to their speaking of their own view of spirituality. Only one participant asked for the interviewer’s working definition and it was given only after she shared her view. The twelve participants’ key words or phrases on how they define spirituality will now be examined. Key words were also gleaned from the general text of the interview as well as the exact definition given in response to the research question.

P. 1 core part of you . . . makes you feel connection to everyone and everything . . . desires to treat everyone with basic human dignity.

P. 2 the core . . . central spoke in the middle that everything radiates out from . . . the heart . . . belief in God and higher power

P. 3 Inner guide or light . . . quest for purpose . . . wonders how to influence lives and positively affect the world . . . connection

P. 4 personal belief in power beyond self and this world . . . which contributes to purpose and meaning in life . . . spirituality is a faith thing

P. 5 experience of religious phenomena . . . joined with God and the world . . . we are all connected . . . all life is infused with spirit

P. 6 God is love . . . love, light, prayer are all energy and rooted in God. God is the core of my being . . . connection

P. 7 life force in each person . . . transcendent . . . connection to God, people and the world

P. 8 Spirituality is awareness of relationship with God and God’s direction and purpose for you . . . God is behind everything

P. 9 Spirit and soul are part of our multifaceted self . . . we are spirit as much as physical and emotional. Aligns spirit with moral fiber.

P. 10 Things which lift her spirit . . . energy . . . you can feel this . . . It being power of the Spirit, life force

P. 11 belief in transcendent God . . . guides and governs our lives . . . relationship . . . spiritual beings . . . connection . . . the spiritual is at the core of who a person is
The respondents’ comments essentially substantiate the initial definition yet they enlighten and deepen the meaning with their perspectives. One third of the participating expert counselors viewed spirituality as the core essence of who they are. It seemed very plausible that several other individuals would agree with that concept, if given the opportunity to consider it. Another third of the participants spoke of the energy, life force, spirit and light or guide within. The key aspect here is the spirit within. It seems aligned with the core comments. Both aspects speak of the special essence or aspect of spirit within.

Eight of the participants used the words core or connection in their explanation of spirituality. Thus, seventy five percent of the counselors in this research project view spirituality as a connection with God. Depending on how it is viewed, the respondents are saying they feel a connection to God or their higher power deep within them and this affects their actions and behaviors in the real world.

Seven participants spoke of how having this spiritual core or essence within contributes to their desire to make the right choices for their life according to their faith beliefs. Several respondents seemed to echo the research that human beings are relational and that is a central component of spirituality. Carlson, Erickson and Seewald-Marquardt (2003) proposed God calls us into relationship and spirituality is a relational way of being. The authors of this particular article were marriage and family therapists. However, the terminology they use is very similar to what happens in the spiritual direction process. Perhaps counselors could use spiritual direction techniques to inform
their counseling approaches when needed to better attend to the spiritual issues of their clients. Counselors apparently are addressing spirituality regularly in their therapeutic work with clients. Many have had to read, seek their own training, or discern the proper approach on their own without official graduate school training on the spiritual dimension of counseling.

For example, Aaron feels connected to everyone and everything. He is aware that he is more than his “badges” or labels such as vegetarian, conscientious objector, yoga teacher, mediator, counselor, and all-around good guy. So, when a client comes in, the individual is more than just their socio-economic status, level of intelligence, personality development, and level of education. They bring more to the relationship and he is happy to be connecting in a more meaningful way with them.

P.1 Buddhists have a concept called Karma. Karma means action. So every action that you do is going to have an opposite and full reaction, right? Any action that you do is going to set in motion some effects. And those events will affect other people. It is too simplistic to say what goes around comes around. It’s like a little explosion. It explodes in all directions. It just doesn’t come back and hit you. Karma’s not so personal. . . . Everything is connected.

The Buddhists’ four opponent powers were paraphrased by another yoga enthusiast as recognition, regret, resolve, and restitution. The term of Namaste describes another form of connection.

P.1 Have you heard the term Namaste? I bow to the divine within you. I bow to that place within you. When you are in that place and I am in that place in me, there is only one of us.
Flow.

The participants’ central core of spirituality established parameters of behaviors and perspectives for their view of the world. With this solid connection and the resulting values, the counselors could become deeply involved in the nature of their counseling work. They would have had to master the art of re-establishing a therapeutic alliance each hour. Just as athletes learn to get in their ‘zone’ of optimum performance and work towards that endeavor, counselors can also reach their peak performance. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) describes the experience of Flow as resembling Maslow’s peak performance. There can be a transcendent quality to the experience.

As these expert counselors perfected their skills and the science of counseling, they seemed to have moved to a performance level where the experience of Flow can occur frequently. Some counselors spoke of it not only as a desirable aspect but perhaps also the preferred outcome.

Expert counselors in this study made comments that sounded very much like the concept of Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Counselors can become engaged in the assessment and therapeutic work with their clients. Once a counselor achieves mastery, they can find a sense of grace, effortlessness and spontaneity which brings enjoyment to their work. Continuing to seek and enjoy the flow experience encourages on-going growth and a sense of meaning and satisfaction in life (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Flow was cited in the research as a good example of the relationship between counseling skill and the pending challenge (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 1997). Examples of participants’ statements which resemble the description of Flow are noted below:
P. 7  In some ways doing therapy was kind of like a meditative experience, if that makes any sense? Because I do sort of enter into like a different state when I’m doing it. There is a sense of spiritual connectedness . . . when I was doing it. And I still have that sometimes with friends, but it is different now. I’m not a therapist with my friends.

P. 5  There is something about the prison that I find nourishing. Something about working with the darkness, working with the shadow. Somehow, I’m fed in that context. I’m nurtured . . . I still enjoy what I do . . . There is something about the clients, when you go along for the ride with them and something great occurs, it is very rewarding.

The participants’ comments most closely align with the Holistic Flow Model (Purdy & Dupey, 2005) which is based on the work of Frankl and Csikszentmihalyi. Spirituality is described as the flow of energy and is centered in the visual diagram created by Purdy and Dupey (2005). This spirituality leads to meaning in connectedness, faith, life and death and generates movement toward compassion. Participants described their spiritual core which contributed to the meaning they ascribe to life events, how they conducted their personal and professional relationships and the treasuring of connection or relationships. Two comments specifically focus on what appears to be episodes of flow in their professional and personal life.

P. 7  Doing therapy was kind of like a meditative experience . . . Because I do sort of enter into like a different state when I’m doing it . . . There is a sense of spiritual connectedness . . . when I was doing it. And I still have that happen sometimes with friends, but it is different now. I’m not a therapist with my friends.

P. 9  I think the spiritual exchange, call it energy, if you will, is something that is vital in therapy. Cause when you get right down to it at the end of the day, I feel it is that very powerful, special, unconditional relationship that moves counseling forward.

Flow acknowledges individuals finding meaning in their life and getting lost in the experience of activity related to that meaning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Ronnestad
and Skovholt’s (2003) study of expert counselors discovered counselors enjoyed their work and found purpose and meaning in it. Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003) saw Flow as a good representation of the relationship between the nature of the challenges in counseling and the counselor’s skills.

In this study, there is ample evidence of counselors enjoying experiences where they got lost in a variety of activities that were meaningful and nurturing to them. Aaron, Ben, David and Lily spoke of solitary times in nature when they felt a deep spiritual sense of connection. Claire and Lily’s work experiences of flow were mentioned above. Aaron, Chad, and Grace have been long term practitioners of yoga and meditation which seems to be rejuvenating for them.

**Meaning.**

Having a solid central core established a way for the individual to interpret their on-going life experiences. As thoughtful, reflective individuals, these counselors take time to contemplate and carefully consider the potential for meaning in not only their own life events but that of their clients. Frankl (1985) declared there were three ways to create meaning: by doing a deed, experiencing a value and by suffering. In their professional role, counselors are doing unique, often value-laden work, sitting with clients who are suffering while helping to inspire hope and create meaning. Having the genuine core seems to not only guide their endeavors but helps sustain them in the challenging counseling work they do.

The expert counselors take time to reflect and ponder life events. This pause and reflection time may be a necessary component for the counseling work the participants do and for their spirituality type. The quiet helps her/him make sense of life events. It is a
way of discovering or making meaning. The participants’ faith life provides a foundation or structure for the interpretation of life events. The reflection or meditation time may be essential for these individuals for maintaining balance or holistic health. Quiet may provide an opportunity to re-connect with their faith core, spending time with the spirit within. After solitude, the counselors may re-engage with the world having found renewal, a sense of meaning or purpose in what they choose to do.

Several are venturing into a new phase of life. The retired participant and one partially retired participant feel called to write. With the wealth of wisdom accumulated from long counseling careers, these expert counselors would seem to have much to offer by sharing their expertise. Writing stories of people’s lives would be another way of making meaning of their life experiences. Others in the study anticipating retirement, are pondering new avenues. It sounded as if they would grow once again through developing new aspects of him/her self that would once again bring meaning to what they choose to do. Midlife is a time for evaluation of the journey thus far. Most of the participants would be in Erikson’s generativity vs. stagnation phase. Lily contemplates opening a bed and breakfast after retirement. Grace feels called to be more involved in her husband’s ministry but makes time for her passions of teaching yoga, sacred dance and using her counseling skills to teach graduate school part time. Esther has transitioned into a new phase of life and enjoys being freer for travel, exploration and family relationships.

Each of the twelve interviewees volunteered stories representative of seeking or finding meaning in their personal life. Several of the twelve also gave examples from their counseling work of clients questing for meaning or discovering purpose in the midst of despair. Frankl (2000) believed that people who are able to transcend suffering and
experience spiritual and emotional health are able to find a deeper positive meaning for life. Nine of the participants spoke of individuals or clients who were seeking to create a meaningful life or who had found a way to transcend their pain and move to a new perspective of their situations. Several therapists spoke of what an honor it was to accompany clients on their healing journey as they make their way out of crisis, move away from the edge of the abyss and begin to voyage down a new path. Four counselors spoke of the difficulties of the work and the foremost necessity of maintaining their own health and integrity for stability. All participants mentioned ways they cared for themselves which often included mind, body and spirit aspects. The two school counselors spoke of wondering what they had accomplished and one specifically pondered if she had identified and helped all the students that she could.

Not every counselor was asked or had the opportunity to answer the question about her/his personal satisfaction with life. Those who did have an opportunity to respond, reported being very satisfied with their lives.

Aaron recalls how his father, during the last year of his life when he was dying of lung cancer, would say prayers. Prior to that period, Aaron never knew his father to go to church. Yet at the end of his life, his father was praying to a higher power. Using a parable from Buddhist tradition, Aaron offers an example of finding meaning in tragedy.

A woman, who lost her son, goes to the Buddha and he says, “First you must go into the town and bring me a mustard seed, which is a common thing, like a grain of rice . . . He says bring me a mustard seed from a family who has not known grief. Well, she goes to the first family and they know grief. They can’t help her, but they try. They sit together and talk about her loss. And then she goes to another one and another one. and she’s so desperate to have her son back that she goes to everyone in the town. And can find no one who has not known grief. By the time she comes back to the Buddha, she is at peace. But the miracle here is not
raising her son from the dead, but creating healing for the whole community by healing their grief.

Anna spoke of her father’s major health issues during the last ten years of his life. Although it was a difficult time, he never was angry about what was happening to him. He took all the health struggles in stride and just accepted what was happening to him. Watching him cope with challenge after challenge, Anna later adopted his philosophy of acceptance and sustaining belief in God when her own health was challenged. She recalled with a quiet laugh how her father used humor.

P. 2 And the only thing that I remember, at one point he said, “I can’t understand why you are so concerned about my heart. If I had a heart attack and died, I’d be out of this mess.” They couldn’t give him this kind of chemo because it might affect his heart . . . Not that he had a death wish or anything, but it was like he kind of chuckled after he said it. That was a week or so before he died that he said that.

Ben spoke of how his clients educated him through sharing their life experiences. Some of his young clients were gurus and mentors to him, provoking awareness and new growth. Those young people shared about the awful things they had been through and how they found a way to move toward health. Finding meaning is inherent in Ben’s statements of his young clients’ difficult journeys.

P. 3 Many things I’ve learned from the people I’ve worked with, not just therapists, but predominantly clients I’ve worked with, the families I’ve worked with, who have taught me. I’ve learned as much as I teach if not more when I’m working with someone.

Personally, Ben quested for purpose and meaning in his early life but has come to believe it lies resident within him. As he has grown, he believes he has a better sense of knowledge about what provides personal meaning for him in his life. A sense of connectedness with others is very important to him.
Bess personally created meaning regarding the discovery of a serious heart problem and the perspective with which she chose to view it. She made a choice to put her part time university instructor’s position on hold to focus on her health and family relationships.

And I remember reading once, someone wrote, Instead of saying ‘why me?’ say ‘why not me?’ And I said, well, it’s true, I’ve been pretty fortunate and I’m healthy.” It’s just something that happened and I’m dealing with it. I’m not angry at God or anything. I’ve been fortunate so far. I’m feeling okay. I’m on some medication. So, I think various things have occurred during my life. It just changes you.

Having worked with individuals who suffered horrendous abuse, she is aware of some of the challenges people have to face to recover. Personally, she is touched by stories of when someone performed an act of goodness. The essence of the meaning in situations such as when people perhaps saved someone they didn’t even know stays with her.

The role model of the way former Pope John Paul found meaning in his suffering stands significant in her mind. He offered his suffering for the benefit of others. This Catholic tradition is a way of honoring others through the personal ordeals he endured.

I think that the thing I learned from the watching all of the death of the last Pope, Pope John Paul, was he wrote several things and talked several times about the meaning of suffering. And I think in our society we are such a pill-popping, no body is supposed to feel anything, society. He was a very spiritual man and recognized that suffering is a part of life. People do have times in their lives that are very difficult, but it doesn’t mean that there isn’t meaning. And what he did in his life was he offered the suffering for the people. And I think people can, when they are going through difficult times, recognize that there is some meaning to this.

Using her counselor expertise, Bess suggested people can reflect on their struggle and suffering then ponder what it is they can learn from the difficult events and if there is
something they need to change. She believed we need a better recognition in our society of the meaning of suffering.

Chad reports the person he likes to work with in the prison system is the individual who will not be getting out. The “lifers” have to construct a meaningful life within the prison walls. In therapy, Chad journeys along with the client who faces a devastating future and tries to discover a way to find or make meaning for their life. The opportunity to travel with the client as he builds a life with a purpose or focus, is rare and special. It is one of the most powerful experiences that he has in his counseling work. The epiphanies or states of radical wonder that he is privileged to observe happen infrequently, often just a few times a year. Even for individuals with anti-social features, Chad has sometimes seen change and growth.

Teresa experienced leaps in her spiritual development occurring during times of great tragedy or while dealing with life problems and also during the directed retreats. Thus, the dark times and the light times brought faith growth for her. She’s used her spiritual direction skills to aid individuals who were physically or sexually abused or otherwise traumatized by life events to discover the dimensions of themselves which have been split off during the trauma. The client must follow up in counseling and do the needed work to solidify healing and acceptance.

One individual revealed to Teresa she had just been diagnosed with breast cancer and had to struggle with life and death issues. Teresa aided the individual’s spiritual journey while another therapist provided counseling help for deep-seated issues. The individual did the personal work, found meaning in the turmoil and successfully passed the five year mark recently.
Claire ponders the meaning of life and death now that she is aging. The Jewish faith is unclear about the existence of an afterlife and although Claire hopes there is one, she’s not very comfortable yet with the concept of death. She is searching for meaning in her life since she retired. She believes God has given her some talent with words and thinks she may be called to write. Dearly loving her Jewish faith group, she finds great satisfaction writing the newsletter and other items for them. In addition, she’s interested in doing social action work with her group, such as feeding the parents staying at the Ronald McDonald house or the workers at a local Jewish nursing home on Christmas day.

Professionally, Claire did long-term therapy in a psychiatrist’s practice for many years. They would share cases so she got to know people in depth. There would always come a point where the client started talking about the meaning of life and wondering what their part was in all of this.

After they get past the crisis that brings them in, at some point I think meaning is really, really, really important. I think it is something that very much gets left out of behaviorist and cognitive sort of therapies that people are doing today. They don’t look at that (meaning) at all. And I think it is a real loss.

David looks for the meaning of suffering. It’s David’s belief that God doesn’t want us to suffer so he struggles with why good people suffer. He knows people who are more faithful than he who have battled serious problems. Currently, his explanation is that we have to take control of the way we see things, maintaining a positive healthy view. These perceptions are based partly on a metaphysical idea that everything we do affects everything else and also on a friend’s Christian Scientist’s focus of taking a positive view of life.
You hear things, ‘well, you are supposed to suffer.’ God suffered so you have to suffer. No. God suffered for us so we didn’t have to go through these things. So, that’s a battle that I’m currently kind of fighting back and forth – is understanding that. I guess of all the things about God, That’s the one that I find that is difficult to comprehend. Again, I don’t question. I say, ‘well, why am I healthy as I am and other people are not?’ And I can’t answer that.

Esther spoke of her belief that we are born with our purpose and plan given to us by a higher authority. It is our life’s journey to interpret the events and recognize the people who come into our life to become aware of our purpose and find meaning. She has also pondered health and illness and quotes a Bible passage from the Old Testament memorized early in her life.

Today before you I lay pleasure or misery, health or illness, life or death. Now choose.

She takes this verse which is powerful to her and ties it with a scripture from the New Testament. This verse she interprets as Jesus desiring the very finest for all humans.

The kingdom of heaven is at hand. It is within you . . . Jesus wanted the very, very best for us. And he believed in the very best for us. He said, ‘seek ye not the kingdom of heaven outside of you. It is within you.’

Heaven is not an intellectual phenomenon. Esther believes God is within us – in our heart and soul. We only need to be awakened to discover this.

Part of Grace’s healing from cancer was finding her voice. This took the form of chanting in her spiritual practice. Finding her voice in other ways continued to help her grow. She began to focus on what she really wanted in life and began to express it. Suddenly, many positive things happened at once, a move, husband’s new position, leaving her practice and support base. Presently, she’s seeking and finding new avenues for meaning in her life.
Jesse also brought up the subject of why bad things happen to good people. He thinks it is just because that is life. He believes God redeems difficult things in life that shape our character. He feels God is with us during the troublesome times.

Lily states she doesn’t always understand how some things can happen to the children she attempts to help. But she will focus on trying to find something positive in the negative world surrounding a child. When the children don’t have a church background they don’t always have values to guide them. When helping students without faith through difficult situations, she finds meaning in reflection, trying to understand, grow and appreciate what she has in life.

In her personal life, Lily has begun pondering what meaning the future will hold for her life when she retires and many things change. She’s been praying for direction for a clear purpose for her life.

P. 12 Right now that’s been one of the big things that I’ve been asking for direction because I’m not sure . . . I think what does God have for me after that? What purpose will I have? Because I must, I have to have something because if not, then I’m not giving back to society. I’m at that point in my life. I remember in college classes learning that when you get to this point you want to give something back to life. So, I don’t know what legacy that’s going to lead me to.

Having an established central faith base seemed to afford the counselors with a method for interpreting and understanding life’s circumstances. Within this framework of their guiding faith, they can choose to engage in work and activities that bring them meaningful satisfaction and enhance the possibility of achieving a state of Flow.

Relationships

A second overarching theme was the concept of relationships. Every participant mentioned the significance of relationships in his/her life. Some talked about their
connection with God and how that influences their relationships with others. Others talked about the importance of their connection with others or connection through nature. Almost half of the counselors spoke of how they were unable to separate their spiritual life from other dimensions of life. The participants’ personal and professional lives seemed quite congruent. Apparently, the spiritual connection they feel with their God within or higher power ripples out into the relationships they have with family, friends and others. It seems evident from the respondents’ statements that they see themselves as a relational beings which resonates deeply with their spiritual focus. Relationships involve thoughts, feelings, actions, behaviors and communications.

The continuous sharpening of relationship skills is one of the cornerstones of developing expertise in counseling (Jennings & Skovholt, 2005). Not only were personal relationships of great value to the participants, but they highly regarded their working relationship with clients and others. This research finding is consistent with the literature review on relationships. Skovholt, Ronnestad, & Jennings (1997) found the single most important aptitude in counseling is the ability to develop and maintain a therapeutic working relationship which is associated with successful client outcomes (Sexton & Whiston, 1994).

Aaron’s world view incorporates the concept that we are all in a web of relationships and we all affect one another. Relationships are very important to Anna, personally and professionally. Anna’s most challenging thing in her personal life has been maintaining her good marital relationship for 36 years.

P. 2 It’s been good. I have a wonderful husband, but it is something you work at all the time. You never take it for granted. You are constantly working
at ways for the relationship to grow and mature. So, I’d say that has probably been the most challenging thing in my personal life.

Having been raised in a close loving family, she had lots of attention and positive interactions with her parents. Anna’s large extended family relationships included 15 cousins. The positive relationships she experienced as a child were repeated when she and her husband raised their two children, who never gave them any difficulties. Both children attended a Mennonite high school, a Mennonite college and still believe strongly in their faith.

Ben began his story by speaking of the relationships in his family.

P. 3 I was a child in a family of four boys. Just the way we interacted with each other and valued each other, how we expressed love and solved problems, and bonded together to do what’s necessary to deal with the challenges of life was part of my learning about what spirituality was.

Ben saw his parents as having a real commitment to the children and valuing their relationships. In response to my question about what brings purpose and meaning to his life, Ben mentioned his relationship to others. He spoke of how linking with the significant others in his life is extremely important to him.

Ben practices his spirituality in his daily life through interactions with people. When he goes for an early morning walk, one of his children may ask to go along. That will be an opportunity to talk in depth about the important subject of the day. He also appreciates being in nature’s surroundings.

Bess spoke first of her personal relationship with God. The women in her family had close relationships with the church and the parish priest which provided a day-to-day connection with faith as she was growing up. The entire small town was a close-knit social network of relationships. Bess continued the close relationships in the family she
created with her first husband. She was a bonding factor and strong influence in her own family. In response to my question about purpose and meaning in her life, Bess mentioned it would definitely be her family. She loves her grandchildren and having fun with them. Her current marital relationship is very important, as well as blending their families. She likes to accompany her husband on trips and is learning to do more fun things.

Married for thirty years, Chad spoke of the balance in their relationship and the pattern of interactions in their life. With a focus on orienting his life around compassion for others, he feels joined with the world and believes we are all linked together.

Teresa speaks of her very deep relationship with God who is at the core of her very being. Having taught personal spirituality and theological experience, she is well prepared to speak of her view of relationship with God.

P. 6 You could never be any closer to God than you already are. God is the very core of your life and being. And our task here is more about becoming aware of that and whatever tools you can use to help you become aware of that then that’s up to you . . . The difference between you and me right now and someone who is planning a murder, isn’t in terms of whether God is close to us or to them but how we have responded to that fact that God is the core of my being. It’s not that God loves that person less. It’s not that God does not love somebody like that. It’s our awareness and cooperation with God’s love. It’s about, “Will I let God in?” Will I accept that God is the very core of all life.

Claire attends to her day to day relationships with people with care. She values her associations with others and especially loves the people she’s in relationship with in her Jewish faith group. The interest in and valuing of relationships has been passed onto her children. It’s evidenced in how they connect with others around them. Relationships are important to both her and her husband.
P. 7 Relationships are really important to him, too. I think maybe sometimes he thinks his relationship skills aren’t as good as mine. I don’t know if that is true or not, but there are times when he is better than I am and there are times when I’m better than he is. We kind of bounce back and forth and trade off on things like that. People like him a lot. When he starts to say something everyone gets quiet because they want to hear what he’s going to say because he is very insightful.

David first spoke of relationships in the context of growing up in a close family that was actively involved with their church and the large social network of people associated with church. At age 12, when he began being a church camp counselor during the summer, he could develop a spiritual relationship with the children and enjoyed that. Church traditions passed on from his parents have continued the family progression and are being practiced in his children’s homes with the grandchildren. He values his relationships at work with individuals who also have spiritual values. Throughout his interview, David often mentioned the value of relationships in every aspect of his life. He finds it sad when individuals become isolated and lose their relationships and ability to relate.

David defined spirituality as your awareness of your relationship with God and God’s direction and purpose for you. He speaks of his personal relationship with God.

P. 8 There are times in any kind of relationship where you think, Gee, I ought to be doing this, I ought to be doing that. I think of that. I can find myself a lot of times comparing my parents and God. I think, well, I feel this way about my parents and I should feel that way about God, too. I feel the same way over her. I haven’t seen my parents for a couple weeks, so I feel like . . . I try to make sure I call them every day. When I think about that with my parents, well, then I think, what about God? God is there, too. God wants that relationship, too, just like I have that relationship with my parents.

Esther spoke of the unconditional love she had for three adult mentors in her life. She felt God worked through those special relationships. When sharing about the
definition of spirituality, Esther dialogued about how her marital relationship has grown and changed over the years.

P. 9 So many people talk about love as if it is a feeling or an emotion when in fact, it is an action. It is a behavior. Now with Jack, during the evolution of our marriage, we’ve both had to grow, separately and together. He said to me once, “Love is behavior. I go to work every day and when you were home with the kids there was no pressure on you to do anything. I love you.” And then he would expand on that. But that makes sense to me. You know it is just not that butterfly attraction. That doesn’t last very long. Jesse believes in a personal relationship with God.

P. 11 God created us as part of His overall creation and He values us very, very much . . . It’s a relationship . . . I am connected with God and that is the journey. That impacts every aspect of my life . . . For example, not just how I am treating others, but which guideline am I using in treating others? And that is encapsulated in the relationship with God.

Relationships rose to the forefront as an important component of the counseling work the participating counselors do. The interviewees valued their relationship with the clients and worked hard to keep a therapeutic focus.

P. 6 For me, I think that part of the job of a counselor coming from a spiritual perspective is . . . I know we say it helps a person feel safe, but I think you help them feel safe by . . . in an appropriate way, loving them as they are, whatever they say, whatever they do. Not acting judgmental or anything else but asking the kinds of questions they need to ask themselves or they need to look at or you think they need to look at or listening to them and finding out. Then asking questions instead of talking. That maybe will help them look at their deeper Christian controversy.

P. 9 I think being able to have an exchange with clients who are able to offer me some of their information, their book titles, their experiences, if you will. So, I think the spiritual exchange, call it energy, if you will, is something that is vital in therapy. Because when you get right down to it at the end of the day, I feel it’s that very powerful, special, unconditional relationship that moves counseling forward . . . Carl Rogers spoke about what makes the counseling move forward or therapy move forward.
Exploration of Themes

Introduction

Three first order themes arose under the first research question and another three first order themes arose under the second research question. Participants’ quotes are included to support the identification and clustering of themes. The overarching themes were already investigated thoroughly in this chapter. At this point, the highlights of the remaining themes will now be presented. Later, the detailed categories under each of the themes will be explored in depth.

Under spiritual development journey, three themes emerged representing the areas of Influences on development, contributing factors to Faith Growth, and Faith Practices. Within the contribution of spirituality to counseling work realm, the themes described the counselor’s Personal Attributes, their Work Focus, and the actual process of Addressing Spirituality in counseling work. Within each of the themes, categories emerged that further expanded and explained the major themes. Table Three is a complete listing of themes and categories. Representative samples of these themes will be presented by citing the participants’ quotes. Quotes will be indicated with a P.x where x describes the participant by the order in which the interviews were conducted.

Influences clearly emerged as having categories of Early Faith, Health Challenges, Life Events, Meaning and Relationships. Health challenges often created opportunities for their faith to grow and sustain them during the turmoil or altered to a newer faith focus more consistent with the person they had become. Many pondered the meaning of their life. All individuals seemed comfortable with the concept of the client bringing up their struggles with life’s meaning during their counseling work together.
Table 3

*Spirituality Questions and Resulting Themes and Categories*

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Statements describing **influences** are noted below.

P. 4  Life changes you and you are all you have . . . you make choices.

Bess had many life challenges herself but found faith to be a solid foundation that provided stability for her.

P. 4  My faith has sustained me. I just have to say that. I mean really, if I didn’t have that, I think I would have been in the hospital. Yeah, I would have. I wouldn’t have been able to take it.

David spoke of his spiritual journey within the Lutheran church of his childhood. He’s been very active over the years and sits on church council which is currently in transition.

P. 8  It’s really cool at Grace because one of the things I’ve noticed is that we are a church that is growing, not just in numbers, but in spiritual growth. A church that is being seen more and more as a church that has a mission and a purpose and a ministry that is very devoted to that purpose and very spiritual in the way it is headed. And I see our council as being the role model for the church as a whole cause that’s how we developed ourselves . . . and the people coming in are talking about what a faith filled experience it is to come and what a sense of purpose they pick up and community in the church. That’s what it is all about.

Jesse was raised in the conservative Pentecostal faith, attended faith-based colleges and served in several pastoral positions. Eventually, he left that faith and today attends a non-denominational church.

P. 11 I have this relationship with God which has grown over the years, has outgrown a number of conceptualizations that I’ve had about God, which were just views of God that I placed on Him and they are not Him. They’re just interpretations of who I think He is based upon a number of factors. So, the relationship has grown over time because I’ve let go of trying to place Him in a box because He’s not designed to fit in a box.

P. 1 Throughout my high school years I wanted to be a priest . . . I went to Catechism class. I went to adult conversion class and I said the Rosary as I walked to school. During football practice, I felt that I needed to just keep the Rosary discretely hidden in my pocket to not let it show that I
was so deeply into “religion.” Well, then came the college years. I studied Western Culture and the development of Civilization. I had questions that needed answered about science and faith. The priest would say, “Well, you just need to accept the church doctrine on faith.” The Virgin Birth, yada, yada. Accept it on faith. And I couldn’t reconcile evolution and science with faith.

I was raised in a family of Roman Catholics with 12 years of catechism. I thought for a moment that I might be a priest when I was about 13 or 14. When I was 16, I started to have my own thoughts about religiosity and disagreed with the church. Essentially there was no sign-out sheet, but I just stopped considering myself a Catholic. When I was 19, I started exploring other traditions.

My father was an atheist. My mother was an agnostic. . . And there was no religion in our home whatsoever. . . Then, when I was 16, I was in my art class, working on a project after school one day. I started talking to my art teacher, who happened to be Jewish. I don’t remember what we talked about, but somehow as a result of that conversation she brought me a book called *A History of the Jews*. I took that book home and I read the whole thing. I remember thinking to myself, “Well, this is what I’m like. I should’ve been Jewish. I don’t know why I was born this way.”

**Faith Growth** had contributing factors included categories of Changes, Spiritual Challenges and Yearnings. Examples of faith growth statements are listed below.

I was raised Roman Catholic and still practice that today. . . That kind of personal relationship with God was important growing up. I always had a sense of a kind of spiritual connection. . . (In college) we had religion classes and philosophy classes and I began to recognize that one’s faith isn’t just about not eating meat on Friday or you’re going to hell. So, it grew in that way. I became more open to understanding what faith is all about.

I have always felt invisible hands, if you will, directing me, having grown up on a farm, very close to nature. I could see the essence of God when I would walk in the woods and climb a tree and touch the bark of the tree. . . I was fortunate enough to be influenced by an intellectual and artistic couple who purchased our home place. Mr. and Mrs. Jones became very instrumental in my life and taught me to see beauty and form and to use these kinds of experiences as God among us.
Changes had two identified subcategories. The two are individuals who made new choices and changed the faith of their childhood and those who remained the same faith but matured within it. Individuals in both sub-categories explored their faith through reading, church participation, discussion groups and reflection. Statements follow which describe changes.

P. 8 I’ve been a Lutheran all my life and that spiritual development was fostered by grandparents and parents. . .when I got to Ohio State, I never thought once about not going to church. So I found a Lutheran campus ministry down there and attended church all through Ohio State. I met Carol Ann and got to know her and her church. I started taking time to go and visit the Catholic church. This alternating one week at the Catholic church and the next at The Lutheran church, is a practice, of course, we’ve kept up throughout our marriage.

P. 11 I was born into a Christian family that was very involved in the church. . . it was a conservative approach to spiritual life. I mean conservative church. There was a time in my life where even as a child I knew that this was not for me. . . I feel like I’ve grown dramatically in different ways over the years to where I’m at now. . . I’ve really grown in my relationship with God. . . I’ve had a number of presuppositions challenged along the way . . . outgrown a number of conceptualizations of Him . . . I want to reflect that nature that was shown in Jesus Christ when he walked the face of the earth. He is the model I aim for now.

Faith practices had components labeled Health, Activities and Time. Participants explored faith topics through spiritual reading from a wide variety of sources including Buddhism, Taoism, philosophy, holistic health, and the ancient mystics, Native American traditions, Judaism, the Bible, historical Biblical fiction through current day authors M. Scott Peck and Ram Dass. All but two individuals currently belong to a faith organization that meets regularly. The remaining two individuals celebrated their faith in a solitary fashion, either enjoying nature or through various spiritual and Biblical readings. Examples of faith practices are given below.
I like going to Sunday school especially when we can get into discussions about things. . . I like to read a lot, so I’ve read a lot of historical fiction. . . I think just reading that puts the historical Bible into another picture . . . It brings a historical perspective into the lives of the people – makes them a little more real. . . . I’ll sit down and picture God sitting across from me and kind of carrying on a conversation. . . . I’m on church council. . . . We’ve had opportunities to take a couple weekend retreats.

What I do sometimes is to dwell in the word. . . be open and quiet and reflective . . . (waiting) for Him to tell me what He wants. If it’s something very, very serious, then I fast.

Under the research question, the contribution of spirituality to counseling work, three themes were identified: Counselor Attributes, Work Focus, and Spirituality In Work. Categories under Counselor Attributes were: education, personal beliefs, personal characteristics, and life mottos. This was a very well educated group who seemed to continue to quest for new knowledge and improvements on their skills. The demographic listing of their self description of characteristics provided a wide range of adjectives. Participants often shared old sayings or life motto type of themes which they held as particularly meaningful or significant for them. Counselor Attributes are demonstrated by statements below.

I have occasionally seen miracles happen, but most of the time the miracle happens because you do the things that you need to do and something shifts inside and the healing begins to occur. Of course, there’s the old Middle Eastern saying that says, “Trust in God but tie up your camel.” That tends to be my perspective. Or God helps those who help themselves. So do what you need to do and then also have God support you.

I want to reflect the nature that was shown in Jesus Christ when he walked the face of the earth. He is the model I am for now. When I recognize it’s not all of my doing, I’m much more relaxed. I like this little Russian proverb that is, “Pray to God but row for shore.”
**Work Focus** had the categories of Relationships, Theory and View of Change. Many participants mentioned some aspect of Carl Rogers work, notably unconditional positive regard, and how they establish client relationships. Five individuals mentioned Cognitive Therapy and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy which research has shown to have a slightly higher success rate (Hubble, Duncan, & Miller, 2006). View of change included comments about awareness of clients who choose not to change and thoughts about those making the choice to change. **Work focus** is represented by the following statements.

P. 6 I probably was much more Rogerian when I began . . . Then I realized there were a lot of people who wanted to just be saved and they didn’t want to do the work . . . you can offer five people what they need, who aren’t going to take the steps they need to get well.

P. 8 We are all here to love and serve God and we are all here to love and serve each other . . . going back to that definition of how we are aware of God and how we relate to God . . . if you have a firm handle on that and you know that God wants what’s best for you, how could you not want what’s best for those kids?

**Spirituality in work** had three categories titled Addressing Spirituality, Career Focus and Prayer at Work. Career Focus included aspects of how participants viewed faith values contributing to actions and behaviors. Statements reflecting **spirituality at work** are shown below.

P. 2 I’m comfortable when my clients talk to me about their spirituality and how it impacts them. Part of our intake assessment here, we ask questions about spirituality and how it impacts families and whether or not it is a positive or negative in their lives. We utilize that . . . I’m very comfortable talking to families, no matter what their religious beliefs are.

P. 10 I always included spirituality in the history with people. I always asked them if they had a belief system or a spiritual grounding or a religion. I pretty much put it in that order.
Categories

With the overarching themes and first order themes presented, let’s explore the detailed categories of each theme. Again, quotations from participants’ transcripts are integrated to support the emerging categories.

Spiritual Development

Spirituality is a developmental process involving the accumulation and integration of spiritual experiences over time (Chandler, Holden & Kolander, 1992). As a person makes meaning of life experiences, moving through developmental stages, they create personal faith structures (Fowler, 1981). Having a personal spirituality may be related to the ability to make meaning, create a purposeful life and perhaps a moral structure. Interaction with the spiritual core or connection flows out into the individual’s perspective on life and relationships with significant others. Participants took opportunities for on-going rejuvenation and re-energizing almost daily which seemed to sustain them in the sometimes difficult and challenging counseling work they do. Let’s take a look at some of the influences on the participants’ spiritual development over the years.

Influences

The participating counselors consistently spoke of developmental experiences which Worthington (1989) examined in his faith exploration article. A trigger even can precipitate a crisis which invites the adult to re-examine or reorient their life. During this period of disequilibrium, the believer often feels powerless, as if part of their life is ending and priorities need to be re-structured.
Referring to Erikson’s (1950) generativity versus stagnation crisis of middle adulthood, this phase often stimulates a re-examination of the religious dream that guided the individual’s early life. Successful processing of this crisis can alter an individual’s life course and perhaps stimulate a change in faith. To leave a legacy is the generative desire. Successful resolution frees the religious person to lead a more altruistic life, focusing on caring for people in their immediate realm as well as the extended community. In this study, we especially heard the ponderings of the generativity crisis in the two school counselors who are planning to retire shortly. Claire, who is retired, re-focused her life on serving others through her Jewish faith, and has a special interest in social action.

Integrity versus despair is the final adult crisis. As the person grows in psychological maturity, faith can mature as well. A critical insight of maturity, as well as religious traditions, is the awareness that the person is more than what she or he has done. Losses and deprivations of old age are ways of separating from the false securities of life. The person is freed to live more fully in the present through letting go. Faith can be shaped by the challenges of old age. None of the individuals in this study are at old age yet, however, many spoke of re-organizing their priorities towards the importance of their relationships and family connections.

Five individuals kept the faith of their childhood but grew and matured in their awareness and understanding of faith concepts. Let’s take a look at some general influences on the participants of this study. Bess kept her Catholic faith when peers in college and early adulthood were leaving the church. Discussions with them challenged
her to ponder and solidify her faith beliefs. Life events changed some of her friends and choices they made early in life came back to haunt them.

*Early Faith.*

It seems significant that the solid faith foundation of the early life of these participants is aligned with their current feelings of spirituality as the core essence of their personality. Childhood church experiences influenced seven of the expert counselors’ career choice. All had a desire to serve others.

P. 1 At age six, I told my mother I wanted to be a priest . . . I wanted to make people good.

Faith, love, devotion, altruism and service were strong themes in Anna’s young life which she has maintained throughout her life. She believes her spirituality gives her a groundedness and sense of meaning to all she does.

P. 2 That foundation of faith was always there . . . I bring a sense of groundedness . . . I’m confident in who I am and what my core values are

P. 4 That kind of personal relationship with God was important growing up. I always had a sense of a kind of spiritual connection . . . I think mine (faith actions) . . . would be more in my strength.

P. 6 God was an essential part of our daily lives

P. 11 I was born into a Christian family . . . that was very involved in the church . . . it was kind of a church family

Teresa commented on the lack of an early faith life and how it affected some individuals. In her professional life, Teresa encountered a renowned individual who was attempting to help individuals seemingly possessed by evil spirits. He believed “they are spirits that are not settled. They’re not at home.”

P. 6 Now I tend to think it is because maybe they didn’t have a faith to lead them . . . maybe they got killed in the war . . . (or) in a car accident,
unexpectedly . . . to me, it would help to lead them to the light or God.

The participants’ early faith lives seem to have contributed to the core or connection that they have defined as the spirituality of their adult lives. Let’s review their definitions of spirituality.

*Health Challenges.*

Anna survived two major health challenges. In this passage she speaks of how she felt God’s presence while unconscious.

P. 2 I had some major health problems two times in my life. In 1989, I was in my late 30’s and in graduate school and had to have a hysterectomy. And I can remember, feeling . . . and had complications afterwards . . . found out later that I almost died. I always had a sense that it was God that brought me through all that and made sure that I was going to be okay. And put the right people in the right place at the right time to make sure that I would be able to get through that. Even though there was a lot of physical pain . . . I always had all this confidence once I came to . . . I just felt very secure. I remember being there in the hospital for several weeks and not really being able to respond to people talking to me. Not really being aware that they were there. But there was just always a presence there and I felt very calm about it.

During Bess’s final pregnancy, she was carrying twins. A crisis in the pregnancy occurred and she had to have surgical intervention. Bess didn’t get angry with God over these happenings. She saw herself as pretty fortunate that she’s been healthy and feels okay now. However, she noted that a variety of things have occurred in her life and it just changed her.

P. 4 My youngest are twins and they were born prematurely. And going through that whole thing . . . I had to have an emergency c-section. And the year before I had my twins, I had a friend who died giving birth to twins. She had a c-section and had complications with that. So, I’m in the hospital, thinking of all that, going, “Oh, dear.” So, fortunately, my babies survived and I survived. Prior to that my second child was born with club feet. I remember being in the hospital and I just cried for all the babies in the world who were born with a disability or something. Fortunately, he
had several surgeries and he is fine. But I think experiencing various things in your own life . . . And I’ve had a health challenge most recently. I found out two months ago that I have a dilated cardio-myopathy, which is serious heart damage due to a virus, that I guess I got at some point and didn’t know it until I started having all these heart problems. So, that’s been a challenge.

Regarding his work in a prison, Chad has experienced occasional burnout. He finds avenues for rejuvenation.

P. 5 Sometimes I haven’t (enjoyed my work). I’ve probably had a couple of episodes of burnout. The 1st episode of burnout, I ended up going to the university program for my clinical work and Gestalt came along about the same times. The 2nd episode, I got into relationship with a psychotherapist in California who was also an astrologer and got into a mentoring thing with him and was able to renew my vision of things. So, consequently, I’ve survived those relatively well. But I must admit, after 24 years, in some ways, the thrill is gone. I don’t go out of my way looking for clients. I was hungry before for clients and trying to be helpful. Working and trying to be helpful. Now, I’m much more moving towards retirement. The clients come to me that genuinely want to be helped. And if I feel I can genuinely be helpful, then I put my heart and soul into it.

Life Events.

Aaron experienced a significant life connection when he found a martial arts expert near his home. His on-going training and deep connection to his master has continued throughout the past 34 years.

P. 1 The traditional Chinese Martial Arts. You might call it Kung-Fu. It’s called Quan Ying Do. My master was originally from the Shaolin Temple in China. And of all places in the world he ends up in this small town not far from where I live. If you wanted to study opera, to be with Pavarotti, you’d have to go to Italy. Well, I didn’t have to go to China. My master, with whom I have a deep, deep connection, settled not far from here. I’ve been a regular student for 34 years . . . My master has been my main root in my martial arts for all these years. I learned of my master through word of mouth. He worked as a bailiff for the county. He would walk into the cell unarmed, pull out whoever he wanted and take them to court and transport them back. He was a little, short man. He held the rank of 10th degree black belt which is the highest you can go in the martial arts. I mean the first 3 or 4 degrees are based on skill. He was a professional
fighter. He was undefeated his entire life. He would go back to China every so many years and he was undefeated in all of his professional matches. Some of them were death matches. Whoever lands the first punch wins would usually win, so devastating was their power. My master would say, “It’s fate that brings people through the door, not advertising.” . . . His name and number weren’t in the phone book. He wasn’t in the yellow pages. It was word of mouth.

Opportunities for growth came in several ways for Teresa. One avenue was during major cultural diversity experiences both in and out of the United States. Other breakthroughs in her own spirituality came during the years she was working with The Foundation for Shamanic Studies, and completing her doctoral study.

I did some work with them and then trained a group of people. My thesis was that through the ages, the shaman person was supposed to be helping their tribe as kind of like a spiritual and mystical leader. So my contention was that through the ages and in various religious congregations there were women who . . . because I had to tie it into women’s studies and spirituality . . . there were women who functioned as the shaman of their tribe even though they might not have received that name. So people like Teresa of Avila, Hildegard of Bingen, and Catherine of Siena had experiences which compared to some of the experiences in my work that I had done. So I took . . . I started off with maybe 15 or 18 people but ultimately ended with 5 core people, that I trained in shamanic journey work. They are Catholic sisters or were Catholic sisters. I also finally honed it down to the ones who were probably a little more intuitive. And then recorded their journeys and tied them into Catholic spirituality because of what they had seen.

Seeking.

Jesse made a number of refinements in his career path until he felt a comfortable fit with what he desired to do.

At the time, my sense was, I really wanted to be providing pastoral care and counseling that was afforded me in those adolescent ups and downs. I was able to go in and talk to my pastor. I never had the idea that I wanted to be a preacher. I wanted to serve in that sliver of what they did to help others through difficult times. At the time I didn’t know that was actually a field of pastoral care – pastoral counseling – and later on clinical counseling from a Christian world view, which is where I am at today.
That’s where my heart was at. And so I was trained in lots of theology, lots of Bible, lots of other things. And I think I had 2 classes out of my 128 semester hours, one was in just general psychology, kind of the liberal arts class and the other was in pastoral counseling. So, I went off and again, my ministerial career as a staff pastor, choosing that because I wanted to do my specialization area, although, now I didn’t really have any training in it, but wanted to do it. So, I did youth ministry. I did, eventually, get real close in the pastoral care position I held in a church in upstate New York. So, my spiritual development and my professional development were running concurrent tracks. One was interacting with the other all of the time so that my vocation truly was a definition of avocation, as they call it. Anyways, in saying all that, I don’t mean to say that my spiritual development just took that track. But a lot of the emphasis in my mind during that time was finding my way through life as I was developing my spiritual life. That was a constant.

Bess wanted to be a social worker when she started college. The desire to do this came from the role model of her family of origin’s example of helping others. She graduated from college, met her husband, married and began to have babies, which led to a turn in her career path.

P. 4 I had natural childbirth with my first daughter and also with my son. And I got very psyched up about natural childbirth and I said I want to teach childbirth classes. And so I went back to school and got a nursing degree and started teaching the classes and worked with pregnant teenagers. So I had many experiences with that. And then I directed a woman’s center, so I went back to school in counseling. I thought, I’m better at talking to people than I am at giving shots (laughing). I really didn’t like the shot thing too much.

Chad intended to teach religion in New England when he finished college but his desired place of employment did not materialize with a position. As he describes it, he began to listen to hear what the world was saying to him.

P. 5 As I finished up my coursework, I’d originally intended to teach religion in independent schools in New England. I made some applications. I found a beautiful school that was interested in me. It was right on the border between Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Oddly enough there was a friend of mine from college who worked there as a photography teacher. There were 77 applicants for this position. I was notified that I
was the alternative if the person they had selected didn’t want it. Well, the person they selected wanted it. I try to be awake to what the world is saying to me. I do believe the world is living. It’s not just dead stuff. Because I believe we get all kinds of messages if we just pay attention. Maybe I should be looking more closely at what else is going on. I was looking through the ads in the paper and saw an ad for a psychiatric social worker.

Probably the most unusual career change occurred for Grace, who began her career path as a dancer in NYC. Upon her return to Ohio, she became involved with a group of women healers. Renewing her college studies, she perused somatic studies about the mind-body-spirit connection and discovered the focus on holistic health and everything is related. She shares her journey below.

P. 10 And after I graduated, I moved to New York City to do dance and just started looking at self-help books and new age stuff. And I kept at that for a long time. I moved back, to Ohio. And I had friends who taught me tarot card reading and things like that. And I started studying yoga. I don’t know that those are related but my yoga teacher also did do tarot. So, yeah they are, I guess. And kept reading and looking. I looked at channeled literature – Emmanuel or whoever else was out there, other pieces of literature, spiritual pieces. And I really had, I think about 10 years in there, in that 25-34 range, where I was just sort of doing that kind of stuff – looking and thinking about it, but not going to church, not wanting to be a part of any structure, but I was trying different things out. I’d had a women’s spirituality group called Goddess of the Month Club . . other women, who were healers, like a massage therapist and a chiropractor and others. I just kept looking at things. And I had started doing some work in counseling. Let’s see, I got my second masters in my early 30s and got hired by psychologists.

*Faith Growth*

Regarding Fowler’s Stages of Faith (1981), this investigator’s guess would be that two participants remain in Stage Four Synthetic Conventional Faith. Fowler (1981) believed this was the stage in which most adults became entrenched. It is a stage where
individuals conform to the faith of their family or culture and fail to reflect or analyze
their viewpoint. Values and beliefs are deeply felt.

Six participants are most likely in Stage Five Individuating Reflexive Faith. These individuals have taken responsibility for their life, values and perspective. They no longer are a composite of a specific role in the larger, defining group. They’ve explored other options. The reader will have noted the language of individuation in the stores of these research participants.

It is very possible the remaining four interviewees have achieved Stage Six Conjunctive Faith where individuals reclaim and re-work the past, become more tolerant of paradox and are exploring new depths of spiritual experience. While exploring new spiritual depths, they have re-integrated parts of themselves previously avoided. There is a new appreciation for symbols, myths, rituals of their own faith as well as others. Individuals have patience and tolerance of paradox. Recalling Jesse, who left his Pentecostal faith for a non-denominational church, he spoke of how he is much more comfortable now in his un-knowing than he ever was when trying to put God into a neat little box where everything was perfect. Teresa remained steadfast in her Catholic faith, but explored spiritual experiences such as the Shamanic journey and participated in cultural exchange opportunities which expanded her spiritual awareness. Let’s look at some of the participants’ specific comments relating to aspects of faith growth.

Changes.

P. 2 That foundation of belief was always there, even when I was kind of wandering, maybe not really attending the church or didn’t go, it was always kind of there. So, it was like a foundation. That’s the way I would say it – like a foundation. And so everything that I did and every decision I made regarding career, even decisions I made regarding friends, that is
always the underpinning that kept me grounded. I decided that I
wanted to do something with my life that was a way of giving . . . When
we decided to marry we knew we were always going to be a part of the
church . . . That’s through the ups and downs and whatever is out there,
great pastors or whatever. We always stayed just the same because it
wasn’t, we don’t see our spirituality or our religious membership as being
something that you buy and sell on the market. I mean you make a
commitment and you stick with it through the highs and the lows. And so
that is what we’ve done. We’ve never gone out and shopped for another
church. I would say no, that through the years I have changed. I think I’m
more mature now than I was, of course, many years ago.

*Spiritual Challenges.*

Esther grew up on a large farm isolated from peers and activities, and there was
no one to encourage her. Discovering elders in her life who mentored her, Esther is able
to say she doesn’t believe it was an accident that they met.

P. 9 Mistakes I have made or accomplishments I’ve obtained have become
great teachers . . . those mistakes that we were talking about become
powerful learning lessons that direct us back (on track).

One of the biggest challenges to her view of life occurred immediately after high
school when a peer invited her to go to California for a visit and stay in a family home
there. Experiencing the California culture and finding her way on her own, created many
growth opportunities for Esther.

P. 9 I think we can look at those experiences and see in them the seeds of God.
God isn’t this external invisible force. God works in people, places,
events and circumstances. And so, what an opportunity, instead of
throwing the bad away, I’ve listened and responded.

Grace is feeling some spiritual challenges now as she settles into her new position
as a full time pastor’s wife. She’s feeling called to go on sick calls with him to the
hospital and to use her skills to aid others in the church. With her husband, they are very
committed to bringing comfortable music, movement, and a relaxed atmosphere to their congregation which is new to them.

P. 10 It’s been a very hard row for me to hoe because so much damage has been done to people through religion and here I am a pastor’s wife. And I don’t suffer fools gladly . . . there is a lot of people who have been abused by priests and stuff up there.

P. 10 I actually choreographed a (sacred dance) piece for Joe’s installation into the church, which was interesting. I found out later that many people were not happy at the concept. Then once I did it they were blown away.

Yearnings.

Chad found his spirituality difficult to speak about and conceptualize to this interviewer. Due to the interviewer’s Christian background, Chad attempted to stay in the Christian terminology. It seemed problematic for him to put parameters around his beliefs and define them. In a follow-up e-mail, he wrote the process of being interviewed and then seeing his story in print, is provoking him to formulate and clarify his position more succinctly.

P. 5 Nothing concrete or positive can be said about the mystery which is the source of all this. To even refer to it as God is in a sense mislabeling it. So, this out of which all of us derive is something that remains nameless . . . The word God to me is very toxic because it is so contaminated with various understandings. And, in a way, it’s idolatress because you are attempting to construct an idol where I would say God is not a thing alongside other things. Because that would simply make God an object. I like Tillich’s notion of the ground of being. We live in a sacred world. And although we may choose to emphasize simply because of our own personality preferences, we may choose to emphasize one thing over another. It doesn’t mean that anything is more or less sacred, but it’s just the way we define things. You tend to get caught up in language that really messes us up.

Esther loves Sedona and Santa Fe, New Mexico, due to the spiritual connection and healing she finds there. She yearned to do more traveling and experience similar
spiritual healing locations. Since she re-structured her part-time private practice to a methodology where she works with individuals for a shorter duration, perhaps three to six sessions, more time is available.

P. 9 I knew something wasn’t quite the way I wanted it. I always wanted to go to Sedona. I always wanted to go to Santa Fe. I always wanted to do more traveling than I was able to. Because I know that I won’t be able to do it all the time. I know there is an end result to having lived a long life. And so it is time to really seize the moment. Have you been there? I loved Santa Fe. I just loved Sedona . . . I read somewhere where there are vortexes, mounds and small mountains, made of red rocks with the vortex, which is swirling energy that emanates from the soil. I read about that and I was very interested by that. I believe that it exists. And it could be placebo. I don’t know. But who cares if it was. I felt so healthy when I went to Sedona. And I thought, I deserve to be in Sedona. It’s very bright and very colorful. I could feel the energy and I saw it with my own eyes where there were certain trees and sagebrush that actually grew up around certain vortexes or mountains and it actually had a curling and swirling root system. So, there is an energy that is emitted from the earth. There are certain parts of the earth that have more of it than others. Sedona has it. It’s a real healing – spiritually, emotionally, physically healing place.

Faith Practices

Participants in this study clearly believed their attention to and on-going development of their faith contributed to their physical health and positively impacted their relationships with clients and significant others. This substantiates the literature which indicated being involved in spiritual behaviors like prayer, meditation and faith services has repeatedly shown improvements in general health functioning (Benson, 1996; Koenig, 2002), longevity, and depression (Larson & Larson, 2003). Both David and Jesse spoke of the second greatest scripture passages on loving your neighbor as yourself. The implications of this Bible passage in their lives means acquiring a healthy self-love which will ripple out into healthy social interactions. Bess also talked of what she terms as the spiritual connection of achieving a positive focus on self-care.
The final theme under spiritual development is Faith Practices and includes three categories of Health, Activities and Time. The participants in this study were overall a very faith-filled group who attended to their spirituality on a regular basis, which seemed to affect every dimension of their personality.

Health.

This group of participants seemed remarkably healthy. The focus of this study was not on holistic health; however, follow-up interviews on that topic might have been very enlightening. The core spirituality seemed to influence the individuals’ choices to treat their body in healthy ways and take time for nurturing and self-care. The quiet, reflective nature of most of the individuals may almost require periods of solitude for meditation and reflection. Flow seems to occur for them during periods of quiet as well as while in relationship. Several spoke of how spirituality contributed to their overall health and self-nurturing.

P. 4 And I think another thing that comes up (self-care), I know a lot in counseling that we generally have been taught in our society that when you think about yourself, and in religion, that it is selfish. It is not. You have to take care of yourself if you are going to give a good example to other people, too. You have to take care of yourself. So, I think, overcoming that, “This is not selfish, it’s really self care, is very important.” So, I think that is kind of a spiritual thing to recognize.

P. 8 God wants us to feel good. He wants us to be healthy. He wants us to like who we are. After all, God made us in God’s image. And God’s image in my mind is one of perfection and of health. And if we’re God’s image then that’s what God wants for us.

P. 11 I truly do believe the two greatest commands that Christ pointed out – loving God with all your heart, soul, mind and being; and loving your neighbor as yourself, which also informs my approach to mental health. Because there is a strong theological bent there – loving God with all your heart, soul, mind and being. Loving your neighbor as yourself touches on healthy self-love . . . I’ve done a lot of work with people of Christian faith
especially and I see that as an important component of overall health . . .

that’s encapsulated in the relationship with God, who gives us some guidelines as how to conduct ourselves with others - back to the loving others as ourselves.

Activities.

Five individuals say all of their life is spirituality and there is not separation between it and everyday life. A tally of the demographic form each counselor completed showed the participants in this study to be actively involved in their spirituality. Eleven individuals pray regularly and eleven meditate. Eight are involved with spiritual study and eight attend organized religious services. Please refer to Table 4 for a complete listing of activities.

Several participants wrote in specific activities that nurtured them spiritually. Some of the items mentioned were: visiting shrines, taking retreats, being in nature, practicing yoga and Bible study. An example of spiritual connection through nature follows.

P. 3 It’s not about words, that sense of spirituality or balance. It’s finding I actively do, too. When I lived in Alaska before we moved here, I’d go fishing for the day and I didn’t really care if I caught fish. I’d go out in middle of this one lake I go to. I’d catch some salmon. I’d watch the eagles go by into the mountains, smell the wind and the pine and salt water as the tide came into the tributary. I’d come home at the end of the day and I might’ve been out there 10 or 12 hours. And I’d come in, I wouldn’t have a thought in my head, not one, not even one word. I’d have just a real sense of sanctity, of purity, of getting rid of all the poisons, of all the conflictedness, the tension. And coming back. So, that’s a big piece of spirituality – going and being cleansed and getting to be just in the moment. To find yourself first you must forget yourself kind of like . . . I loose track of myself. I’m absorbed in what’s around me. That happens with people.
Lily enjoys nature also and shares with God the events of her life as she meanders through the woods. Here she is speaking of what helps relieve stress to calm and rejuvenate her.
Table 4

*Counselors’ Choice of Spiritual Activities and Amount of Time Devoted Weekly to Them*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview #</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Prayer</th>
<th>Meditation</th>
<th>Spiritual Study</th>
<th>Organized</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<td>Anna</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Ben</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
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</table>

A – Life is infused with Spirit

B – All is integrated with God at the core of my being

C – All

D – Unable to say. So many things happen which are spiritual

E – All
P. 12 We live in the country, so I’m out in the woods and if people heard me they would think that I’m crazy because I’m usually out there talking to trees, it sounds like. But sometimes it’s verbal, so I hear myself. Sometimes it’s not, sometimes it’s just thoughts . . . It will have been a cloudy day and the sun will break forth and I think, “There’s hope. It’s going to be okay.”

Regarding spiritual reading, this group is extremely well read and continues to consume books and journals. Several mentioned the same authors or areas of spirituality as influential to their earlier development: Deepak Chopra, Ram Dass and M. Scott Peck. One fourth of the participants of this study were faithful practitioners of Eastern meditation and yoga. The Buddhist, Natural Mysticism and Baptist all mentioned the life-long influence of the Eastern faith practices on their lives. The Buddhist and Natural Mysticism individuals implemented meditation as a regular activity beginning during their college years. The Buddhist and the Baptist taught yoga for more than a decade. The Buddhist considers his thirty-four years of martial arts a spiritual activity.

*Time.*

Time allotted for spiritual practices by this group was generous. Five individuals found it difficult or impossible to separate the amount of time spent in their everyday life. Four indicated all of their life was filled with a spiritual focus and the fifth could not define how much because there were so many spiritual things that happen in his life. The remaining seven individuals averaged 10.6 hours per week in spiritual activities with the range being 1.5 to 20 hours weekly.

Three individuals mentioned spirituality involved food choices, preparation, and consumption. Claire remarked there is a Jewish prayer for every aspect of life the including use of the bathroom. The Roman Catholic faith has a book of Blessings which
categorizes prayers and rituals for multiple dimensions of human life. Of those participants who mentioned all their life being spiritual, several specifically said the respect and positive caring they felt for others in their personal life also manifested in their professional attitude towards clients and others.

Ten of the twelve had been or currently were very active in their organized religion of adult life and often had multiple roles of serving others. From ministering, teaching Sunday School, food preparation for feeding the needy, serving on committees and church council, there were frequent layers of church involvement. Extra time would have been needed for preparation to teach Sunday school and serve on various committees outside of the actual activity itself. One participant’s church activities are briefly given below which gives us an awareness of the amount of time she might have spent committed to organized religion.

P. 2 I’ve taught Sunday School forever, 36 years. I do a lot of that. I have had a lot of leadership roles in my church – not just my local church, but the state and national. I’ve worked as a camp counselor in a church camp.

_Spirituality’s Contribution to Work_

Themes under this research question were Counselor Attributes, Work Focus, and Spirituality in Work. Categories under Counselor Attributes were Education, Life Mottos, Personal Beliefs and Personal Characteristics.

_Counselor Attributes_

Two individuals have the unique perspective of having trained for religious service and practiced in that capacity prior to becoming licensed counselors. Both continue to have active faith lives. Teresa remained in the sisterhood while Jesse changed his faith and now attends a non-denominational church.
Education.

The expert counselors in this study epitomized Jennings and Skovholt’s (2005) finding that counseling experts had a voracious appetite for learning and an internal drive for on-going growth and development. The twelve counselors had thirty four degrees among them and multiple hours of certification and professional training above and beyond their degrees. Most were widely read and experienced a thirst for knowledge.

Even after three degrees, with a full-time job and family commitments, Bess decided to go back to school after divorcing her first husband of twenty-nine years. She earned her Doctorate three years ago and has just recently gone to part-time work.

At age 59, I do not believe that I need a Ph. D. to complete me. I am, however, a life long learner. Perhaps I would go back to school to get a degree in marriage and family counseling. I am doing that work now, and my life is very fulfilled with dance, martial arts, and my spiritual development.

And I had gone back to school again when I got divorced. And that’s how I thought, “Do something constructive here. Go back to school.”

Chad mentioned numerous authors on his favorites list: Hillman, Patrick Harper, Robert Sardello, Carl Jung, Tillich, Whitman, Mary Oliver, Meister Eckhart, Rilke, Alan Watts, Thomas Moore, Matt Fox, Tao Te Ching, and Zen Buddhism texts.

I’m always, as you can guess, quite a reader.

Both Teresa and Claire have earned doctorates but continue to read, grow and learn. As a nun and a counselor, Teresa is widely educated in both fields but is still learning. Regarding her faith, Claire has read between 500 and 1000 books on Judaism. When preparing to convert to that faith, she brought the Rabbi a full list of all the books she’d read. He said she had read as much as some of the Rabbis he knew.
P. 6 I’ve had a lot of training in spirituality and throughout the years, I have continued that . . . Not only have I studied my own faith but Christianity in general and then have taught it a number of times. Also, I studied different world religions . . . And the learning. Of course, I keep my counseling license up, so I’m usually doing five or six days of CEU kinds of further study . . . That always gives me more insight . . . I continue to read and study.

P. 7 I’ve always been reading since I was a little kid. But especially, when I was twelve years old, I told myself I was going to read at least two books by every great author I ever heard of. And, at 12 years old, I started doing that. I started reading. Ernest Hemmingway was my first author. I don’t know why, but I’ve been reading a lot ever since then . . . I’m keeping my license current . . . I have a lot of time to read and study.

P. 10 My recent interesting experience has been to get much busier teaching and studying . . . so I’m sort of in that transition phase right now, here we’ve been here for awhile and I’ve got some things going on that I think can bring my gifts to the front but I still need to hold out some space to be available for him (husband).

P. 9 Oh, I am a voracious reader.

*Life Mottos.*

Both Teresa and David have many years of faith-based education and formally served their churches in their work positions prior to becoming counselors. Both of them take a realistic approach to how God works in human life. Regarding his personal journey, Jesse recalls an old saying, “I have no idea where I’m going but I’m making good time.” Another old saying he likes is about wisdom being the product of good choices and good choices are the product of experience and experience is the product of poor decisions. The later comment is similar to Teresa’s remark about do your part and pray to God.

P. 6 There’s the old Middle Eastern saying that says, “Trust in God but tie up your camel.” That tends to be my perspective. Or God helps them who help themselves. So, do what you need to do and then also have God support you.
P. 11  I like this little Russian proverb that is, “Pray to God but row for shore.” And so I’ve been rowing for shore through spiritual disciplines and various things that help position me in a place where God can shape me into the type of person He wants populating this earth.

The realism is refreshing. Counselors work in therapy to provide the opportune climate and teachings/education for the client to lean new ways of being to improve their life circumstances. Empowering clients and also having the added benefit of the client’s belief in a God who loves them and is present in their lives, would seem to embrace a holistic approach. The mind-body-spirit approach has been shown in the literature to contribute to better overall health and would seem to promote more rapid healing and recovery.

There is a commonality in many of the other participants’ sharing of their faith guideposts.

P. 1  Recognition, regret, resolve, repair
P. 2  Wonder, hope, gratitude, optimism
P. 3  Pause, reflect, find meaning, learn and grow
P. 4  Reference gratitude, celebration and wonder
P. 5  God is love. Love, light and prayer are all energy. God is the very core of your life and being. Our task here is to become aware of that.
P. 6  Tikkun olam – repair the world. Serve others. Value connection and relationships.
P. 7  Be aware of your relationship with God and God’s direction and purpose for your life.
P. 8  Offer daily activities as dedicated practices in honor of people and causes.
P. 9  We are spiritual beings, in relationship with God.
Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and being; love your neighbor as yourself.

Read scripture, pray, be quiet and open, reflect, wait for an answer.

The respondents’ spiritual core seems to have provided the framework for how they choose to conduct their lives.

Personal Beliefs.

Certain aspects of their spiritual focus seemed to influence their life and ripple out into the lives of those with whom they came in contact. Several participants mentioned how essential altruism was to who they were and their focus on life.

The main thing in Buddhism is altruism. Be concerned for the welfare of all sentient beings – eliminate their suffering. I pray daily, may all sentient beings enjoy happiness. May all sentient beings be free from suffering. May all sentient beings find peace. May they all be free from pain and suffering.

I like to frame my life with reverence, gratitude, celebration and wonder. Those are my four guideposts. Those are the four corners of my framework. I’m reverent toward life and all that I meet. I have extreme gratitude for being here, for being able to experience this wonderful mystery. And I certainly am just in awe of getting up in the morning . . . the appropriate response is celebration. You have to savor it. So, those kinds of things shape my life. It gives some sort of picture of it, I hope.

Personal Characteristics.

The participating counselors exemplified many of the descriptors of expert counselors defined by Skovholt, Jennings and Mullenbach (2004). Master Therapists are great at giving and know how to nurture themselves. They often prefer solitude, sometimes for reflection and processing and sometimes for rejuvenation. The quest for mastery is ongoing and they retain a sense of never fully arriving. Word characteristics
the research cited were: self-aware, generous, fun, open, curious, inspiring and passionate.

On the demographic form, individuals were asked to list their personal characteristics which they felt might contribute to their spirituality. Twenty-nine adjectives and attributes were listed by the interviewees. In the telling of their stories, participants often revealed aspects of themselves that re-confirmed many of the demographic form remarks. Please see Table 5 for a full listing of the personality characteristics.

In the text of their interviews, two individuals spoke of the importance of altruism in their lives. Other important attributes mentioned in the interview were compassion, awareness, and attentive. Sense of wonder was mentioned once on the demographic form and by two other respondents in their text.

Eight of the twelve individuals self-reported their personality as being Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) INFJ. Two others reported their MBTI type included the NF letters. This is quite a high population of INFJs for a sample size of twelve. INFJs are likely to be insightful, creative, visionary, symbolic, metaphorical, complex and deep (Myers & McCaulley, 1985). The standard Myers Briggs profile for INFJs from the Manual (Myers & McCaulley, 1985) states:

Succeed by perseverance, originality, and desire to do whatever is needed or wanted. Put their best efforts into their work. Quietly forceful, conscientious, concerned for others. Respected for their firm principles. Likely to be honored and followed for their clear visions as to how best to serve the common good (p. 29).

The Manual (Myers & McCaulley) showed a research sample of 359 practicing counselors with 7.8% of all counselors in the INFJ type category. Occupational choices
Table 5

*Self Reported Personality Characteristics Listed on Demographic Form*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview #</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>Disciplined, Openness, Curiosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Confidence, Positive Attitude, Groundedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Humor, Sense of Wonder, Enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Bess</td>
<td>Sense of Calm, Faith People Can Grow and Change, Congruence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>Skepticism, INFJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>INFJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>(None Given)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight</td>
<td>David</td>
<td>Generous, Caring, Thoughtful, Honest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nine</td>
<td>Esther</td>
<td>Initiative, Explorative, Nurturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten</td>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Need for Connection, Always Searching, ENFJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleven</td>
<td>Jesse</td>
<td>Artistic, Philosophical, Semi-extrovert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelve</td>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>Quiet, Helpful, Caring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
listed for those individuals with a NF profile included these professions among the
top ten: clergy, priests and monks, psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors.

Only two individuals were extroverts. One individual with an ES in her type has
moved into management part-time and seems to use her counseling skills quite well in
that capacity. The other extravert is transitioning into a new career at mid-life and is very
involved in her world. The remaining person with an S in his type enjoys reading detailed
religious histories and fiction.

Skovholt, Jennings and Mullenbach’s (2004) word characteristics of expert
counselors were: self-aware, open curious, generous, passionate, intense and fun.
Paradoxical Characteristics were: great at giving and nurturing of self, able to be fully
present with another and often preferring solitude, quest for mastery and a sense of never
fully arriving. The results of this study show the twelve participants aligned with the
personality characteristics listed in Skovholt, Jennings and Mullenbach’s (2004) findings.

An example of how Ben’s nature has evolved over the years into a quieter, more
reflective individual, is revealed in his quote below. David also speaks to his quiet nature
and shares a comment on being “free-flowing” periodically, which sounds like
Flow.

P. 3 I’m absorbed in what’s around me. That happens with people . . . When I
was younger I talked and talked and talked. Now that I’m older and should
know more – maybe the one thing I know more is that I talk less
(chuckle).

P. 8 I’m surprised I sat here and talked as much as I have. I’m usually not
one to talk like that. I’m usually one that is pretty darn quiet . . . Usually, I
just take in information and then respond. Every once and awhile I get
free-flowing like this, but usually I just sit and answer questions . . . I
guess you did get me on something (spirituality) that I liked.
Several respondents in this research believed their counseling work to have a spiritual focus or they felt spiritual energy or received spiritual guidance in their counseling work. These attitudes are noted in the literature review which showed some counselors viewed their work as spiritual in nature (Jennings & Skovholt, 2003).

Effective psychotherapy is based thirty percent on relationship factors (Hubble, Duncan, & Miller, 2006). The expert counselors in this study are very aware of the importance of establishing and maintaining a therapeutic alliance with their clients. The classic counseling stance of unconditional positive regard was reflected in many comments made by the participants (Rogers, 1980).

P. 1 To be authentic and to be genuine, to be transparent, these are qualities that I wish to model and become . . . Oh, and to be unconditional in my positive regard. I mean that is basic Rogers, but to feel that so much that without words people come in to your presences and they just get it.

P. 2 It’s . . . something that is just part of who I am. I certainly try very hard to treat people with respect . . . the way I want to be treated – kind of the golden rule . . . That is just kind of how I live my life.

P. 9 Cause when you get right down to it at the end of the day, I feel it is that very powerful, special, unconditional relationship that moves counseling forward. Carl Rogers spoke about what makes the counseling move forward or therapy move forward.

Research recommended that treatment should assess the client’s motivational level for change (Miller, Duncan, & Hubble, 1997). Prochaska’s (1994) Transtheoretical change model is a good way to do so. The participants in this study have distinctive views on change and some of the aspects that may render clients immobile.
P. 1 I want to be a counselor where I model and I risk and I’m willing to make myself vulnerable so that I can learn. I build and I grow from each interaction, as well as the client. To be authentic and to be genuine, to be transparent, these are qualities that I wish to model and become...and to be unconditional in my positive regard...to feel that so much that without words people come in to your presence and they just get it.

P. 4 I would reiterate that to be in the counseling field, it is very valuable for the person to be grounded and to understand their own beliefs and certainly not to impose particular beliefs on people but to recognize that people do grow and change and not to give up on them.

Jesse avidly believes counselor education should be presenting the spiritual dimension of development in human growth and development coursework. As a counselor educator, he has strong opinions regarding his work focus and what he believes the counseling field should be doing.

P. 11 Spirituality in counseling as I see it, I just think the counselors are best positioned to really take this seriously. I mean we are somewhat the newcomers in the field. We came about because people needed more than just analysis and problem solving. They wanted to discuss meaning issues, too...the counseling field, being a holistic field, really needs to be holistic and not just say it is holistic while continuing old patterns that were handed down to us by those who kept spiritual off to the side because it wasn’t scientific enough. I think we have the opportunity to speak to the whole person, not only the remedially, but preventatively. And meet the person wherever they are at on the journey.

P. 11 We don’t have the human growth and development coursework required for no reason. We believe from before the beginning to the end, the human is important and relationships are important. And we are continuing to discover things about human life that is amazing to us. So let’s not chop people up and study one aspect of them as if that’s all of them. Let’s look at the whole person. And the spiritual part of people is central, I think. It’s just as important as anything else.

Theory.

Five individuals said they use Cognitive Therapy or Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. Two participants mentioned they preferred Rogerian. One counselor uses a
conglomerate approach. Four others mentioned using more than one approach. The remaining theory preferences cited by the group were Gestalt, Logotherapy, Solution Focused, Adlerian, Jungian, Object Relations, Existential, Reality, Systems, and Integral. The two most frequently mentioned theories by these participants are substantiated by the research. Cognitive and cognitive behavioral therapies have shown a consistent slight advantage for effective counseling (Sexton, Whiston, Bleuer, & Walz, 1997). Rogerian focuses on establishing and maintaining the interpersonal relationship in therapy. The client-therapist relationship is the strongest factor in successful client outcome (Sexton & Whiston, 1994; Skovholt, Ronnestad, & Jennings, 1997).

View of Change.

Teresa has a realistic approach for her Christian counseling clients. She expects them to make healthy choices in their life and use their free will to be active in their own care. Earlier in this study Teresa was quoted as saying, “Miracles happen because people do the work they need to do.”

P. 4 People can change. They can grow and change. And people surprise you. I think that’s one of the biggest lessons I’ve learned in life because people surprise you.

P. 6 So, anybody who comes to me, I’ll say, “God loves you. But let’s try to make better choices.” But I tell them, “Some of the choices are not yours.” Would you blame your 8-year-old daughter if she was sexually abused by an adult male? Would you say it was her fault? Then, why are you saying this is your fault? Why would God blame you? If we as humans would say, “My God, I wouldn’t blame you for that . . . If they can get past God not blaming them, sometimes they can get to a higher state. “It wasn’t my fault.” And then you still have all the hard work to do to get past it and how are you going to do that?

P. 9 One powerful lesson that can be transmitted in therapy, I believe, to find a client right where they are in time and to facilitate that same growth and willingness. That they are not powerless. That they can be powerful in
their own life’s development. But some people want to do that and other people are afraid to do that . . . We’re going to use this time right now, right where you sit, to begin to choose again. There is power in hearing that. We are not victims. And that is a wonderful benefit for the relationship in counseling because someone else is feeling or hearing the faith that therapy can help.

**Spirituality in Work**

Seven of the participants regularly assessed their clients at the initial assessment for spiritual beliefs. Two others watched when their client revealed a spiritual interest and used that in their work. Thus, the majority of the counselors in this study regularly include spirituality in their counseling work. The respondents’ approaches were consistent with the suggestions for incorporating spirituality in counseling through spiritual strategies mentioned in the literature: spiritual assessment of past and present religious and spiritual concerns, current spiritual practices and image of God (Sperry, 2001).

Regarding the research question of how spirituality contributes to their counseling work, the responses were very revealing.

P. 4 I think to be a therapist you have to be grounded and you have to have encouragement for people, too. Because I’ve heard people who’ve gone to other therapists and that basically there is no hope given or sign of optimism. I mean, gosh, you have got to be hopeful – give people hope.

P. 6 We could deal with the fact that we’re human – body, soul, mind and connection. And what is their belief about God? How does their belief about what God expects of them prevent them from healing? Because if you believe that God expects you to have faith and never be upset about anything, you can’t heal . . . And you have so much major trauma in people’s lives. You can’t get past it.

P. 7 Appreciation of each person. I guess it kind of goes back to everyone is created in the image of God which makes everyone having some worth, although in some people it’s very hard to find. There are some people out there that are very damaged and very ill and, unfortunately, don’t have
very much to contribute that is good to the world, if anything. Some people are literally so damaged that they have nothing to contribute. But I try to be able to see something worthwhile in everybody and build on that. There’s a spiritual basis to that.

P. 8 I think the way you see yourself – where you have been and then having a sense of who God is and what God wants us to do and how God treats us. And going back to that definition of how we are aware of God and how we relate to God.

Addressing Spirituality.

Aaron used one aspect of his Buddhist faith as a teaching tool while working with adolescents. Below is a story of how his influence sparked significant change in the life of a teen.

P. 1 My meditation cushion partner, the late Alan Ginsberg, the poet, he would take these complex Buddhist teachings and he would make mnemonics out of them. So for the Four Opponent Powers, he said, “Oh, the four R’s. Recognition . . . Regret . . . Resolve . . . Restitution. I had worked with two kids. This was before 9/11. One was bragging then, saying he’d called in three bomb scares at his high school. And among his closer peers, they teasingly called him the “Unibomber.” It was discovered that he was the one who called in the bomb scares. He was sent to juvenile court. Juvenile court has a diversion program. They sent him to us. So, what I told the Unibomber was these four R’s. I want you to write a sentence. I want you to say, “I recognize that what I did was wrong.” And I want you to think about that. I won’t say meditate on it, I just want you to think about it. Was that wrong? Why do you think that was wrong? And just write a sentence, “I recognize that what I did was wrong.” Secondly, “I’m sorry.” I regret what I did and I resolve not to do it again. And this is my apology to you. I would have thrown away that paper but he did what I said. He did the four R’s and he sent this letter to the local newspaper, to the editor. And it says, “I would like to apologize to the people of this town and particularly to the parents and students of the High School. Now, if he’d just shrugged his shoulders and said, “I am sorry that I did that” or gave me some promise that he wouldn’t do it again but then he goes on. “I am sorry that I did that and I regret the worry, the fear that I caused the parents and students. And I resolve not to do it again. And this is my public apology. And he wrote his real name. His parents were mortified. They were enablers, too, and tried to keep the lid on this and they couldn’t. Now, do you have a sense that he will not repeat that action again? These are like 4 strands of a rope and one strand is not strong
enough. It would break. But all four of those melted together with a
firm apology – that would purify his Karma.

Chad has an interesting view of some individuals who converted to Christianity
while in prison.

P. 5 A lot of guys find God there (in prison) and some of that is conservative
Christianity. That’s what resonates well with them. Some of them change
and you can see the change in how they are. Some of them try to change
but they are wearing a mantel that doesn’t fit real well. They don’t hit
someone not because they feel it is wrong. Their behavior is controlled by
something external. They haven’t integrated and incorporated the Ten
Commandments. I shouldn’t do that because I’m supposed to be a
Christian. I use this story: Two guys walk by a beggar on the street. The
beggar is asking for a sandwich or food or something like that. One guy
offers him something because he knows what it is like to be hungry and to
be starving, homeless and abandoned. Another man offers him something
because he knows that’s what he should do as a Christian. That’s why he
gives the guy something. In either case, the man gets fed and that’s the
important thing. In terms of our own spirituality, if we can integrate it
coming out from our own experience instead of some contextual or
outside experience, it is perhaps more authentic. We get a sense that we
become the author of our own lives. So we don’t need the authority of
someone outside ourselves to conduct our own life.

Career Focus.

Anna’s career path is an extension of the early altruism seeds planted by her
parents. She enjoys her counseling work and feels strongly about several aspects of it.

P. 2 I think one of the reasons I chose to go into counseling is because I
thought of the way of being a catalyst to help people help themselves. I
did not go into this field to help people. That bothers me when people say
that. They are on the way to getting burned out. People need to want to
help themselves. That’s direct from counseling. But I think that the whole
idea of counseling fits well with who I am and how I function. I have
learned that my values are not necessarily the values of the people I see.
And I have learned to be able to be accepting and respectful of other
peoples’ values that are different from mine. Because I see that as we all
express our inner selves and our spirituality in different ways, we need to
be accepting of one another. So, I try to do that . . . I think one reason why
I so much enjoy being a counselor is because there’s that sense of wonder
and happiness and hope that I have. I think I share that. I mean, that’s who I am. I am very positive. I’m noted as someone who is a positive person and trying to always see the best in everything.

Chad speaks of his counseling work in the prison system. He does find meaning in aiding the clients who choose to come to him and find a way to live a life with purpose.

P. 5 There are terrible people there. So psychologically misshapen and morally malformed that no human agency can provide any aid for them. I have this notion that we are all in the same boat together. Even the most misshapen, malformed, twisted people that I have seen, I know they are suffering. Which is the first noble truth in Buddhism is suffering. Suffering can be defined in many ways from agony to personal dissatisfaction with life. Everything that exists will pass. Being able to acknowledge and accept that is a helpful way to be. So many of the inmates want to hold onto what they had. I want my wife back. I want my freedom. I want my life back from before I got into trouble. Some of these guys are in for no prior history of crime whatsoever. Because we’re all in that world, in this existence together, we all have a sacred duty, I think, to be compassionate toward and helpful toward one another. I don’t sit there and think about what this guy did. I don’t imagine him as a horrible human being. I try not necessarily to be aware of what he’s in here for unless it is relevant to what we are doing. I want to be present for him as a human being and experience him in the most neutral way, the most open way possible so I don’t have my own resistances.

Prayer.

With eleven of the respondents having an active, personal prayer life, it would seem they may be tolerant of prayer in their counseling work. There were different approaches about prayer in the therapy room and school. Once the client or student revealed they were a spiritual person, most counselors were open to pursuing how his/her faith and prayer life might sustain them during life challenges.

P. 2 I don’t pray openly with my clients. It’s just in my own personal prayer life that I often will pray for people. I pray for my clients. I pray for my staff. If I ever had a client who wanted to pray in a session, I would be
open to that. They could do that. I would not do it for them. They could do it. But I would have a prayerful attitude with them.

P. 7 I even prayed with someone one day. I’ve only done that once, but I did do that once. But, there always, I think that with me, there always is a sense of . . . in some ways doing therapy was kind of like a meditative experience. Because I do sort of enter into like a different state when I’m doing it. Yes, then there is a sense of spiritual connectedness, I guess, when I was doing it.

Conclusion

This chapter began by presenting the participants’ individual stories of spiritual development composed from transcripts of the interviews, the demographic forms, vitas, case notes and follow-up phone calls and e-mails. Many commonalities were noticed in the individual stories, notably finding meaning in suffering, learning from clients, on-going study and personal growth, guiding life mottos and spirituality being woven into the fabric of their career.

The two overarching themes of Core and Connection and Relationships were presented and thoroughly explained. The first order themes were presented next, along with participants’ quotes provided for examples. First order themes were Influences, Faith Growth, Faith Practices, Counselor Attributes, Work Focus and Spirituality at Work. Detailed descriptions of categories were investigated and again, quotations from participants were added for validation of the content.
Chapter Five

Introduction

This qualitative study investigated expert counselors’ spiritual development and how it contributed to their counseling work. Twelve participants were interviewed with additional information attained through demographic forms, vitas, phone calls and e-mail correspondence. The emerging themes arose from transcripts of the expert counselors’ remarks and supporting information. Spirituality pervaded the personal and professional life of the participating counselors. The results of this study provide support for the concept of a spiritual core and connection providing a perspective or lens from which to make meaning of life events, inspiration to create a purposeful life which brings holistic health, satisfying relationships and opportunities to be in flow or in sync with that spiritual energy.

The objective of this study was to listen to participants as they told their stories and shared their spiritual development experiences. Long quotations were used in the text to capture the true tone and essence of each interviewee. In order to stay consistent with the participating groups’ indispensable qualities, results were presented as descriptions of the themes which materialized from within the data. To this author’s knowledge, no other researcher has exclusively investigated expert counselors’ spiritual development.

Participants most often spoke of a sense of connection when making reference to their God, higher power or faith base. While defining spirituality, participants spoke of their connection being a deep inner core, guide or light. Thus both core and connection
are part of one primary theme. Relationship was more frequently used to indicate how the participants related to humans in their lives.

As a result of this strong interior core guiding and influencing their life choices, participants deeply valued their relationships with family, friends and those who came within their sphere of influence. Core and connection seemed to inspire the participants’ attitudes towards respect, altruism and compassion in their relationships.

The connection participants felt with their God or faith base generated a positive, optimistic way of relating to other individuals. The counselors used their interpersonal skills to establish and sustain significant relationships. The counselors’ values, as established through their spiritual core, flowed into their relationships at work. Three themes clarify the components of how the counselors’ spiritual core informed their counseling work. These three are titled Counselor Attributes, Work Focus, and Spirituality at Work. Another three themes specifically seemed to describe how the participants’ spiritual core and on-going development was challenged, nudged or nurtured. These three are named Influences, Faith Growth, and Faith Practices.

Overarching Themes

The importance of core and connection and relationships stood out clearly in the participants’ statements making them the most significant findings. The spiritual core and connection appears to be stable, yet in an on-going growth and evolutionary process. Life experiences seem to provoke reflection and pondering in these individuals which may often lead to new spiritual insights or awareness. None of the participants were stagnant in their faith life and their core and connection seems to continue to develop. The importance of relationships gained momentum as the individuals aged.
Core and Connection.

The participants’ spiritual core or connection provided a guiding viewpoint for professional and personal interpretation regarding how the counselors chose to relate to others, care for themselves and make meaning of the tragedies and blessings of life. Life choices made as a result of making sense of the multiple incidences of evolving life events seemed to provoke spiritual development and maturation.

Participants reflected and shared their stories of spiritual development, beginning by speaking about their early faith lives, relationships with family members and significant others around religious experiences. Eleven individuals had a significant early faith life in their family or origin, which seemed to create the initial spiritual base within. Their early established patterns of attending church and seeing faith carried out in their families’ daily lives seemed to be an influential factor in the creation of the strong faith lives these individuals experience today. These early life preferences influenced the ongoing faith development process of growing closer to their God or Higher power, which they described here as their spiritual core and connection.

The characteristic strengths exemplified by master therapists, reflective, self-aware, open to experience, superb relationship skills, emotional maturity, strength of character were evidenced in these participants. The additional aspect of having a spiritual core or inner guide or light seemed to provide guidance and balance on how to conduct their lives and offered a way to make meaning. It also seemed to have some bearing on how they choose their career, interactions with others, and personal activities and hobbies. Several respondents specified moral and ethical choices were based on their spiritual beliefs. Thus, having a personal spiritual core or connection was related to the
participants’ ability, in this study, to make meaning, create a purposeful life and perhaps their moral structure.

On-going, continual reflection seems to be fabricated into their lives as they make sense of new sense of new client scenarios as well as processing personal life experiences. Counselors use their own internalized training, knowledge and understanding to guide their approaches to their professional work. For these participants, the integration of their spiritual core with the entire meaning-making process seems to indicate their spiritual core and connection informs their counseling work.

*Relationships.*

The significance of relationships arose frequently in the participants’ response to the research questions. Each story began with descriptions of the relationships within their family of origin and most ended with mentioning the significance of relationships in their current lives. There seemed to be an indication that as they aged, the participants treasured their relationships with others even more. Having experienced multiple types of relationships through their profession, the counselors certainly have the wisdom and skill to choose, create, and/or enjoy nurturing and satisfying relationships. Of course, there was always that guiding component of spiritual core present in their lives. The exceptional interpersonal and relationship skills coupled with the awareness of spirituality existing in some aspect in each person suggests these counselors are well prepared to engage their counseling clients who express spiritual concerns.

Calm, focused, open and available, the participants as a group, seemed to have exceptional interpersonal skills. One of the major constructs of their work focus was creating and maintaining the working relationship. Counselors’ relationship skills are an
The central themes which nudged or nurtured the participants’ on-going spiritual development of their spiritual core were Influences, Faith Growth and Faith Practices. The themes which described how the participants’ spiritual core contributed to their...
relationships in their counseling work are Counselor Attributes, Work Focus and Spirituality at Work.

_Spiritual Development._

Life events, such as moving, job changes, marriage, divorce and the birth of children influenced the participants’ faith life. Health challenges in their loved ones, friends and within her/himself was another opportunity for making meaning. Connection to their God or higher power contributed to a valuing of relationships. As a result of how the individual made meaning of these life influences, blessings and burdens, the counselor may have sought a new approach on their spiritual journey, or re-established a stronger conviction to their present faith life. As individuals evolved on their faith journey, some changed to a new faith that more closely aligned with the person they had become. Five remained steadfast in their childhood faith affiliation, but deepened in how they understood and appreciated their faith.

Spiritual challenges came in many forms and each person seemed to have their own significant issues. Two individuals mentioned helping others who had been traumatized by religious leaders, and the school counselors pondered the lack of structure, stability or a value system in the lives of some of their students. From in-depth pondering and reflection, there often arose yearnings in the participants for a different aspect of spiritual nourishment or ways to dialogue with others about spiritual issues.

Faith practices are an indication of the behaviors and actions that follow the individual’s reflection of life topics and interaction with their spiritual core. Overall, this appeared to be a remarkably healthy participant population with each making efforts to maintain the health of their mind, body and spirit. With eleven meditating regularly and
another eleven praying regularly, the participants chose to stay in close contact with their spiritual core or connection. Five individuals saw every aspect of their life as spiritual.

**Spirituality’s Contribution to Work.**

As a well-educated group, the participants seemed to be constantly updating their skills. This on-going desire to learn and grow may be related to their personality characteristics as voracious learners who regularly engage in quiet reflection. While sharing their personal journeys, participants revealed how life mottos which had shaped and informed their lives as well as personal beliefs they constructed that enlighten how they view their counseling work.

Theory choice was indicated as Cognitive Therapy or Cognitive Behavioral Therapy by five and another five valued the Rogerian approach. Most of the counselors had created an internal view of how people change. All of the participants had been addressing spirituality in their counseling work with nearly half addressing it in the initial session. The remainder waited for their client to reveal a spiritual position prior to processing spiritual issues. Several respondents mentioned allowing their clients to pray in session, prayed for them in private prayer or directed the client to significant others with whom they could pray. Overall, counselors choose their career either through early faith experiences or through a series of career path corrections that brought them to their present counseling stance.

To borrow a term from the spiritual direction field, some participants felt “called and gifted” with the ability and desire to do this work. Most of the counselors stayed in the field due to the intrinsic satisfaction of walking with another as they make sense of
life’s events and move forward to a new level in their own development. Several counselors clearly spoke of experiences akin to Flow, the total involvement in an activity that requires complete concentration and is energizing. It certainly seems plausible that if the remainder of the participants had been asked if she/he had experienced episodes of flow either professionally and/or personally or both, they would have agreed. Essentially, the counselors have built lives for themselves that bring them purpose, meaning and experiences that contribute to their overall happiness in life.

It seems as if the study’s participants are most aptly suited for the work they have chosen. Did the participants grow into the professional skills necessary to be an excellent counselor? Or did their personality evolve to the best possible fit with their work life? Given the histories reported, many small refinements were made over the lifespan personally and professionally which shaped who they became, yet the spiritual core remained the steadying foundation.

Outcomes

Other outcomes became apparent as a result of the participants’ spiritual core and connection. The spiritual core seemed to provide incentive to make time for rejuvenation from the rigors of work and life. Thus, core informed the counselors’ decisions about self-care for mind, body and spirit.

Holistic Health.

Many of the participants indicated their spirituality guided their view of self-care and how to treat others. It would seem that good holistic health would empower counselors for their relational work of engaging the client just where he or she is and nurturing that individual’s health and growth. Nurturing of self through quiet reflection
and meditation seemed to be a necessary requirement for maintaining a healthy balance in all aspects of life. Attending to and renewing mind, body and spirit made them good role models in their professional lives and showed congruence between their beliefs and actions. It may be that these skills become such an internalized aspect of who they are which is naturally fed by making time for solitude and retrospection.

Almost all of the respondents spoke of the beneficial effects of quiet time alone and/or in nature. Most counselors mentioned the renewal effects of retreats or travel. It was almost as if this self-care was a necessary component of who they were or who they had become at this point in their lives. Personality characteristics may be influential both in aspects of desiring quiet time for good self-care and in the professional reflections periods necessary to be a master counselor. The deeply thoughtful, pensive, searching for meaning and relational attributes professional counselors exemplify are positively correlated with the personality characteristics of the MBTI Intuitive Feeling.

Flow.

Purdy and Dupey’s (2005) Holistic Flow Model of Spiritual Wellness seems to be an apt example to make meaning of the participants’ responses and comments regarding how spirituality contributes to their counseling work. Growth in the spiritual aspect permits an individual to enhance existence in all aspects of life. As a whole, the participants enjoyed their counseling work, and through it, found satisfaction, meaning and often an experience of flow.

While engaged in work with clients, several spoke of the spiritual nature of the counseling sessions, calling it a meditative experience, feeling blessed by the interactions or energized by the experience. The outcome in these incidences was the experience of
Flow. Flow is re-generative and growth oriented. By continuing to increase their skills to meet the challenges and demands of the profession, counselors can continue to work towards achievement of Flow.

Implications

Future research seems indicated on the state of holistic health of expert counselors. This would begin to create a fund of knowledge regarding how spirituality interacts with physical and mental health in counselors. Perhaps using a scale such as the 5 Factor WEL to assess health and well-being on mind, body, and spirit dimensions (Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000) would provide measurable information. Additionally, conducting a study using one of the more reliable and valid spirituality scales along with a qualitative exploration of counselors’ spirituality would provide measures for comparison.

With ten of the respondents falling in the MBTI categories with NF preferences and eight of those individuals being INFJ, it clearly would seem important to further study the MBTI preferences of expert counselors. It could be that counselors with the NF type preferences naturally gravitate towards working in the counseling profession and may experience a call or desire to deepen their spiritual connections. Many of the participants in this study began life, aspiring to serve in some aspect of religion or a faith career. Further research could be aimed towards understanding the dynamics of how the two dimensions interact in those individuals who choose the counseling field.

Studying the concept of Flow as it occurs in the counseling work would be an interesting topic to pursue. Does it occur most often when counselors feel a spiritual connection, as mentioned by some participants in this study? The challenge and total
involvement in the process of Flow would seem to provide growth, regeneration and a motivation to continue to be deeply involved in the therapeutic alliance.

An implication for the future would include bringing awareness of spirituality to personal consideration of counseling graduate students. General spiritual development could easily be included and taught in human development classes. One aspect of the class might include having students compose their own spiritual development journey and note the standard human development stages that are a traditional part of Lifespan classes. The goal would be for budding counselors to become aware of their own personal spiritual journey and how it might impact or influence their future work.

It is time for the counseling field to actively train its graduate students to be aware of their own spiritual development and to know how to assess future clients with spiritual issues. Mobilizing the client’s spirituality as one more component of healing and/or change may aid the therapy process.

It would also seem necessary that counseling trainees be aware of the on-going research linking spirituality and better health functioning and longevity for two reasons. Personally, they could be reflective and process how their own spirituality affects the essence of who they are and how they function. Professionally, they have the option of assessing and utilizing the additional positive influence of spirituality in their therapeutic approach, with receptive clients.

The proliferation of spirituality books and increasing number of counseling texts on spirituality and research would seem to bring the topic to the awareness of counselor education faculty. An atmosphere open to sharing and discovery of spiritual values and beliefs in counselor education programs as well as the professional counseling
community could spark a greater awareness, understanding and acceptance of spiritual experiences and choices.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the spiritual development of expert counselors and how it may contribute to their counseling work. The results of the study provide support for the concept of a spiritual core and connection providing a perspective or lens from which to make meaning of life events, inspiration to create a purposeful life which brings holistic health, satisfying relationships and opportunities to be in flow with that spiritual energy.

It is evident each of the participants sees themselves as spiritual beings. Spirituality encompasses their professional and personal lives. Spirituality was the term most frequently used by the participants to refer to their faith base. Bible verses were shared to solidify points the participants were making. Overall, the counselors shared more of their personal life experiences with faith or spirituality-based stories rather than stories of organized religion. Life narratives provided evidence that spirituality and religious issues are a component of normal human development. The awareness of their own spiritual issues would aid these counselors in their understanding of their clients’ spiritual needs and/or problems.

Holistic health was a focus of the participants as part of their regime of self-care. Different aspects of caring for the mind-body-and spirit were described. The necessity of self-nurturing seemed to arise out of a spiritual focus on being healthy, maintaining the self due to the rigors of the work and as a component of their own unique personality characteristics.
The counselors held common values such as respect, valuing the other, self-awareness, compassion, on-going learning, desire and need for reflection, and a view of relationship as a crucial element in both personal and professional life. During their work experience several regularly attained what clearly sounds like an experience of Flow. They became totally involved in the therapy process which required their complete concentration and became energized. It seems most likely the other interviewees would also acknowledge such a process occurring in their therapeutic endeavors.

A spiritual core or connection was a central element in defining who the counselors were. This interior spirituality seemed to inform their focus on life and was evidenced in their actions and behaviors. The counselors engaged their spiritual connection to make meaning of life’s blessings and burdens. Several spoke of their view of our purpose on earth being to grow in awareness and relationship with God and others. Using the results of this study, expert counselors may want to reflect on their own spiritual life and how it may influence her/his professional work.
References


Myers Briggs Type Indicator. (Retrieved December, 2006).

www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jTypes2.asp


Appendix A

Query for OASERVIC Listserv

Hello. I am a doctoral student at Ohio University in counselor education. I’m seeking licensed counselors, who have been in practice approximately 15 years and who are willing to speak with me about their spirituality. I would like to explore counselors of different faiths and cultures to better understand their spirituality. These interviews would be in the location of your choice and last approximately 1 hour. This study is for my dissertation. I would greatly appreciate hearing from any licensed counselor willing to dialogue about his or her spirituality and counseling. Please contact me at DonnaMenigat@columbus.rr.com or (740) 687-0441.
Appendix B

Demographic Information

Name:__________________________________________________________________

Age:___________Sex:___________Race/Ethnicity:________________________________

Number of years practicing counseling:___________

Personality Characteristics Which Might Relate to your Spirituality:_______________
___________________________________________________________________________

Theory Preference:___________________________________________________________

Education:

Degree       Major       Year
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

Did you have training in spirituality in your college program?

_____No

_____Yes. If yes, please indicate number of clock hours of training_____________

After graduate school, did you seek training in spirituality to use in your work?

_____No

_____Yes. If yes, please indicate number of clock hours of training_____________

Religious affiliation of childhood:___________________________________________

Current religious affiliation:_______________________________________________
How do you attend to your spirituality:

_____Prayer

_____Meditation

_____Spiritual study

_____Organized spiritual practices

_____Other: _______________________________________________________

I spend approximately this much time each week involved in spiritual activities: ______

________________________________________________________________________

My spirituality helps my well being.

_____No

_____Yes    If yes, in what way?_______________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Would you care to make any other comments?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Title of Research: Exploring Expert Counselors Spiritual Development and how it
Contributes to Their Counseling Work

Principal Investigator: Donna Menigat Phone (740) 687-0441

Department: Counseling and Higher Education

Federal and University regulations require us to obtain signed consent for
participation in research involving human subjects. After reading the statements below,
please indicate your consent by signing this form.

Explanation of Study

There is very little research on the spiritual development of expert counselors and
how these counselors’ spirituality may contribute to the likelihood that they will be
willing to address the spiritual concerns of their clients in the therapy room. This study
will explore ten expert counselors spiritual development for the purpose of
understanding these concepts further.

You will be asked to complete a brief demographic form inquiring about your
educational training, occupational history, theory preference, personal characteristics,
spiritual affiliation, age, sex race, ethnicity and motivation for becoming a counselor.
You will be asked for a copy of your personal vita. All personal information will be kept
confidential. A pseudonym will be assigned to you for the purpose of this study. During
the interview, you will be asked questions about your spiritual development and how it
contributes to your counseling work.
Interviews will take place at a time and location you have chosen. All interviews will be taped. Transcription will be done by a clerical professional who will not know your true identity and will agree to keep all information confidential. If you wish to review your typed transcription prior to inclusion in the study, to check for accuracy, please tell the researcher during your interview. The researcher may need to contact you for clarification of a particular word or phrase. The completed dissertation will be done electronically and will be available on the world wide web through Proquest Dissertations.

Interviews will be of approximately one hour duration. You will choose the quiet location, time and date of the interview. A follow-up interview, at your convenience, at a location chosen by you, to clarify the data or ask other questions may be necessary.

*Risks and Discomforts*

I understand my participation in this research is voluntary. If feelings arise during the interview, I understand that I can process them at a later date with this researcher, who will conduct one final session of one hour, if needed. If further discussion is requested, I understand I will be referred to a licensed counselor or spiritual director in my area.

*Benefits*

The only benefit of participating in this research is the opportunity to contribute to the understanding of counselor spiritual direction through sharing your personal comments.
Confidentiality and Records

All personal information will be kept confidential. A pseudonym will be assigned to you for the purpose of this study. All interviews will be audio taped and transcribed later by a clerical professional who will not know your true identity and will agree to keep all information confidential. Interviewees may receive a copy of their transcription to review for accuracy to the essence of the interview. The only individuals to have access to your transcription will be the transcriber and the investigator. The audiotapes will be stored in the researcher’s home desk. Once the study is completed the audio tape will be destroyed.

Contact Information

Researcher: Donna Menigat        Phone: (740) 687-0441
Researcher E-mail: DonnaMenigat@columbus.rr.com

Advisor: Dr. Tom Davis        Phone: (740) 593-4460
Advisor E-mail: davist@columbus.rr.com

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740) 593-0664. E-mail address for the office of Research Compliance is compliance@ohio.edu.

I certify I have read and understand this consent form and agree to participate as a subject in the research described. I agree that known risks to me have been explained to my satisfaction and I understand that no compensation is available from Ohio University and its employees for any injury resulting from my participation in this research. I certify I am 18 years of age or older. My participation in this research is given voluntarily. I understand I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.
to which I may otherwise be entitled. I certify that I have been given a copy of this
consent form to take with me.

Signature: ____________________________ Date: __________________

Printed Name _______________________________
Appendix D

Open-ended Questions to Prompt Interviewees

Please tell me about your spiritual development.

Please talk about your definition of spirituality.

Please speak about how your spirituality relates to your health and well-being.

If you pay attention to your own self-care, how do you do that?

How satisfied and fulfilled do you feel with your life?

Can you talk about the real purpose of your life?

Please tell me what influenced your choice of career or what motivated you to become a counselor.

Please tell me about your evolution as a therapist during your career.

Question to be asked near the end of the interview, if interviewee doesn’t voluntarily speak to the issue:

Please talk about how you feel your spirituality contributes to your counseling work when spiritual issues arise with clients.
Appendix E

Pilot Study

The first investigation was conducted on June 10, 2005, at the University office of counselor Mary, LPCC, director of the counseling department. The tape-recorded interview took approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes with Mary pausing to reflect deeply on several topics during the process.

Biographical Sketch

Mary is a single white female, aged 57, never married, with no children, and the oldest of four in her family of origin. Mary wears her blonde hair short and is professionally clothed in a sheath dress, which compliments her slender figure, and matching green shoes. A soft green color in her dress reflects the color of her eyes. Her demeanor is warm and friendly as she welcomes me to her office.

Mary has just moved into this larger office, and boxes remain to be unpacked, standing in the corner. This lovely room is flanked across the back wall by leaded glass windows with a lattice pattern. Her desk parallels the windows, facing towards the center of the room. A comfortable seating area is arranged in front of the desk with two upholstered chairs, an area rug, and a table with a few personal adornments. Several calming pictures adorn the walls. The setting invites quiet reflection and discussion. Her suite includes an anteroom with table and chairs, which will serve as a place for students to wait until their appointment time arrives.

Mary received her initial Masters degree in a major, metropolitan area of Ohio, and later picked up the additional hours needed for her clinical counseling licensure at a faith based university and was licensed in Ohio in 1995. She received no specific
training in spirituality during her Masters work. At mid-life, Mary completed a training program in spiritual direction and is now an instructor in that certificate program. Her professional career started as a high school guidance counselor at an all girls’ Catholic high school in Cleveland. As the eldest of four in a tightly knit Catholic home where she learned about the rules of the faith tradition but not much about spirituality, she first ventured away from home into living alone by moving to Columbus during her 30’s. No jobs were available, and she had to stretch and grow quickly to sustain herself. Invited into a youth ministry position doing retreat work with high school students by an agency who saw her vita, she “crash learned” seeking specialized training in spirituality to prepare her for the work ahead. Once she was licensed, she began doing private practice part-time in the Columbus area and later was approached by a local seminary to work part time with their student population. After a few years, she added teaching a psychology class at the same facility. The rhythm of a variety of activities appealed to her, and she maintained the balance of private practice, counseling college students and teaching college for approximately eight years. As midlife loomed, she began to realize she needed to invest in a retirement program and have benefits such as health insurance. At this juncture, she joined the staff of a religiously based institution of higher learning in the counseling department, where she does instruction as well as individual counseling. Mary expressed a desire to seek her doctorate in Counselor Education. Encountering clients with spiritual concerns happened frequently in her past private practice as well as in her current location on a regular basis. Mary’s direct quotes will be listed with the notation P.0 where P stands for participant and 0 indicates Mary was part of the pilot study and not the actual research.
Definition of Spirituality

P. 0 It seems to me like there’s kind of a spirituality belongs in all of them. You start really with basic things about the dignity of the human person and I just think about control and letting go . . . spirituality talks about interconnection and higher power and value.

Spiritual Development

P. 0 When asked about her own spiritual development, Mary had a lot to say. “I think it’s really been more of this, as I become more aware it becomes more visible . . . It’s kind of like it’s . . . always there. It’s always influencing me. And it’s always a part of what people see in me. But its kind of like the more I ask that then the more I’m comfortable with my own spirituality and the more I’m comfortable with you know, speaking that or living from that. The more comfortable using it as a tool in therapy. The more people respond (gives a recent example of a connection made in a session) . . . I’m working at this healing process.”
Mary stated spirituality was a component of her private practice work.

“For me, that was part of their intake. I wanted to know, what were the supports they had and in the places they lived in their life and did they practice or did they not, or how would they describe their faith. . . I believe people have spirituality even if they don’t profess a particular organized religion or even if they wander among different religions.”

Mary believes her training in spirituality made her a better therapist because she was then “more consciously attuned to asking those questions or giving people the freedom to move in the therapy session around issues they thought was important to them.” “Because I’m a spiritual person, it’s always been a part of my therapy. But I didn’t really know maybe the power of using it. So this (spiritual direction training) has helped me to grow and try to access that to be more intentional.”

Mary sees spiritual direction as a healing profession just as counseling is a healing profession. In therapy, she notes how counselors always talk about not imposing personal values on clients. However, she believes as a counselor, “You expose them to your spirituality, and you are exposed to their spirituality. And doesn’t that then become another tool or vehicle for healing to happen?” She proposes spirituality could be a tool for psychotherapy and suggests it be explored in training regarding how it impacts personality disorders or family history or goals.

Personal Faith Development

Mary states she was raised Catholic and did all the Catholic things but doesn’t believe she was a very spiritual person. Not until she made the initial move to leave home and live alone in her 30s and then experienced the death of individuals close to her did she struggle through a mental health crisis exploring who she was and the direction of her future. A complex set of circumstances made the transition a tumultuous period resulting in an “identity solidifying time.” Presently, Mary might be considered to be in Fowler’s
Stage Five Conjunctive Faith characterized by detachment and a willingness to let reality speak its word (Fowler, 1981). Mary made statements indicating she’s aware she is a very analytical person but can now move beyond that position in a counseling session and just be present with the individual. A change occurred in Mary after spiritual direction training.

She states there was a progression towards relaxing in her work and approach towards therapy, which involved using her own person in the work. Others noticed this evolution in her personal approach and her confidence grew. Being contemplative in session while avoiding being pulled into integrating everything into some kind of cohesive whole has become more of a focus. Stage 5 individuals recognize the task of integrating or reconciling the conscious and the unconscious (Fowler, 1981). They also experience the wisdom evolved in the reverence of seeing things as they are as evidenced by her comment that she is less attuned to fixing things in therapy and more focused on the impact on the individual and empowerment.