Spirituality and Counselor Wellness

CRAIG S. CASHWELL
D. PAIGE BENTLEY
AMY BIGBEE

Spirituality often is conceptualized as a vital, if not essential, aspect of holistic wellness. The spiritual lives of counselors and counselors-in-training, therefore, are considered with an emphasis on healthy spiritual practices that encourage mindfulness, heartfulness, and soulfulness.

> *People say that what we're seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we are seeking is an experience of being alive, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.*
>
> —Joseph Campbell (Campbell & Moyer, 2001)

Various scholars have posited that spirituality is the core of wellness and inseparable from other aspects of wellness (Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992; Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000; Sweeney & Myers, 2005; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992). In addition, spirituality is receiving attention in the counseling profession at a level unparalleled in history, as evidenced by the inclusion of spirituality in the accreditation standards of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP; 2001), a V-code for Religious or Spiritual Problems in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed., text, rev.; American Psychiatric Association, 2000), and a proliferation of scholarly writing on the subject (Cashwell & Young, 2005; Frame, 2003; G. Miller, 2002). Although the emphasis of wellness models, accreditation standards, diagnostic criteria, and much of the scholarly literature on spirituality is on client wellness and development, the spiritual lives of counselors and counseling students warrant attention as well. The purpose of this article is to define spirituality, to consider how the spiritual lives of counselors may affect their overall wellness and effectiveness, and to consider how disciplined spiritual practice may enhance counselor mindfulness, heartfulness, and soulfulness as aspects of counselor wellness.

TOWARD DEFINING SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality has been described as a universal phenomenon (W. Teasdale & Dalai Lama, 1999), and empirical evidence attests to the importance of spirituality and religion in the lives of Americans. One group of researchers

Craig S. Cashwell, D. Paige Bentley, and Amy Bigbee, Department of Counseling and Educational Development, University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Craig S. Cashwell, Department of Counseling and Educational Development, School of Education, PO Box 26170, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC 27402 (e-mail: cscashwe@uncg.edu).

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(Princeton Religion Research Center, 2000) found that 96% of persons living in the United States believe in God; more than 90% pray; 69% are church members; and 43% have attended a church, synagogue, or temple within the past 7 days. These numbers only paint part of the picture, however, because there are many persons for whom their primary expression of spirituality is private rather than public. Furthermore, researchers have found spirituality to be highly important in the lives of mental health professionals (Carlson, Erickson, & Seewald-Marquardt, 2002; Young, Cashwell, & Wiggins-Frame, in press). Although our assumption cannot be empirically validated, it is our working assumption in this article that spirituality is universal.

Although research evidence suggests that spirituality and religion are far-reaching within society, there are challenges inherent in defining the construct of spirituality. Although we, the authors, consider spirituality to be a universal phenomenon (i.e., available to all people), it is also highly personal and developmental. That is, each person develops a highly personal spiritual life that changes over time. Thus, it is not possible to provide a single definition that is wholly inclusive (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999). When individuals attempt to define spirituality, they discover not its limits but their own (Kurtz & Ketcham, 1992). As a result, many have chosen global definitions of spirituality. Unfortunately, such definitions lend themselves to a type of relativism that does not adequately mirror the growing body of literature on spiritual development (Faiver & Ingersoll, 2005).

These caveats notwithstanding, we choose here a discussion of spirituality that is highly practical. We consider spiritual development to be a consciousness-altering process. As Huston Smith (2000) has eloquently stated, altered states are only useful if they lead to altered traits. For this article, we define *spirituality* as a developmental process that is both active and passive wherein beliefs, disciplined practice, and experiences are grounded and integrated to result in increased *mindfulness* (nonjudgmental awareness of present experiences), *heartfulness* (experience of compassion and love), and *soulfulness* (connections beyond ourselves). We believe that this definition is useful for several reasons. First, it makes no assumptions about the relationship between spirituality and religion for a given individual. That is, some people may find that their religious and spiritual lives are inextricably linked and mutually supportive, whereas others may find that their spiritual development occurs outside of the context of organized religion. Second, this definition emphasizes the developmental nature of spirituality. Growth and change are essential aspects of spiritual development. Wilber (1997) described this when he discussed the transformative versus the translative aspects of religion. That is, although it is important to develop personal beliefs and schemas to make meaning in the world, the spiritual path ultimately is about transforming one's life, literally transcending the ego rather than strengthening it. Third, the recognition that spiritual development is both active and passive considers that there are external factors and forces, both desirable and undesirable, that occur throughout the life span to affect spiritual development and that the developmental process has an active component

in which an individual engages in study to inform beliefs and develops a disciplined spiritual practice. Finally, this definition emphasizes that spiritual development has tangible outcomes—namely, increased mindfulness, heartfulness, and soulfulness—aspects of the spiritual journey discussed by Lesser (1999). This aspect of the definition helps in distinguishing between healthy and unhealthy spiritual beliefs and practices. Unhealthy spiritual beliefs and practices will not have a positive impact on mindfulness, heartfulness, and soulfulness. Two examples may be helpful here. If a person holds beliefs that emphasize her or his negative attributes, the harsh self-judgment and self-hatred of the inner critic's voice is neither mindful, heartful, nor soulful. At the other extreme, one who abuses spiritual beliefs and practices to lead to spiritual narcissism (the belief that I am better than you because of my spiritual evolution) is not increasing mindfulness, heartfulness, or soulfulness. Both of these cases typify unhealthy spiritual processes.

CHARACTERISTICS OF "SPIRITUAL" PEOPLE

Maslow (1998), often deemed the father of transpersonal (literally, "beyond the ego") psychology, provided a list of attributes of people he labeled transcendent self-actualizers, that is, people who are developing spiritually. The term *spiritual* is in quotation marks in the section heading to emphasize that, given the developmental nature of spirituality, the dichotomization of people into categories of "spiritual" or "not spiritual" is an artificial dichotomy. Rather, the following attributes represent personal characteristics that evolve through a lifelong process of spiritual study, practice, and experience:

- Independence from environment and resistance to enculturation
- Social conscience
- Intimate personal relations
- Nonhostile sense of humor
- Move from egoism to altruism
- Acceptance of self and others
- Spontaneity and simplicity
- Freshness of appreciation
- Creativity and originality
- *Peak experiences,* a term Maslow used to describe nonreligious quasi-mystical and mystical experiences. Peak experiences are sudden feelings of intense happiness and well-being, and possibly the awareness of ultimate truth and the unity of all things (Maslow, 1998).

SPIRITUALITY IN THE COUNSELING PROCESS

There are numerous ways in which the spiritual life of counselors affects their overall wellness. Dlugos and Friedlander (2001) defined *passionate commitment* as

(a) a sense of being energized and invigorated by work rather than drained and exhausted by it; (b) the ability to continue to thrive and love one's work in spite of the personal and environmental obstacles one might face in it; (c) a demonstrable sense of balance and harmony with other aspects of one's life; and (d) a sense of energizing and invigorating those with whom one works. (p. 298)

Using this definition, Dlugos and Friedlander found that 83% of peer-nominated therapists (i.e., therapists considered by their peers to be passionately committed to their work) acknowledged the spiritual nature of the therapeutic process. By integrating spiritual practices consistent with a client's belief system as adjuncts to traditional talk therapy, both in-session (e.g., guided meditations, experiential focusing, breathwork) and between session (e.g., yoga, centering prayer, mindfulness meditation), counselors maintain openness to the experience of the therapeutic process. Furthermore, by increasing knowledge of various faith traditions, a counselor is better able to work with clients of diverse belief systems and is more aware of personal biases and projections that may have an impact on the counseling process. In these ways, it is possible, although empirically untested to date, that a counselor may increase her or his self-efficacy as a counselor, reduce burnout, and enhance holistic wellness (Valente & Marotta, 2005).

Acknowledging the spiritual nature of counseling involves first recognizing the counseling setting and time as sacred space. For example, a counselor may engage in some form of ritual consistent with her or his beliefs prior to a client arriving to set an intention that the counseling session and physical space will be sacred. Examples of possible rituals grounded in different beliefs include prayers of petition and intercession for the client, "smudging" the counseling room or burning incense to clear negative energy left from a previous session, or meditating to quiet the mind. Another example of creating sacred space occurs when a client states, "I've never told anyone this, but . . ." and proceeds to make a difficult disclosure. This process is akin to confession within certain religious traditions, and the counselor might reflect that he or she is on hallowed ground in that moment. Treating the counseling setting and time as sacred space may benefit both the client and counselor.

Perhaps the most direct impact of counselor wellness, though, is not from the integration of spirituality into the counseling process but rather in the counselor's personal spiritual life. Imagine first, if you will, a vessel that contains a finite amount of a beautiful golden liquid. This liquid is poured out, a little at a time, to others. At some point, the vessel, if not refilled, becomes empty, and there is nothing left to give to others. The process of counseling involves pouring out a bit of ourselves to each client and, in some instances, taking on some of the "draining" energy of others. Through these processes, the "vessel" becomes empty if not consciously, intentionally, and frequently refilled. In fact, burnout might be characterized as continuing to try to give of ourselves when there is little left to give (Maslach, 2003; Valente & Marotta, 2005). Although spirituality does not represent the only way to "fill the vessel,"

it clearly is a vital way. Historical spiritual leaders such as The Buddha and Jesus, and more contemporary spiritual leaders such as Gandhi and Mother Teresa, all seemed to share the awareness that self-care is essential. As one example, Mother Teresa insisted that all of the nuns in her order, including herself, take a break each afternoon to nap or enjoy quiet reflection. It appears, then, that there are three aspects of the counselor's personal spiritual life that are important: (a) the recognition that self-care is essential to caring for others, (b) interconnectedness with clients while maintaining appropriate boundaries, and (c) the clear intention of serving the needs of others rather than meeting personal needs through service to others.

There is a saying in the Talmud that roughly translated, suggests that we see things as we are rather than as they truly are (Steinsaltz, 2006), suggesting that individuals' experiences and history cloud their perceptions. Although this is discussed further in the section on Mindfulness, it bears mentioning here as a vital aspect of counselor wellness and effectiveness. Graduate students commonly enter the training process with blind spots, areas in which they lack self-awareness. It is in these aspects of the student's unfinished business that there is the greatest likelihood of personal strain and projections onto client stories. However, through a disciplined spiritual practice, it is possible for counseling students and for counselors throughout their careers to increase self-awareness and reduce biases and projections. We now turn our attention to this aspect of spiritual wellness, mindfulness.

COUNSELOR MINDFULNESS

Joseph Campbell's quote (Campbell & Moyer, 2001) at the beginning of this article points to the idea that spirituality is about learning to experience life fully awake, that is, mindfully. The concept of mindfulness dates back to ancient times, and mindfulness practices are associated with almost all spiritual traditions (e.g., Christian centering prayer, Buddhist meditation). More recently, clinicians are using mindfulness practices to help clients more effectively cope with the physical and psychological realities of their lives (e.g., Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Linehan, 1993; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002). Furthermore, researchers are finding empirical evidence that these interventions are effective in treating a wide variety of clinical issues (Baer, 2003; Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004), including chronic pain (Kabat-Zinn, 1982; Randolph, Caldera, Tacone, & Greak, 1999), depressive relapse (Ma & Teasdale, 2004; J. D. Teasdale et al., 2000), borderline personality disorder (Linehan, Tutek, Heard, & Armstrong, 1994), and generalized anxiety disorder (Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992; J. J. Miller, Fletcher, & Kabat-Zinn, 1995; Semple, Reid, & Miller, 2005), among others.

Brown and Ryan (2003) stated that mindfulness is a quality of consciousness characterized by "clarity and vividness of current experience and functioning and thus stands in contrast to the mindless, less 'awake' states of habitual or automatic functioning that may be chronic for many

individuals" (p. 823). The idea of vividly experiencing the present moment fits with the components of spirituality outlined by many authors and theologians. In their synthesis of the writings on spirituality, Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, and Saunders (1988) stated, "The spiritual person believes life is infused with sacredness and often experiences a sense of awe, reverence, and wonder even in 'nonreligious' settings" (p. 11). Mindfulness is a nonjudgmental experiencing of life—the hallmark of a spiritual path.

Like spirituality, mindfulness is a difficult construct to define. The generally accepted definition of mindfulness is "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). As such, mindfulness differs from attention in that it is nonjudgmental awareness of even the smallest details of the present moment (e.g., boredom), coupled with an attitude of curiosity and acceptance of the current moment experience—even if that experience is painful. Mindful attention seeks to experience the phenomenon as it truly is. Buchheld, Grossman, and Walach (2001) suggested that mindfulness is similar to naturalistic observation in that the observer is unbiased and curious and simply allows the phenomenon to appear and then recede without judgment, interpretation, or reaction. For counselors, the cultivation of mindfulness holds the promise of increased ability to sustain attention and openness to both internal and external present-moment experiences.

Both an outcome of spiritual practice and a spiritual practice in itself, mindfulness is a way of being that changes and develops over time (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Buchheld et al., 2001). In many ways, it is difficult to separate mindfulness from spirituality because the two go hand in hand. As a product of spiritual practice, mindfulness manifests in an attitude of acceptance, nonjudgment, curiosity, enthusiasm for life, and a willingness to live in the present moment (Buchheld et al., 2001; Germer, 2005; Hahn, 2002; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Neff, 2003; Piedmont, 1999). By living life in the present moment rather than in the past or the future, the individual begins to connect more fully with others, and the reality of life as a human, and experiences her- or himself as a human "being" rather than a human "doer" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Piedmont, 1999). A connection to the spiritual may initiate these quiet moments of "being." Likewise, such quiet moments can lead to a deepened sense of spirituality. This recursive, reciprocal relationship between spirituality and mindfulness reflects the developmental process of growing into, and out from, one's spirituality.

Mindfulness as a spiritual practice can be either formal or informal (Germer, 2005). Formal mindfulness typically refers to such disciplined practices as meditation. Informal mindfulness can happen at any point during the day when the individual makes a conscious decision to be nonjudgmentally aware of the present moment. For instance, a person could bring mindful attention to washing the dishes, walking the dog, or brushing one's teeth.

Whether formal or informal, the practice is deceptively simple. An object for awareness is chosen, most often the breath or a mantra. When the mind

wanders from the object of attention, the practitioner acknowledges where it went and then gently and nonjudgmentally brings it back to the original object (Hahn, 1975; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Lesser, 1999; Segal et al., 2002). The counseling session itself can be a practice in mindfulness because it calls for the counselor to be fully and nonjudgmentally present with the client. Working in this way, the counselor develops an enhanced capacity for attention and concentration, strengthened ability to accept the present moment, greater self-awareness and compassion, and increased capacity for self-regulation and use of the self in therapy—all skills that facilitate the counseling process and counselor wellness (Fulton, 2005; Valente & Marotta, 2005).

Enhanced Attention and Concentration

The mind is made to wander. It is meant to think about things and figure out problems. Unfortunately, this wandering mind often means that it is difficult to remain focused on the task at hand. For counselors, this tendency to wander can make it difficult to pay attention to the client during a counseling session—particularly after a long day of back-to-back counseling sessions. Disciplined spiritual practices that focus and quiet the mind are exercises in attention and what Fulton (2005) called an "antidote" (p. 59) to the drifting mind. By working nonjudgmentally to bring the mind back to the present moment, the individual eventually develops the ability to hold attention longer. Sometimes the practitioner must bring the mind back a 100 times a minute. With practice, however, the mind becomes trained and more readily focused (Hahn, 1975; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Lesser, 1999; Segal et al., 2002).

Spiritual practices also lead to an enhanced ability to find joy in the small things in life and make it easier to remain focused (Elkins et al., 1988; Fulton, 2005; Underwood & Teresi, 2002). Mindfulness practices, in particular, encourage the examination of the small details of experience and lead to greater sensitivity to the fullness of life. Rather than requiring constant stimulation or excitement, the mindful person finds richness even in the mundane. In the counseling session, this means that the counselor is able to remain attentive to and interested in the client even under demanding circumstances. Being fully engaged with the client in this way lays the groundwork for a strong working relationship and energizes the counselor, which leads to greater overall passion for the work (Fulton, 2005).

Staying Present and Accepting What Is

In counseling, strong emotions are expected—whether from the client or the counselor. Building a therapeutic relationship requires that the counselor remain present for and tuned into these emotions (Egan, 1998; Fulton, 2005). Counselors and clients alike may believe, however, that the emotions

are too overwhelming or overpowering to explore directly. Skovholt and Rønnestad (2003) referred to the counselor's inability to handle a client's difficult emotions or stay in the client's experience as "premature closure" (p. 49). This is seen as a maladaptive way of coping with the overwhelming nature of the work. Premature closure sends a message to the client that the exploration of difficult feelings is not permitted and may have the effect of creating distance in the counseling relationship or invalidating the client's experience.

Mindfulness, on the other hand, welcomes strong emotions with the same attitude of curiosity and acceptance with which it welcomes other life experiences and cultivates the ability to stay in the present moment without trying to change or deny it. Softening into experience in this way, the counselor learns that strong emotions not only are transitory but are also tolerable—perhaps even interesting. For example, a counselor may become aware of fear around a client's strong affect. She or he can explore this fear with curious and accepting mindfulness. When viewed in this way, the fear itself ultimately subsides. The more the counselor practices in this way and cultivates an attitude of acceptance, either through direct mindfulness practice or other spiritual practices, the less power her or his own fear will have over her or him. This same strategy can be applied to the client's emotional pain, watching the pain as it changes over time rather than running from it (Fulton, 2005; Hahn, 2002; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Linehan, 1993; Segal et al., 2002). In many ways, this aspect of mindfulness is very similar to counselor heartfulness, which we discuss later in this article. In fact, it has been suggested that the two go hand in hand (Lesser, 1999).

Greater Self-Awareness and Compassion

Historically, mindfulness has been taught as a practice for the development of insight and compassion. Clearly, the ability to hold both positive and negative experiences in awareness that comes with mindfulness leads to an increased ability to do the personal-growth work required of effective, well-balanced counselors (Baker, 2002; Skovholt, 2001). By exploring the habits of the mind nonjudgmentally, the counselor can systematically explore basic assumptions and beliefs and examine how those may interfere with the counseling process.

Researchers have shown that expert counselors seem to be more aware of their own internal biases and areas of weakness than novices (Etringer & Hillerbrand, 1995). Typical methods of self-exploration used in counselor education programs, such as journaling or group discussion, often are met with fear and anxiety arising out of self-consciousness and deep-seated beliefs around inadequacy (Neff, 2003; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003). Horney (1950) suggested that the ego often blocks inadequacies from self-awareness in order to protect self-esteem. This protective defense mechanism, unfortunately, hampers the process of self-exploration and growth.

In contrast, by working from the place of mindful acceptance and nonjudgment cultivated through spiritual practice, the counselor can safely explore such things as perceived inadequacies, values, and prejudices that otherwise might be denied or unexamined (Neff, 2003). By working nonjudgmentally with personal doubts and fears, the counselor begins to develop self-compassion. For example, as the counselor works to hold attention on one object, the mind naturally wanders. In bringing the attention back, the mindfulness practitioner often will experience a flood of other related thoughts such as "I can't do this," "I'll never be any good," and "What's wrong with me?" All of these thoughts are opportunities for nonjudgmental awareness. Soon the counselor is familiar with these "habits of mind," and they become simply more examples of the counselor's typical "mental behavior" rather than overwhelming obstacles that need to remain hidden from view (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Segal et al., 2002). This nonjudgmental acceptance and exploration of the self does not imply passivity. Rather, honestly recognizing these habits for what they are instead of ignoring them is the first step toward change. This process of opening to personal shortcomings and seeing things as they are rather than as the counselor wants them to be leads to increased acceptance of both the self and others and tolerance of ambiguity (e.g., Fulton, 2005; Germer, 2005; Hahn, 2002; Hayes, 1994; Neff, 2003).

Use of the Self in Counseling

As counselors develop greater present-moment awareness, acceptance, and compassion, they can more effectively use their own experience in the here and now of the session as a therapeutic tool. Such here-and-now processing requires that counselors be able to tune into their own experience and internal dialogue, put words to the experience, and share it genuinely with the client (Egan, 1998; Yalom, 2002). Being mindful allows counselors to become aware of personal experiences during the session and discuss those without judging them as good or bad. For instance, a female counselor with a strong mindfulness practice decides to pay attention to the client's presentation of self during the session. While listening and watching the client, she notices a feeling of sadness arising within her. She acknowledges this feeling and returns her focus to the client. Later in the session, she shares her experience of sadness with the client to facilitate a deeper exploration of the client's situation.

Self-Regulation

The ability to be aware of one's own internal processes is vital not only for ensuring the sanctity and effectiveness of the counselor–client relationship but also for the counselor's well-being. The nature of the work includes ambiguity regarding what constitutes successful therapy, a lack of positive feedback

from peers, and demanding and challenging client situations. Counselors need to be able to recognize the signs of imbalance or overload in their lives in order to prevent burnout (Skovholt, 2001). These signs may be internal (e.g., muscle tension, loss of energy, high frustration levels, inability to mentally leave clients at the office) or external (e.g., lack of extracurricular activities, disorganized work spaces, loss of friendships, poor eating habits). By tuning into and accepting what is happening in the moment—either internally or externally—the counselor has good information on which to make necessary changes to prevent burnout. Moreover, nonjudgmental awareness of one's tendency to be self-critical or self-doubting can help relieve the sting of such cognitions and enhance well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Fulton, 2005).

COUNSELOR HEARTFULNESS

> Let yourself be silently drawn by the stronger pull of what you really love.
>
> —Rumi (2004, p. 51)

Another aspect of the spiritual development journey is one of increasing heartfulness. In this work, "the goal is an awakened heart, one that feels everything there is to feel" (Lesser, 1999, p. 157). Such openness to the full range of experiences in life, that is, the painful and the joyous, is characteristic of counselors who are energized and invigorated by their work (Dlugos & Friedlander, 2001).

Counselors, like all people, must work to open the heart. In the process of opening the heart, each of us is confronted repeatedly with our fearful habit of closing to pain (Lesser, 1999). In this vein, Lesser asserted that

> mindfulness and heartfulness are a powerful duo on the spiritual path: a quiet mind without an open heart is a pretty brittle and boring proposition. But an open heart that doesn't have the support of a quiet and tamed mind is equally unhelpful. (p. 160)

In addition to increasing mindfulness, meditation and other contemplative practices may have a positive emotional impact as well. Researchers suggest that meditation increases activity in the brain in areas associated with positive affect (Davidson et al., 2004) and that these neural changes may be long lasting and occur even when the person is not actively meditating (Lutz, Greischar, Rawlings, Ricard, & Davidson, 2004).

Both the benefits of heartfulness and limitations of the person who does not work to maintain a heartful way of living are well documented (Lesser, 1999). Counselors who live a heartful life, in addition to living a more authentic existence, are themselves likely able to experience more completely the full range of emotions experienced by clients. At the same time, the combination of mindfulness and heartfulness allows the counselor to maintain appropriate boundaries to avoid taking on too much of the client's problem and losing perspective. This delicate balance of heartfulness and objectivity affects the therapeutic process. Counselors who are

too open to the client's pain without the necessary boundaries may take on too much of the client's problem, lose objectivity, and be more susceptible to emotional exhaustion. Conversely, an extreme lack of heartfulness may occasion depersonalization, that is, being overly detached from clients. It bears noting that both emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are attributes of burnout (Maslach, 2003). As such, heartfulness is vital to counselor wellness.

COUNSELOR SOULFULNESS

Soulfulness is the third aspect of the spiritual development journey. Kelly (1995) expressed how authentic spirituality is achieved through a person's awareness. Soulfulness requires the counselor to come to a heightened sense of awareness of the meaning and purpose of each life, the sacredness of all, and that all is connected. This type of awareness is not achieved instantaneously but, as with other aspects of the spiritual journey, is a process that must be engaged in and developed by counselors.

The first aspect of soulfulness is the awareness of the meaning and purpose of each life. Frankl (1984) discussed the importance of finding meaning, arguing that this was the primary motivator in life. Kelly (1995) expounded on this idea of striving for meaning in life by breaking this concept into two parts. First, a person searches for meaning to "make sense of one's reality" (p. 95). The second part is that a person is searching to find direction in her or his life. Both are important parts for the larger task of the search for meaning and purpose in life.

M. R. Miller and Thoresen (1999) concluded that meaning in life influences health and wellness. Meaning in life is part of a person's perspective on life, which is an aspect of health, and is regarded as one's "inner peace" or "coherence in life" (p. 5). Meaning and purpose is connected not only to health but also to hope. Yahne and Miller (1999) connected hope to a person's search for meaning by extending Frankl's (1984) belief that all people are capable of finding hope, even in a seemingly hopeless situation. Through striving for an awareness of meaning and purpose in each life, one can experience health and the ability to inspire hope.

Although it is important that a counselor strives for meaning in her or his own life, a counselor's awareness does not stop here. A counselor's awareness can flow to the work that is done with clients. Counselors can become aware of the meaning and purpose of each life that they encounter in a counseling session. Kelly (1995) concluded that through this awareness of meaning and purpose in each life, the counseling relationship will have a new perspective and energy (p. 95). This energy is developed from the collaborative effort in each session between the counselor and the client to make meaning of life.

In addition to awareness of the purpose and meaning of each life, awareness also is needed to understand the sacredness of all. As mentioned

earlier, Maslow (1998) described people who are developing spiritually as transcendent self-actualizers. Part of this spiritual development includes the acknowledgment of the sacredness of all things (Chandler et al., 1992). Through recognizing this type of sacredness, one is able to see the beauty and importance that is present in all things (Westgate, 1996).

A counselor with an awareness of the sacredness of all will be able to approach clients and sessions with this mind-set. When viewing clients and sessions with the awareness of the sacred, the counselor is better able to let go and live in the present moment. Connors, Toscova, and Tonigan (1999) described this type of living in the present moment as serenity. Awareness of the sacredness of all things leads the counselor to let go of other burdens and to fully be present with each client during every session. The counselor is also able to appreciate the beauty of every client and session because of the heightened awareness of the sacred. This can be healing for counselors as well as clients, because development of an awareness of the sacred and an ability to be present in the moment has benefits beyond the session itself and can infuse more hope, joy, and vitality into one's whole life.

Finally, a counselor on the spiritual development journey strives for awareness that all is connected. Ivey, Ivey, Myers, and Sweeney (2005) described spirituality as "an awareness of a being or force that transcends the material aspects of life and gives a deep sense of wholeness or connectedness to the universe" (p. 51). A counselor strives for awareness that sees the universe as a whole. Maslow's (1998) concept of transcendent self-actualization also incorporated a holistic idea that involved "synergy (cooperative action)" (Chandler et al., 1992, p. 168). A person acts in a certain way because of the awareness of the interconnectedness of all things in the universe.

Awareness that all is connected is important to the counselor because of the impact it will have on the counseling relationship. Kelly (1995) explained that "spirituality infuses the counselor–client relationship with an augmented awareness of an in-depth bond grounded in a fundamental human connectedness that has the potential for healing power in the concrete, contextual expression of individual personness" (p. 91). Through this awareness of the interconnectedness of all things, the potential for a deeper therapeutic relationship is possible as openness is fostered in the client–counselor relationship (Kelly, 1995).

Becoming aware of the connectedness of all things is also about living with the tension that often exists among those who are different (Tisdell, 2003). Chandler et al. (1992) stated that spirituality is about focusing on the community that is present rather than differences between individuals within the community. Through realizing the connectedness of all things, a counselor is able to focus on the work that is to be done with a client rather than on counselor–client differences. This interconnectedness allows the counselor to learn from the session even as the client does. By minimizing the hierarchical separation inherent in the counselor–client relationship, or at least minimizing it through the spiritual lens of interconnectedness,

counselors can recognize their own humanity even as they experience compassion for the humanity of each client.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although there is general consensus regarding many of the ideas presented in this article, empirical validation of these concepts is limited. Much of the research to date has been on the integration of mindfulness into treatment for a range of emotional and psychological difficulties for clients (Baer, 2003; Grossman et al., 2004; Linehan et al., 1994; Ma & Teasdale, 2004; J. J. Miller et al., 1995; Semple et al., 2005). Although there is a growing body of research on client outcomes, research is needed to demonstrate the impact of facilitating mindfulness, heartfulness, and soulfulness on professional counselors. For example, scholars (Valente & Marotta, 2005) have posited that a counselor may increase her or his self-efficacy as a counselor, reduce burnout, and enhance holistic wellness with mindfulness training, but this concept remains empirically untested. Given the current attention on integrating spirituality into the counseling process, in particular, additional research is needed on the impact of training counselors to be more mindful, heartful, and soulful.

CONCLUSION

Counseling is a demanding profession, and striving to provide high-quality services to others while maintaining personal wellness is a challenging goal. The spiritually oriented counselor sustains the lifelong commitment toward this goal first by recognizing that purpose exists in and for each life and that all is sacred and connected. On this foundation is built the powerful combination of an open heart and a present-centered nonjudgmental awareness. In this way, soulfulness, heartfulness, and mindfulness converge, and the counselor moves closer, both personally and professionally, to a fully authentic existence. Although there are many aspects of holistic wellness, the spiritual path offers many opportunities for personal and professional healing and growth.

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