Faculty Publications

2019

Integration or Separation? Addressing Religious and Spiritual Issues in Multicultural Counseling: A National Survey of College Counselors

Timothy B. Smith
Brigham Young University, tbs@byu.edu

Rachel Crook Lyon
Brigham Young University

Kari O'Grady
Brigham Young University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub>

Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Smith, Timothy B.; Crook Lyon, Rachel; and O'Grady, Kari, "Integration or Separation? Addressing Religious and Spiritual Issues in Multicultural Counseling: A National Survey of College Counselors" (2019). *Faculty Publications*. 3153.

<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub/3153>

This Peer-Reviewed Article is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Smith, T. B., Crook-Lyon, R., & O'Grady, K. (2019). Integration or separation? Addressing religious and spiritual issues in multicultural counseling: A national survey. *Journal of College Counseling*.

Integration or Separation? Addressing Religious and Spiritual Issues
in Multicultural Counseling: A National Survey of College Counselors

Timothy B. Smith, Rachel Crook Lyon, & Kari O'Grady
Brigham Young University

Correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to Timothy B. Smith, Department of Counseling Psychology, Brigham Young University, Provo, UY 84604, USA. Email: tbs@byu.edu.

Abstract

Given contemporary ethical concerns, we conducted a national survey of 216 college counselors' perceptions of integrating religious and spiritual issues in multicultural counseling and counselor education. Using cluster analysis, we identified four patterns of commitments to multiculturalism and religiosity. Respondents demonstrated ethical bracketing, as they considered religious and spiritual issues favorably within the framework of multicultural counseling, irrespective of their personal commitments to those topics. Counselors can openly address spiritual and religious diversity.

Key words: Values conflicts, professional ethics, multiculturalism, counselor education

Integration or Separation? Addressing Religious and Spiritual Issues
in Multicultural Counseling: A National Survey of College Counselors

Historically, counseling has taken a holistic approach to human wellness, an approach explicitly including multiple facets of human experience including spirituality and religiosity (e.g., Witmer & Sweeney, 1992). In recent decades, the field has informed its traditional holistic approach with the tenets of multiculturalism, the affirmation of human dignity across all differences, ideational or innate. To assist counselors in their work with diverse clients, competencies for addressing spiritual and religious issues in counseling (ASERVIC, 2009) and multicultural and social justice counseling competencies (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016) have been formally endorsed by the American Counseling Association (ACA). Those documents describe skills and dispositions that apply to all counselors. Thus multicultural counseling is now considered mainstream counseling, with the profession aspiring to appropriately address all forms of human diversity (Kaplan, Tarvydas, & Gladding, 2014).

Religion and spirituality are aspects of human diversity, but some religious tenets conflict with multicultural tenets, most notably those concerning gender identity and sexual expression (e.g., Witman & Bidell, 2014). Resulting tensions could increase over time, particularly on college campuses (Cuyjet, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2011), creating a rift in the historic holism characterizing college counseling. Rather than focus exclusively on gender identity and sexuality, prominent issues in recent discussions (e.g., Smith & Okech, 2016), this paper explores general points of separation and convergence by evaluating college counselors' integration of religious and spiritual issues in the framework of multicultural counseling. Integration of those topics, working through inherent contradictions and values conflicts, represents a contemporary challenge to counselors' traditional commitment to holistic values.

A Challenge for Holistic Multiculturalism

Holistic perspectives denote plurality, a comprehensive inclusion of divergent ideas and ideals. Although college counselors may strive for holistic multiculturalism, the expansive ideational diversity on college campuses (Cuyjet et al., 2011) makes it obvious that even culturally sensitive college counselors cannot accept absolutely everything about everyone. For example, even when deeply rooted in a culture, beliefs demeaning to women exceed appropriate limits. Ideational rifts challenge the ideals of holism. And in counseling, ideational rifts and values conflicts often involve religious tenets and spiritual values (Richards & Bergin, 2017).

Although the ideal of multiculturalism aspires to open exchange across all human differences, the reality is that most affirmations of multiculturalism concern race, culture, gender, and sexual orientation to a much greater extent than religion and spirituality (Magaldi-Dopman, 2014; Pieterse, Evans, Risner-Butner, Collins, & Mason, 2009). Religious and spiritual diversity may be mentioned as a component of multiculturalism but receives very limited coverage in research (e.g., Amer & Bagasra, 2013) and in professional training (Adams et al., 2015; Hage, Hopson, Siegel, Payton, & DeFanti, 2006). For instance, multicultural competencies for overcoming racism, sexism, and homophobia also pertain to biases against religion (Ratts et al., 2016), yet Islamophobia and anti-Semitism receive hardly any attention (Schlosser, Ali, Ackerman, & Dewey, 2009). Rather than ignore such experiences, holistic multiculturalism should explicitly affirm spiritual and religious diversity (Smith & Richards, 2005).

Maturation of the field of multiculturalism has ushered in more comprehensive expectations for multicultural competence. The field has shifted from attending primarily to outward identifiers to including inner perspectives or worldviews (Sue & Sue, 2016). This shift requires increased understanding of worldview influences, including spirituality and religion

(Slife, O'Grady, & Kosits, 2017). This expanded focus poses a challenge for counselors who feel inadequately trained, avoidant, or opposed to religious aspects of human experience.

In counseling, a working alliance needs to be maintained with clients even when the counselor disagrees with a client's theology (Richards & Bergin, 2017), such as when a client venerates spiritual inspiration over personal autonomy when selecting a college major. College counselors need to work effectively with everyone, including clients who receive harassment because of their beliefs and practices and clients who engage in advocacy against the other clients' beliefs and practices. Given manifest complexity, there are at least fourteen skills and dispositions that counselors should demonstrate when working with spiritual and religious diversity (ASERVIC, 2009). Clearly, maintaining multiculturalism and spiritual and religious diversity on college campuses requires genuine work, metaphorically moving against strong currents pulling toward disengagement over differences. Far from any ideal we may hold about tranquil acceptance of human differences, holism involves undercurrents that pull and swirl.

Counselors' Beliefs about Multiculturalism, Religion, and Spirituality

Studying opinions among college counselors can provide useful insights on the strength and direction of ideational undercurrents. Is polarization occurring in the field? On college campuses, some factions hostile to diversity cite religious teachings. As a result, others may consider religion an inappropriate topic of discussion in counseling centers and college campuses generally. If religious tenets are offensive, should they be dropped from conversations in state funded colleges and counselor education programs? To what degree can religious and spiritual practices be addressed openly in the framework of multiculturalism, such as in diversity classes? Would multicultural competency training be watered down by incorporating religious and spiritual diversity and thus reducing attention to the issues of race, gender, sexual orientation,

etc.? Clearly, questions like these can inform the future of college counseling.

Specifically, we wonder to what extent college counselors consider religion and spirituality as central or antithetical to multiculturalism. If those topics remain separated from multiculturalism, how will moral conflicts be addressed? Thus integration or separation clearly affects the field.

Prior Training and Personal Commitments Influence Beliefs

Counselors' responses to important questions about the future direction of college counseling undoubtedly reflect their personal values and commitments (Albarracin, Johnson, & Zanna, 2014). Thus counselors' personal commitments must be taken into account. For instance, counselors strongly affirming their own religion may have difficulty affirming multiculturalism and vice versa, failing to ethically bracket (Kocet & Herlihy, 2014) their deeply held personal values when working with others. To better understand college counselors' attitudes about the explicit (not merely superficial) integration of religion and spirituality in the already widely-accepted framework of multicultural counseling, we should evaluate the degree to which counselors' prior training in and personal commitment to those areas influence their beliefs about how to address those topics in counseling centers and in counselor education.

Purpose of This Study

Recognizing the broad diversity and resulting values conflicts on college campuses (Cuyjet et al., 2011), we focused our evaluation on the attitudes and experiences of college counselors. We targeted members of the American College Counseling Association (ACCA), who represent a range of counseling specialties (e.g., career counseling, mental health counseling, and substance abuse counseling). Moreover, college counselors often interact with counseling programs and observe the impact of training (or lack of it) in spiritual/religious issues

in students' counseling work in a setting where supervision is typically well structured, carefully monitored, and closely coordinated with counselor education programs. Furthermore, discussions about human diversity commonly occur on college campuses, such that college counselors would likely have considered and formed opinions about multicultural and spiritual/religious issues. Thus college counselors can speak to several components of professional practice and to issues pertaining to counseling education that will influence the future of college counseling generally.

Specifically, we sought to investigate college counselors' perceptions of integrating religious and spiritual issues within the widely-accepted framework of multiculturalism, accounting for their personal commitments to and prior training on those topics. Previous research has evaluated either multiculturalism (Brooks, Kim, Moye, Oglesby, & Hargett, 2015) or religion and spirituality (Adams, Puig, Baggs, & Wolf, 2015) but not their integration. We sought to fill that gap in the literature.

Although ACA and ACCA support multicultural, religious, and spiritual issues in counseling practice and counselor education (ACA, 2014), actual *integration* of the topics goes far beyond inclusion of certain words in professional documents. Actual integration occurs in the beliefs and practices of counselors. We therefore asked the following questions:

1. To what extent do participants believe that religion and spirituality can be considered openly in (a) public colleges, (b) multicultural counseling, and (c) counselor education?
2. To what degree does polarization of multicultural and religious commitments characterize the field, as indicated by distinct data clusters?
3. To what degree are participants' beliefs associated with their prior training and personal commitments?
4. What reasons do participants provide for integrating/separating religious and spiritual

issues from multicultural counseling?

Method

Participants and Procedures

Investigators randomly selected 500 participants from the ACCA professional membership directory. Prospective participants were mailed a statement of informed consent, a questionnaire, a one-dollar bill as incentive, and a postage-paid return envelope. We conducted no follow-up but received 216 completed surveys (43% response rate). This return rate is similar to that of other national surveys (e.g., Young, Wiggins-Frame, & Cashwell, 2007).

The 216 participants had been ACCA members for an average of 6.3 years ($SD = 6.9$). A total of 135 (63%) were women and 79 (37%) were men, with 2 not reporting gender. Participant racial composition included 174 (81%) European Americans, 15 (7%) African American, 5 (2%) Hispanic/Latinos(as), 2 (1%) Asian Americans, and 1 Native American, with 19 not reporting race. The average age was 46.9 years ($SD = 10.9$). Participants predominantly affiliated with Protestant Christian denominations (28%), Roman Catholicism (22%), or other/unspecified Christian denominations (21%), with 16% endorsing no formal religious affiliation, 4% being Jewish, 1% subscribing to Eastern religions (e.g., Buddhism, Hinduism), 1% agnostic/atheist, and 7% not reporting affiliation. Regarding occupation/role, 114 (53%) were counselors; 36 (17%) were professors; 34 (16%) were administrators, 20 (9%) were psychologists, 7 (3%) were related service professionals (e.g., career advisors), and 5 (2%) provided no response. On a 6-point scale on which 1 = *not at all* and 6 = *very much*, participants rated themselves as having moderately strong levels of prior training in multicultural issues ($M = 4.0$, $SD = 1.1$), with the data normally distributed, except that all participants had received at least some multicultural training. On the same scale, participants rated themselves as having moderate levels of prior

training in spiritual/religious issues ($M = 3.6$, $SD = 1.5$), with 10 having no prior training.

Measures

Integration of religion/spirituality and multiculturalism. We could not locate any previously published measure of the integration of religion/spirituality and multiculturalism, so we developed the questions listed in Table 1 to evaluate participants' perceptions of 10 aspects of integration of religion and spirituality with multiculturalism, with responses on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). Eight professors and three graduate students reviewed and revised draft questions to reduce bias and minimize ambiguity. The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) was .84. We sought to learn from participants' opinions about all 10 aspects of integration, so we conducted item-level analyses after an initial multivariate analysis.

Religious commitment. The second section of the survey assessed participants' level of religious commitment, using the Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI; Worthington et al., 2003). Participants respond to 10 items on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all true of me*; 5 = *totally true of me*). Example items are: "I spend time trying to grow in understanding of my faith" and "It is important to me to spend periods of time in private religious thought and reflection." RCI authors reported an internal consistency alpha of .93, and the internal consistency coefficient obtained with the data collected in the present study was .96.

Multicultural sensitivity and commitment. The third section of the survey consisted of the Multicultural Commitment Scale (MCS), developed by the authors, who have previous experience with scale development and with measurement evaluation in multicultural counseling (e.g., Authors, 20XX). Participants responded to 9 items on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all true of me*; 5 = *totally true of me*). Example items are: "I continue to seek out information, experience,

and training in multicultural areas” and “My actions and behavior strongly reflect a commitment to multiculturalism.” The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling for the MCS was .93, and a subsequent principal components analysis yielded a single factor (eigenvalue of 5.1) accounting for 56% of the variance. These results suggested that the MCS items evaluated a single construct. Cronbach’s alpha was .86, an adequately high value.

Rationale for integration/separation. The final survey question asked respondents to give an open-ended response with reasons why religious and spiritual issues should be included in or kept distinct from the framework of multicultural counseling, along with a prompt: “Please use the entire space provided to elaborate on your answer.” Two professors, three graduate students, and three undergraduates coded the responses using established guidelines for qualitative content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). To reduce potential bias, coders worked independently, with student coders being uninformed about the study hypotheses. Coders first developed initial domains from participants’ written responses, then reviewed the data for inconsistencies and discrepancies between the initial domains and participants’ responses. Subsequently, final domains and categories were derived, with at least two coders independently evaluating each participant’s response. A third coder resolved discrepancies between coders.

Results

Integration of Multicultural, Religious, and Spiritual Issues in Professional Counseling

Counselors in this national sample generally endorsed the integration of spiritual and religious issues in professional counseling—and in multicultural counseling (Table 1). Some participants ($n = 19$, 9%) felt that topics of religion and spirituality should be excluded from discussions in publicly funded clinics and colleges, but most disagreed with that approach. Counselors believed religion and spirituality to be multicultural issues ($n = 175$, 81%) that

should not be separated from multiculturalism ($n = 145$, 68%). Most participants agreed or strongly agreed ($n = 154$, 72%) that counselor education should cover religious and spiritual issues, and 160 (74%) felt that such training inadequately addresses religious and spiritual issues. Several participants ($n = 42$; 19%) felt that religious teachings may dismiss cultural differences, with some religious aims being incongruous with the aims of multiculturalism ($n = 80$, 37%).

As would be expected, the more training on multiculturalism or on religious and spiritual issues the counselors had received, the higher their MCS and RCI scores ($r = .56$ for both, $p < .001$; see Table 2). Individuals who had received multicultural training also tended to have received training in religious and spiritual issues ($r = .29$, $p < .001$). However, MCS scores were unrelated to RCI scores ($r = .03$, $p = .62$), indicating no meaningful association between participants' affirmations of multiculturalism and affirmations of religion.

Clusters of Belief Patterns

If ideational polarization characterized the participants, then the data reported in the preceding paragraphs would differ substantially across individuals with different types of beliefs. To identify categories of participants' MCS and RCI scores, we conducted a cluster analysis, a statistical method for sorting cases into homogeneous groups (Kaufman & Rousseeuw, 2009). Across 213 participants with complete data, the two-step clustering method indicated the optimal solution as four clusters, with the silhouette measure of cohesion and separation yielding an average value of 0.5, the threshold for a good solution (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011). The optimal solution of four clusters was confirmed using *k*-means clustering, which permits the recombination of cases and clusters over repeated iterations. Other numbers of clusters did not result in optimal differentiation of cases or failed to converge in 10 iterations.

The first cluster of participants (labeled *pro-multiculturalism*; $n = 61$) strongly endorsed

multicultural commitment but weakly endorsed religious commitment. The second cluster (labeled *pro-religion*; $n = 33$) had the opposite pattern: strong religious commitment but low multicultural commitment. The third cluster (labeled *uncommitted*; $n = 39$) consisted of participants with low levels of both multicultural and religious commitment. The fourth cluster (labeled *committed*; $n = 80$) were participants who had strong multicultural and religious commitment. Subsequent analyses indicated that 29% of this fourth group were people of color, a much higher proportion than any other group ($F = 5.9, p < .001$).

The four clusters of participants represented distinct beliefs about multiculturalism and religiosity, so we examined the correlations of the MCI and RCI separately for each cluster. The correlations in the first three clusters were very small ($p > .05$); thus the data were inconsistent among participants who held one-sided or ambivalent beliefs about multiculturalism and religiosity. However, among the fourth cluster of participants who endorsed both multicultural and religious commitment, those two constructs were strongly associated ($r = .48, p < .001$).

Analyses and Comparisons among Clusters

The four clusters differed in their level of prior training in multiculturalism and in religion and spirituality (Wilk's Lambda = .58, $F = 21.2, p < .001$). Individuals in the first (pro-multicultural) and fourth (committed) clusters had received significantly more training in multicultural counseling ($F = 23.4, p < .001$) than those in the second (pro-religion) and third (uncommitted). Similarly, those in the second (pro-religion) and fourth (committed) clusters had received significantly more training in religious and spiritual issues relevant to counseling ($F = 19.1, p < .001$) than those in the first (pro-multicultural) and third (uncommitted).

Overall, the more training participants had received, the stronger personal commitment they had to both multiculturalism and religion. However, the patterns of correlations in the third

cluster (uncommitted) were different from the other groups: The correlations were small ($p > .05$). For uncommitted individuals, level of prior training was unrelated to level of commitment.

Data across the four clusters were next compared on endorsements regarding integration of multiculturalism with religious and spiritual considerations in professional counseling and counselor education. When the 10 items in Table 1 were examined simultaneously in a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), the resulting model reached statistical significance (Wilks' Lambda = .77, $F = 1.7$, $p = .012$). Post hoc univariate analyses identified significant differences on two items. On item 5, individuals in the third cluster (uncommitted) did not believe that spiritual/religious interventions should be considered in the practice of multicultural counseling nearly as much as those in the second and fourth clusters ($p < .05$). On item 6, individuals in the first cluster (pro-multicultural) did not believe the aims of religious groups to be in harmony with the aims of multiculturalism nearly as much as individuals in the second and fourth clusters ($p < .01$). No differences were found on the other eight items on Table 1. Individuals' personal commitment to multiculturalism and religion did not yield divergent opinions about integration of those other eight issues relevant to professional counseling.

Overall, the amount of counselors' training in and commitment to multiculturalism was unrelated with responses to all ten survey items (Table 2). Only one of the many correlations accounted for more than 6% of the shared variance: Religious commitment, as measured by the RCI, was positively associated with individuals' endorsement of Item 6 on the survey: "The aims of many religious groups are in harmony with the aims of multiculturalism." In general, level of training and commitment did not explain substantial variance in their responses to inquiries about the integration of religious and spiritual issues in multiculturalism.

Reasons for and Against Integration of Religion/Spirituality with Multicultural Counseling

Participants provided reasons for and against integrating religious and spiritual considerations with multicultural counseling. In total, 183 individuals (85%) gave 261 conceptually distinct responses to the open-ended survey question. We sorted responses into three categories: (a) rationale for integrating religious and spiritual issues with multicultural counseling, (b) cautions about that integration, and (c) rationale for separating religious and spiritual issues from multicultural counseling.

Rationale for including religious and spiritual issues. Respondents gave five reasons for integrating religious and spiritual topics in multicultural counseling. The primary rationale pertained to conceptual overlaps, as indicated in the following quotations: “Religious and spiritual issues are obviously a main component of any description of a *culture*; to speak of multicultural issues and ignore a central element of the core is absurd”; “Religion and spirituality influence beliefs about behavior, sexuality, holiday practices, etc.”; “As someone who has researched extensively in both areas, it is impossible to accurately and effectively educate about multicultural/cultural issues if religion/spirituality is not discussed, and vice versa.”

A second rationale pertained to counseling effectiveness, with statements such as: “To provide appropriate interventions, the counselor needs to understand all aspects of the culture including spirituality/religion”; “In such a chaotic world, if clients have a spiritual foundation it is important to know how to help them build on this for stability and inner peace”; “It is important to help clients within the framework of their own faith tradition.”

Third, multiculturalism encompasses all aspects of human diversity: “*Multicultural*, by definition, does not exclude religion or spirituality”; “Religious and spiritual issues reflect a dimension on which people differ; therefore [they] fit with other themes that are widely accepted as part of multiculturalism.”

Fourth, religious differences result in discrimination or oppression: “Spiritual/religious issues have been used oppressively over the years, with one group not allowing another's practice; these issues need to be addressed in the context of multiculturalism”; “Anti-semitism should be addressed, as well as respect for diverse spiritual practices”; “Deeply religious people are a minority like other minorities; they have their own language, customs, etc.”

Finally, some felt that excluding spirituality and religion from multiculturalism would be inconsistent: “Excluding any aspect that creates diversity among humans fails to promote the spirit of multiculturalism.” Some went so far as to label that exclusion “discrimination.”

Cautions regarding inclusion of spiritual and religious issues. Participants raised three cautions about including religion and spirituality in multicultural counseling. First, they expressed the need for discretion and sensitivity. They felt that such content could be discussed respectfully “at the initiation of the client, never ignored by the therapist.” They specifically warned against moralizing and proselytizing: “Religion should never be used by a counselor as an indoctrination tool.” Even indirect imposition of beliefs would be problematic, such as when counselors “with religious beliefs make assumptions that everyone has a religious stance.” They insisted on the “need for self-awareness; no value imposition.”

Second, respondents frequently mentioned professional training: “I think counselors are often hesitant to delve into these issues, but training might help.” Although they understood that for many graduate programs “a separate course [may] not be possible due to time constraints,” they felt that the content should be part of counselor education: “Spiritual issues and multicultural issues should be infused throughout the counselor education curriculum”; “I believe all practitioners in counseling, and educators in general, need to have a thorough foundation of training in all world religions.”

Finally, several respondents affirmed the need to differentiate between religion and spirituality: “Religion and spirituality are separate and distinct” and “I am a very spiritual person, but I do not believe in religion.”

Rationale for separating religious and spiritual issues from multiculturalism.

Participants provided four reasons why religious and spiritual issues should remain separate from multicultural counseling. First, religious and spiritual differences do not necessarily merit inclusion in multicultural counseling: “That is a *diversity* issue, and not a *multicultural* issue.” A related second point involved conceptual distinctions: “I think they are different issues”; “They are very different. One has no choice about race, yet anyone who decides not to be Christian any longer (or any other faith) has that option.”

Third, individuals raised concerns about diluting information about either topic if both were considered simultaneously: “If one desires spiritual training, take classes in theology. If one desires multiculturalism, take those classes. Do not mix the two, or you will have diluted and substandard training in each”; “Only superficial coverage of each topic may be possible with so many issues to cover.” Finally, a few participants felt disposed to omit religion altogether: “No religion... I believe entirely in separation of church and state.”

Discussion

Perspectives including religion, spirituality, culture, race, gender, sexual orientation, and so forth characterized the practices, education, and scholarship of professional counselors (e.g., Myers et al., 2000). Inclusive perspectives assume integration of divergent concepts. With an aim of promoting wellness inclusive of diversity (Kaplan et al., 2014), college counselors working on diverse campuses can address occasional and sometimes poignant divergences between multiculturalism and religious and spiritual perspectives.

This study sought to investigate the extent to which a national sample of counselors believed that issues relevant to religion and spirituality should be included in multicultural counseling and counselor education. Rather than rigid polarization in which counselors' opinions favored multiculturalism *or* religion and spirituality, the majority of college counselors in this sample accommodated both concepts—and both together. The averages in Table 1 reflect opinions supporting integration over separation.

Although some counselors who strongly endorsed multiculturalism did not report personal commitments to religion (28%) and vice versa (15%), the largest of the four clusters (37%) consisted of individuals strongly committed to both religion and multiculturalism. Among that cluster, which had by far the highest representation of counselors of color, the stronger the commitment to multiculturalism, the stronger the commitment to religion ($r = .48$), which association did not characterize the other three clusters. Typically, personal commitments to multiculturalism were unrelated to religious commitments, a finding that suggests heterogeneous belief systems among most participants. Counselors' complex beliefs cannot easily be stereotyped, even if the individuals have clear personal commitments.

A remarkable finding from this survey concerns ethical bracketing, separating one's own values from those required by the context. Among participants strongly committed to multiculturalism but not to religion and among those strongly committed to religion but not to multiculturalism, respondents' personal commitments were unrelated or only modestly related to their opinions about topic integration. Statistically significant differences among the clusters of college counselors occurred on only 2 of the 10 survey items concerning topic integration, and correlations were of small magnitude even when they reached statistical significance. Strength of personal commitments did not consistently predict beliefs about what should occur in the field as

a whole. These findings suggest that many counselors in this sample expressed opinions about issues pertaining to the entire field in ways that bracketed or withheld some of the influence of their personal commitments. Scholars have encouraged the practice of ethical bracketing (Kocet & Herlihy, 2014), and these survey data seem to indicate that ethical bracketing may have occurred among some of the counselors in this sample.

Although most counselors endorsed inclusion of religion and spirituality in multicultural counseling and coursework, 10-15% did not. Furthermore, 18% (the third cluster) endorsed neither multiculturalism nor religion. This group represents a new consideration for research, which typically has ignored the dispassionate among us. For that group, prior training was unrelated with commitment, a finding that differed markedly from the those with the other three clusters, which had correlations with prior training around $r = .30$. Whereas increased training typically increases commitment, that is not the case for everyone. Diversity training should account for that fact (Brooks et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2006) and prevent disengagement.

Participants' written responses about why topic integration should or should not occur provide additional considerations for scholars and counselors. Respondents in favor of topic integration called attention to the importance of religion and spirituality in individuals' lives and pointed out the many conceptual and experiential overlaps that make it virtually impossible to separate religion and spirituality from other multicultural considerations. Minimizing or excluding a controversial topic like religion from professional discourse because of conceptual conflicts would contradict the rationale typically invoked when affirming multiculturalism.

Respondents who expressed qualified support for topic integration were savvy to the points of disagreement and to the use of power. These participants did not want religion advocated as a moral system; counselors should not promote adherence to particular religious

and spiritual beliefs (Richards & Bergin, 2017). Respondents cited the need for increased respect and indicated that fears over differences should be overcome with additional training.

Respondents who opposed topic integration perceived conceptual dissimilarities rather than overlaps. They felt that the content areas are too distinct and warrant separate consideration. Most of those respondents were not opposed to religious and spiritual content, but they did not believe that multicultural counseling provides the optimal forum for addressing those topics. Rather, they felt that the content deserves its own coursework or discussion space.

Limitations of the Research

In considering the findings and interpretations of the survey data, several limitations must be acknowledged. Randomly selected survey respondents did not represent the beliefs of all college counselors. Individuals with strong opinions about the topics may have been more willing than others to complete the survey. Nevertheless, a 43% survey response rate reduced the probability of respondents holding extreme beliefs relative to non-respondents. Moreover, the data on the measures of religious commitment (RCI) and multicultural commitment (MCS) were normally distributed and did not over-represent extreme beliefs.

Another limitation of this research concerns its scope. This project purposefully asked and answered broad questions. Thus the data do not address specific questions that the field would like to address (e.g., Smith & Okech, 2016). We asked broad questions to first determine the feasibility of topic integration. If counselors preferred to address religion and spirituality separate from multiculturalism, those topics would likely not be meaningfully integrated in the profession at all. Although scholars call for additional attention to those topics (Adams et al., 2015; Cashwell & Bartley, 2014; Hage et al., 2006; Hull, Suarez, & Hartman, 2016; Magaldi-Dopman, 2014; Young et al., 2007), the reality is that publicly funded colleges and counseling

centers unaffiliated with a religious institution will not invest in those topics, given the other aspects of diversity that clamor for attention, time, and resources. Multiculturalism is already integral to our profession (Ratts et al., 2016), and no framework besides multiculturalism would or could inform the entire counseling profession about religious and spiritual diversity. As a hypothetical parallel, it seems unlikely that gender equity would have gained so much ground if feminism was perceived to be distinct and best separated from multicultural counseling and coursework. Thus this study first sought to explore the proverbial lie of the land so that others' future work can clear ground that was found to be ready for cultivation.

Implications for Counseling Practice and Professional Development

Overall, the results of this survey reinforce recommendations for religious and spiritual topics to be explicitly integrated in professional counseling (e.g., Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999; Hage et al., 2006; Magaldi-Dopman, 2014; Smith & Richards, 2005). In spite of the widely acknowledged concerns about religious proscriptions regarding sexuality (Smith & Okech, 2016; Whitman & Bidell, 2014) and other conduct, a counselor can openly speak of spiritual and religious diversity, just as issues of sexism, ableism, classism, and so forth have been normalized in professional discourse without fears of adverse interpersonal or workplace repercussions. Nevertheless, counselors practicing several decades ago could remind us that the then controversial issues of gender equity and so forth took time for the field to assimilate. Value conflicts can stir emotions and tensions, but repeated engagement can normalize discourse and lead to eventual integration with counseling practice. The following points could help to normalize discussions of religion and spirituality.

Participating in professional development. Previous research indicates that mental health professionals often feel unprepared to attend to clients' religious and spiritual issues

(Hage, 2006) and that counselors inadequately address issues of religion and spirituality (Young et al., 2007). To acquire relevant counseling competence (ASERVIC, 2009), counselors can seek professional development training. Hull and colleagues (2106) recommend experiential activities, including participation in spiritual gatherings, along with practical steps, such as developing spiritual referral networks and spiritual intervention toolboxes for clients. As noted by participants in this study, such training can be integrated with existing multicultural counseling models and conveyed in counselor education, where skills needed for handling sensitive topics about human diversity are already taught (e.g., Purgason et al., 2016).

Understanding the rationale for content integration. When learning about religious and spiritual issues, college counselors would benefit from understand the rationale for addressing those considerations. Multiple reasons exist. Research has consistently found that individuals' religiosity and spirituality are positively associated with their psychological well-being, identity development, crisis coping, social functioning, and life satisfaction (e.g., Aten, O'Grady, & Worthington, 2012; Richards & Bergin, 2017). Nine additional reasons for explicitly including religious and spiritual issues in multicultural counseling have been cited in the literature (Smith & Richards, 2005), and counselors in this study provided similar rationale.

Addressing client beliefs and experiences. College student clients who endorse religious and spiritual tenets prefer for those concepts to be included in counseling (Martinez, Smith, & Barlow, 2007), and religious clients have improved outcomes when counseling explicitly includes religious and spiritual considerations (Smith, Bartz, & Richards, 2007). Whether or not counselors share faith beliefs with a client, effective counseling adapts to the client's beliefs and experiences (ASERVIC, 2009; Aten et al., 2012; Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999; Ratts et al., 2016). Counseling aligned with client values improves client outcomes (Smith &

Trimble, 2016). For instance, clients' spiritual coping can be identified and reinforced, support from clients' religious networks can be fostered, and practices such as meditation, expressing gratitude, extending forgiveness, and prayer can be considered (Richards & Bergin, 2017).

Examples of how counselors can ethically include religious/spiritual practices in counseling have been provided in the literature (e.g., Martinez et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2007), and the fourteen competencies published by ASERVIC (2009) remain the foundation for ethical practice.

Speaking openly about content integration. When counselors hear an extreme assertion (for or against multiculturalism, religious tenets, or spiritual practices) by a passionate colleague on campus or online, they may falsely conclude that the field as a whole is conflicted and thus avoid entering the supposed fray. However, data from this survey suggest that ideational polarization does not characterize our discipline. So when we encounter intense reactions to religious bigotry, permissiveness without attention to consequences, or exclusionary accusations, we can understand the underlying motives and speak up about the broader contexts. Reasoned responses temper extreme positions. For instance, a reasoned approach could (a) identify underlying principles, (b) find common ground, such as in integrative models of well-being (Myers et al., 2000), and (c) replace finger-pointing and silencing with proven methods of inter-group and inter-cultural exchange (e.g., Kocet & Herlihy, 2014; Purgason et al., 2016).

Speaking aloud in favor of holism is assuredly better than the alternatives of silence or silencing. The segmentation of our society in popular media need not divide our campuses or our profession. It will take our best thinking and our most compassionate counseling skills to engage and remain engaged across divides on college campuses. Lest our profession lose its footing and adopt *us versus them* mentality and tactics, we can demonstrate multicultural competence (Ratts et al., 2016) by addressing proactively the ethical concerns and values conflicts of our time.

References

- Adams, C. M., Puig, A., Baggs, A., & Wolf, C. P. (2015). Integrating religion and spirituality into counselor education: Barriers and strategies. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 54*, 44-56.
- Albarracin, D., Johnson, B. T., & Zanna, M. P. (Eds.). (2014). *The handbook of attitudes*. New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- American Counseling Association. (2014). *Code of ethics*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Amer, M. M., & Bagasra, A. (2013). Psychological research with Muslim Americans in the age of Islamophobia: Trends, challenges, and recommendations. *American Psychologist, 68*, 134-144.
- Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (2009). *Competencies for addressing spiritual and religious issues in counseling*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Aten, J. D., O'Grady, K. A., & Worthington, E. L. (2012). *The psychology of religion and spirituality for clinicians: Using research in your practice*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Brooks, M., Kim, T., Moye, P., Oglesby, S., & Hargett, B. (2015). Multicultural training in CACREP counselor education programs: A survey. *International Journal of Social Science Studies, 3*(6), 1-8.
- Cashwell, C. S., & Bartley, J. L. (2014). Engaged spirituality: A heart for social justice. In M. Ratts & P. Pedersen (Eds.), *Counseling for multiculturalism and social justice: Integration, theory, and application* (pp. 275-288). Alexandria, VA: ACA.
- Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. (2016). *2016 CACREP Standards*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Cuyjet, M. J., Howard-Hamilton, M. F., & Cooper, D. L. (Eds.). (2012). *Multiculturalism on*

- campus: Theory, models, and practices for understanding diversity and creating inclusion*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62, 107-115.
- Fukuyama, M. A., & Sevig, T. D. (1999). *Integrating spirituality into multicultural counseling*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hage, S. M. (2006). A closer look at the role of spirituality in psychological training programs. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 37, 303-310.
- Hage, S., Hopson, A., Siegel, M., Payton, G., & DeFanti, E. (2006). Multicultural training in spirituality: An interdisciplinary review. *Counseling and Values*, 50, 217-234.
- Hull, C. E., Suarez, E. C., & Hartman, D. (2016). Developing spiritual competencies in counseling: A guide for supervisors. *Counseling and Values*, 61(1), 111-126.
- Kaplan, D. M., Tarvydas, V. M., & Gladding, S. T. (2014). 20/20: A vision for the future of counseling: The new consensus definition of counseling. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 92(3), 366-372.
- Kaufman, L., & Rousseeuw, P. J. (2009). *Finding groups in data: An introduction to cluster analysis*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Kocet, M. M., & Herlihy, B. J. (2014). Addressing value-based conflicts within the counseling relationship: decision-making model *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 92, 180-186.
- Magaldi-Dopman, D. (2014). An "afterthought": Counseling trainees' multicultural competence within the spiritual/religious domain. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 42(4), 194-204.

- Martinez, J. S., Smith, T. B., & Barlow, S. H. (2007). Spiritual interventions in psychotherapy: Evaluations by highly religious clients. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 63*(10), 943-960.
- Mooi, E. A., & Sarstedt, M. (2011). A concise guide to market research: The process, data, and methods using SPSS statistics. *International Journal of Market Research, 53*, 563-564.
- Myers, J. E., Sweeney, T. J., & Witmer, J. M. (2000). The wheel of wellness counseling for wellness: A holistic model for treatment planning. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 78*(3), 251-266.
- Pieterse, A. L., Evans, S. A., Risner-Butner, A., Collins, N. M., & Mason, L. B. (2009). Multicultural competence and social justice training in counseling psychology and counselor education: A review and analysis of a sample of multicultural course syllabi. *The Counseling Psychologist, 37*, 93-115.
- Purgason, L. L., Avent, J. R., Cashwell, C. S., Jordan, M. E., & Reese, R. F. (2016). Culturally relevant advising: Applying relational-cultural theory in counselor education. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 94*(4), 429-436.
- Ratts, M. J., Singh, A. A., Nassar-McMillan, S., Butler, S. K., & McCullough, J. R. (2016). Multicultural and social justice counseling competencies: Guidelines for the counseling profession. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 44*(1), 28-48.
- Richards, P. S., & Bergin, A. E. (2017). *A spiritual strategy for counseling and psychotherapy* (3rd ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Schlosser, L. Z., Ali, S. R., Ackerman, S. R., & Dewey, J. J. H. (2009). Religion, ethnicity, culture, way of life: Jews, Muslims, and multicultural counseling. *Counseling and Values, 54*, 48-64.
- Slife, B.D. & O'Grady, K.A., & Kosits, R.D. (Eds.) (2017). *The hidden worldviews of*

- psychology's theory, research, and practice*. New York: Routledge.
- Smith, L. C., & Okech, J. E. A. (2016). Ethical issues raised by CACREP accreditation of programs within institutions that disaffirm or disallow diverse sexual orientations. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 94(3), 252-264.
- Smith, T. B., Bartz, J., & Richards, P. S. (2007). Outcomes of religious and spiritual adaptations to psychotherapy: A meta-analytic review. *Psychotherapy Research*, 17, 643-655.
- Smith, T. B., & Richards, P. S. (2005). The integration of spiritual and religious issues in racial-cultural psychology and counseling. In R. T. Carter (Ed.), *Handbook of racial-cultural psychology and counseling: Theory & research* (Vol. 1, pp. 132-160). New York: Wiley.
- Smith, T. B., & Trimble, J. E. (2016). *Foundations of multicultural psychology: Research to inform effective practice*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Sue, D. W., & Sue, D. (2016). *Counseling the culturally diverse: Theory and practice*. Wiley.
- Whitman, J. S., & Bidell, M. P. (2014). Affirmative lesbian, gay, and bisexual counselor education and religious beliefs: How do we bridge the gap? *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 92(2), 162-169.
- Witmer, J. M., & Sweeney, T. J. (1992). A holistic model for wellness and prevention over the life span. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 71(2), 140-148.
- Worthington, E. L., Jr., Wade, N. E., Hight, T. L., Ripley, J. S., McCullough, M. E., & Berry, J. W. (2003). The Religious Commitment Inventory-10: Development, refinement, and validation of a brief scale for research and counseling. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 50, 84-96.
- Young, J. S., Wiggins-Frame, M., & Cashwell, C. S. (2007). Spirituality and counselor competence: A national survey of American Counseling Association members. *Journal*

of Counseling and Development, 85, 47-85.

Table 1

Counselors' Opinions about Integrating Religious and Spiritual Issues with Multicultural Counseling.

Questions	Mean	SD
General Integration of Content		
1. Talking about religion/spirituality is not appropriate in public universities and clinics.	1.59	1.01
2. Religion and spirituality are multicultural issues.	4.13	1.17
3. Spiritual/religious teachings are dismissive of cultural differences.	2.64	1.04
4. Spirituality/religion and multiculturalism are completely separate topics.	2.30	1.27
5. Spiritual and religious interventions should be considered in the practice of multicultural counseling.	3.98	1.02
6. The aims of many religious groups are in harmony with the aims of multiculturalism.	2.93	1.11
Integration of Religious and Spiritual Issues in Counselor Education		
7. Spiritual and religious issues are not adequately addressed in graduate training.	4.01	1.02
8. Graduate training programs should include training in spiritual and religious issues.	3.93	1.17
9. Spiritual and religious issues should be taught in multicultural courses.	3.86	1.13
10. Multicultural training would be too "watered-down" if it included religion/spirituality issues.	2.19	1.14

Note. Responses based on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

Table 2

Correlations of Counselors' Prior Training and Personal Commitments with Opinions about the Integration of Religious and Spiritual Issues with Multiculturalism.

Survey item	MCS	RCI	MC training	R/S training
1	.02	-.17*	.01	-.09
2	.16*	.08	.06	.11
3	.13	-.20**	.08	-.01
4	-.05	-.11	-.02	-.10
5	.05	.21**	.00	.20**
6	-.10	.33**	-.08	.12
7	-.04	.18**	-.02	.07
8	-.01	.22**	-.03	.22**
9	.11	.15*	.07	.19**
10	-.09	-.14*	-.05	-.24**
MCS		.03	.56**	.16*
RCI			.09	.56**
MC training				.29**

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. MCS = Multicultural Commitment Scale (higher scores reflect stronger commitment to multiculturalism). RCI = Religious Commitment Inventory (higher scores reflect stronger commitment to religion). MC Training = amount of prior training in multicultural counseling. R/S Training = amount of prior training in religious and spiritual issues relevant to counseling.