Issues and Insights

Recognizing Spirituality as an Important Factor in Counselor Supervision

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Despite the recent, growing emphasis on spirituality in the counseling and psychotherapy literature, information regarding spirituality and the supervision process is limited. The purpose of this article is to help supervisors and supervisees enhance awareness of spiritual values in supervision. Factors such as counselor competency, conceptualization of spirituality, cross-cultural awareness, and the similarity of clients' and counselors' values form a foundation for developing effective intervention and supervision strategies. A series of research questions is proposed to spur a program of empirical exploration.

There has been an increasing acknowledgment that spirituality is an important aspect of client diversity in counseling and psychotherapy (Bergin, 1980; Burke et al., 1999; Hodge, 2001; Holt, Houg, & Romano, 1999; Jones & Butman, 1991; Richards & Bergin, 2000; Worthington, 1993). Despite the emphasis on spirituality in the counseling and psychotherapy literature, scholars report finding little emphasis in the counselor supervision literature regarding spirituality and the supervision process (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998). Because the counselor supervision literature addresses a wide variety of client, counselor, and supervisor issues (e.g., Watkins, 1997), it is puzzling and unfortunate that scant attention has been given to the issue of spirituality. How is it possible to educate counselors to competently and effectively address spiritual issues in the counseling process if spiritual issues are not addressed in the counselor supervision process?

Issues of Spirituality in Supervision

The following vignettes provide a starting point for the consideration of issues of spirituality in supervision.

Situation 1

A 19-year-old college woman came to counseling for help in deciding whether or not to terminate her pregnancy, which was just entering the second trimester. She had a boyfriend who was interested in supporting her in caring

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for the child, but he did not want to commit to marriage. The client and her boyfriend were the only two people who knew of the pregnancy. The client struggled with guilt over the pregnancy and had not told her parents because of her concerns about the family's involvement in church. The client clearly indicated that she believed abortion was morally wrong, and she did not want to damage her relationship with God. She had not been sleeping or eating well and was struggling to keep up with basic school assignments. She was in emotional and spiritual turmoil and did not want to continue with the pregnancy because of the foreseeable strain on relationships in her family and the negative impact on her schoolwork.

Situation 2

A client with whom your supervisee has been working for several months has shown significant improvement in his ability to cope with work-related stress. He has frequently described how he felt supported by several friends with whom he shared similar spiritual beliefs. The client asked your supervisee's opinion about the role of spirituality in the resolution of his problem. Even though the client had openly described the spiritual discussions he has had with his friends, the counselor had not offered commentary related to the issue of the client's spirituality. Because the client wanted to understand the reasons for his improvement and to synthesize his improvement with his spirituality, he wanted to understand the counselor's insight.

Situation 3

Your supervisee is currently on practicum assignment. She has recently read, on her own initiative, several articles on the topic of spirituality and the impact of prayer in promoting well-being (e.g., Dossey, 1996; Moon, Bailey, Kwansy, & Willis, 1993; Watts, 2000). While listening to an audiotape of a counseling session, you hear the trainee spend part of the most recent counseling session praying with the client. On the tape, the client indicated intense gratitude for the counselor's care and concern. Although the client seems to have benefited from the counselor's actions, you feel uneasy about the situation.

Essential Factors in Counseling and Supervision

The purpose of this article is to help supervisors and supervisees enhance their awareness of spiritual values in the supervision process and to promote the integration of spirituality with the counselor supervision process in order to improve the competency of counselors in dealing with this aspect of client diversity. Consideration of the following factors related to counseling and psychotherapy can enhance the preparation of counselors and supervisors to deal with situations similar to the ones previously outlined. We hope to improve the welfare of clients by enhancing the counselor supervision process and by developing a research-based literature to increase dialogue and discussion among counselor trainers, supervisors, and students. All of these benefits will accrue from ongoing empirical study and clinical involvement in spirituality issues.

Counselor Competencies

Counselors and other mental health professionals are expected to be competent in their dealings with clients and to ensure clients' well-being at all times (American Counseling Association, 1995; American Psychological Association, 1992). If the public is to be served well and to be protected from potential harm from individuals providing inadequate services, competence must be given primary consideration.

Mental health professionals are invested in ensuring that the public is served well. Organizations such as the American Psychiatric Association (1995) and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (Burke et al., 1999) invest significant ongoing effort in publishing and enforcing codes of ethics and practice guidelines, with emphasis on the recognition of and appropriate accommodation of human diversity and respect for clients' rights. In addition, there has been a particular emphasis on directing training programs to ensure that graduates have attained adequate skills to competently deal with clients' spirituality and religious values (American Psychiatric Association, 1995; Burke et al., 1999; cf. Richards & Bergin, 2000). Therefore, the counselor's main responsibility is to provide the utmost respect for the client and to do no harm. This respect extends to all aspects of the person, including his or her religious and spiritual values.

Except for institutions that are church affiliated or programs that are of an explicitly religious nature, counselor education programs do not typically offer courses that address spirituality (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1997; Grimm, 1994). Kelly (1994) surveyed heads of 525 counselor training programs in the United States and substantiated that most programs did not offer courses that addressed spirituality. It can be argued that because spirituality and religion are in the private domain, counseling and counselor education have no business intruding into this area of client functioning; however, Fukuyama and Sevig outlined a course designed to explore spiritual issues that occur during counseling. Within an "individual-differences and multicultural" framework, topics of the course include development of counselor competencies, appropriate client and counselor relationship boundaries, and counselor self-awareness (cf. Bishop, 1995; Lemire, 1999; Pate & Bondi, 1992).

Spirituality

In addition to supervised experience, competence is enhanced, in part, through knowledge and understanding. Having a basic understanding of spirituality is needed to form a foundation for gaining skills in the supervision process. Counselors and supervisors need to understand how religion and/or spirituality are significant components of being human (Burke et al., 1999; Genia, 2000; Helminiak, 2001; Hodge, 2001; Holt et al., 1999; Thorsen, 1999). At this point, it should be pointed out that although religion and spirituality are interrelated, they are not synonymous (Burke & Miranti, 1996; Helminiak, 2001). Since the "beginning of time," those things that we consider transcendent have affected the way we view the universe and the way we give credit for the out-

comes of our actions (Stanard, Sandhu, & Painter, 2000). Spirituality is not only a significant and integral part of human experience, but spirituality is also an integral part of human development (Worthington, 1989).

> Spirituality may be defined as: the animating force in life, represented by such images as 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 is also described as a capacity and a 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. (Burke & Miranti, 1996, p. 2)

Other authors (e.g., Burke et al., 1999; Fukuyama & Sevig, 1997; Grimm, 1994; Helminiak, 2001; Pate & Bondi, 1992; Stanard et al., 2000) have given further elucidations of spirituality.

Religion, on the other hand, has been defined as the logical outcome and organized attempt to give a framework to the sense of awe for the transcendent (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1997; Helminiak, 2001; Pate & Bondi, 1992). Religion also tells its adherents what life is about and how one is to live that life (Helminiak, 2001). Both religion and spirituality can be found across cultures and are expressed in dynamic and diverse ways (Bishop, 1995; Worthington, 1988).

For counselors, it is not always easy to approach clients' concerns regarding spirituality or religion. Historically, counselors have been encouraged to focus on a secular approach to counseling that emphasized a negativistic bias regarding the influence of spirituality or religious values on psychological well-being (cf. Ellis, 1980; Slife, Hope, & Nebeker, 1999). Zinnbauer and Pargament (2000) indicated that counselors tended to take a detached view of the spirituality of clients. This means that in a counseling session, counselors may avoid issues that deal with spirituality or religious practice. Nevertheless, Koenig and Pritchett (1998) indicated that addressing such issues with clients had several benefits by helping counselors in the following ways:

> (a) better understand the [client's] psychological conflict, (b) design interventions that are more acceptable to the [client] and congruent with their worldview (and thus more likely to be complied with), (c) identify healthy religious resources that may bring comfort and support, (d) recognize psychological roadblocks that prevent the [client] from utilizing potentially powerful spiritual resources, and (e) strengthen the therapeutic relationship (because this demonstrates sensitivity to an area that may be very meaningful to the [client]). (p. 327)

Information regarding the impact of the similarity of client and counselor values, as well as cross-cultural elements in the counseling process, can further help counselors and supervisors appreciate the importance of client spirituality.

Value Similarity

A noble goal of counseling is to promote client welfare (American Counseling Association, 1995), and the evidence is clear that counseling and psychotherapy help clients to improve (cf. Bergin & Garfield, 1994). Although counselors and clients may generally share the goal of improvement, there

may be sharp differences in opinion about what constitutes significant improve-ment and about what factors contribute to improvement. There is evidence that individuals in the current culture in the United States consider spirituality and/or religion to be important and helpful parts of their daily lives (Alferi, Culver, Carver, Arena, & Antoni, 1999; Haight, 1998; Richards & Bergin, 2000). There is a growing amount of literature that supports the positive impact of spirituality or religious practices on the well-being of individuals in a variety of circumstances (Gartner, 1996; Propst, Ostrom, Watkins, Dean, & Mashburn, 1992; Richards & Bergin, 2000; Shapiro et al., 2001; Thorsen, 1999). Alferi et al. noted that individuals who possess a sense of connection to a religious community acquire a support system that enables them to look beyond present circumstances and to focus on healthier aspects of life. In summary, the evi-dence suggests that progress toward mental well-being and emotional health is enhanced by a positive focus on spirituality.

There are indications that there are limited collaboration and complementarity between spiritually based caregivers and professional counselors (Frevert & Miranda, 1998; Garzon & Tan, 1992; Lemacher, 1997; McMinn, Chaddock, Edwards, Lim, & Campbell, 1998; Richards & Bergin, 2000; Thorsen, 1999). Several sources (e.g., Bergin, 1991; Pate & Bondi, 1992; Worthington, 1989) have addressed the ethical issues that are involved in the exclusion of spirituality from coun-seling and psychotherapy and have indicated the importance of dialogue regarding ethical issues—a discussion that is beyond the scope of this article. Other literature on ethical issues includes topics such as dual roles (Richards & Potts, 1995) and the risks of inadvertent insensitivity by counselors to the religious concerns of clients (Hinterkopf, 1994). Counselors may overlook viable resources in spirituality and/or religion and need an understanding of when a client's personal beliefs reflect unhealthy spirituality or unhealthy or dys-functional family systems (Heise & Steitz, 1991).

In spite of the growing amount of literature on spirituality, counseling professionals and supervisors continue to struggle with the acceptance of spirituality as a significant part of the counseling process (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2000). This discrepancy between counseling professionals and the clients they serve perpetuates barriers, particularly because clients may be suspicious of what they may consider an unfriendly environment that will discount, negate, or conflict with their religious values or spiritual worldview (Miller, 1995). To further illustrate the point about barriers, con-sider the perspective of Worthington (1986) regarding the position of clients who espouse conservative Christian perspectives on spirituality. These po-tential clients may be reluctant to receive intervention from "secular thera-pists" because they fear therapists may (a) neglect religious concerns; (b) deal with religious beliefs and events as pathological or psychological; (c) fail to discern religious language and ideas; (d) presume that religious clients share nonreligious cultural norms; (e) promote therapeutic conduct that contra-dicts clients' own particular sense of morals; or (f) make presumptions, explanations, and suggestions that clients' account of revelation is not valid epistemology. Rather than emphasize the apparent disparity between coun-

seling professionals and clients, it is important to focus on ways to shrink the gap. The development of counselor awareness and of the ability to deal with the cultural diversity of clients has been an area where counselors have gained significant ability to encourage and promote the welfare of clients. Issues of culture are considered next.

Culture

A significant part of ensuring the competence of counselors is the development of counselor skills in dealing with issues of culture. Bergin and Jensen (1990) stated, "every therapeutic relationship is a cross-cultural experience" (p. 3). There must be some similarity of values and other aspects between the client and the counselor for counseling to be effective. When clients perceive a counselor to be similar to themselves, they have a more positive counseling experience, and the counseling process is enhanced (Ramos-Sanchez, Atkinson, & Fraga, 1999). In studies with members of minority ethnic and cultural groups, it has been demonstrated that these clients preferred someone who was like them, whether in race, language, religion, or other aspects (Abreu, 2000). Being "familiar with" and having similar values allow both the client and the counselor to see eye to eye and to reach a level of understanding that might otherwise not be reached. We argue that in counseling supervision, just as in counseling psychotherapy, there must be, at the very least, similarity in understanding and openness to spirituality in order for the supervision process to be effective.

Much of the literature that addresses client–counselor similarity in the context of ethnicity, race, and culture could also be applied to the issues of religion or spirituality (Bishop, 1995; Garzon & Tan, 1992). It is our contention that spirituality is another area of individual difference, diversity, and multiculturalism that needs to be addressed as such (Richards & Bergin, 2000; Stanard et al., 2000). An individual's experience of spirituality or religious practice is intricately intertwined with ethnic and cultural experience as well as with geographic location (Frevert & Miranda, 1998) and, in some cases, with political influences.

In the past decade, cross-cultural aspects of counseling have received increasing attention (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2000). Whether it is racism in counseling, concerns particular to a race or cultural group, or special needs of clients who are members of minority groups in the United States, there is a significant emphasis on the notion that counselors must be able to work competently and genuinely with clients who are culturally and racially different from themselves (American Counseling Association, 1995; cf. Behring & Ingraham, 1998). Given that spirituality and religion are aspects of diversity and multiculturalism, these issues become relevant to the counseling process, even for counselors who are hesitant to address them. In a related way, it becomes necessary for counselors and supervisors to address spirituality in the supervision process. The next section presents information available in the current literature regarding the inclusion of spirituality in the supervi-

sion process. Despite the development of some attempts to address spirituality in counselor training, the counselor supervision literature has remained virtually silent on this issue, providing little guidance in advancing student sensitivity to spirituality through the supervision process. This situation, therefore, presents a difficult dilemma, in that although counselors are expected to develop and demonstrate competence in dealing with spiritual values in counseling, there is no clear guidance or training structure available in the supervision process to help counselors gain the requisite competence.

Supervision Literature

The principal aim of this article is to promote the integration of spirituality into the counselor supervision process. In their 354-page textbook on clinical supervision, Bernard and Goodyear (1998) devoted three paragraphs to the topic of spirituality. They stated, "We were unable to identify a single published work devoted to spirituality as a legitimate supervision issue" (p. 38). They went on to state, "we simply assert the importance of spirituality in the development of the trainee, as a matter of individual difference and as a cultural matter . . . spirituality must be included in the supervision agenda" (p. 38). Although we agree with the assertion made by Bernard and Goodyear, we wanted to independently examine the supervision literature for information on spirituality.

Even though there is literature on spirituality in the general mental health area, Souza (1999) indicated that there were fewer publications in counselor education on the topic of spirituality than there were in several other related disciplines, including psychology, social work, teacher education, and nursing (e.g., Dudley & Helfgott, 1990; Hall, 1998; McShery & Draper, 1997; Rolph, 1991). We searched the literature in the current ERIC and PsycINFO databases using the key word *supervision* in combination with the following key words: *spirituality, religiosity, values* and *spirituality, multicultural* and *religiosity,* and *diversity* and *spirituality.* We found that numerous studies (e.g., Gange-Fling & McCarthy, 1996; Lemoncelli & Carey, 1996; Parker, Horton, & Watson, 1997) have examined spirituality in the clinical aspect of counseling. We also concur with Souza (1999) that there are few studies that address spirituality or religion specifically in counseling education. One study (Kelly, 1994) that assessed how and to what extent counselor education programs dealt with religious and spiritual issues in the preparation of counselors indicated that attention to client's and supervisee's spirituality during supervision was low. The findings of Kelly's study revealed an apparent gap between the current burgeoning literature on spirituality in counseling and psychotherapy and the actual consideration of these issues in the counselor training process. We failed to find other articles, empirical or nonempirical, that examined the interface of supervision and spirituality.

A second strategy we used in sifting through the literature was consulting a variety of recently published major textbooks on the topic of spirituality in counseling and psychotherapy (Koenig, 1998; Richards & Bergin, 1997, 2000; Shafranske, 1996; Worthington, 1993). We searched these textbooks for information on supervision by consulting the tables of contents and indexes. Two

brief statements in the introductory chapter of Richards and Bergin's (2000, p. 19) textbook recommended seeking supervision as a way of gaining competence in the area of religion and spiritual diversity when dealing with clients. We found no additional information in the other texts.

A third strategy that we used was to search textbooks on supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998; Borders & Leddick, 1987; Bradley & Ladany, 2001; Hess, 1980; Powell, 1993; Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987; Watkins, 1997) for references to spirituality or the other related terms that we had used in our searches of the journal databases. We found the previously mentioned information from Bernard and Goodyear and an additional, tangential comment from Rodenhauser (1997), who included religion in a list of factors that "usually require explicit attention in the supervisory and therapeutic relationships" (p. 537). The other sources yielded no significant information. We were left to ponder again the question: How is it possible to train counselors to competently and effectively address spiritual issues in the counseling process if these issues are not addressed in the counselor supervision process?

Implications for Research and Supervision Practice

When contemplating the challenges presented in the vignettes at the beginning of this article, several issues are apparent. First, how does the counselor effectively attend to the spiritual issues presented by the client in the immediate situation? Second, how does the counselor present these issues in the supervision process? Third, how does the supervisor respond to these issues in the supervision process? We recognize that factors such as counselor competency, culture, one's conceptualization of spirituality, and the similarity of clients' and counselors' values form a foundation for developing effective intervention and supervision strategies.

Furthermore, there are specific questions that arise that are beyond the scope of this initial inquiry. For example, are the implications the same for students who are in either a practicum or internship as they are for graduates who are working under supervision requirements for licensure? A practicum/internship student obviously does not have the same depth of experience as a licensure-eligible counselor, and the counselor may have gained greater insight. Another question may be, Do counselors who are currently working as supervisors have any training in spirituality? For the most part, counselor training programs do not offer a spirituality component unless the programs are religiously affiliated (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1997; Grimm, 1994). Although there are not standardized practices regarding the inclusion of spirituality as part of the supervision process, an individual supervisor may have an interest in spiritual issues even if he or she has not had specific training; however, the lack of standardization means that each situation will be different and that the supervisee will not know what to expect.

A follow-up question would be, How could current supervisors be trained in spirituality issues? Various approaches, such as continuing education credits, workshops, and agencies' policies, might be suggested. There is no easy way to

ensure that this training in spirituality issues would occur; yet, these approaches are some that may satisfy the need for supervisor training in spirituality and religious issues. Finally, it seems that some venues may seem more of a natural fit than others for the inclusion of spirituality in the supervisory process. Specifically, would the inclusion of spirituality be unfit where it may actually be used (e.g., public schools)? One thing to remember is that often collaboration is the best policy. Supervisors in settings where they feel that they, or their supervisees, are somewhat restricted or limited in their ability to address spiritual issues can seek the collaboration of an individual whom the client sees as a spiritual authority. The client's rights will be upheld if all possible avenues are used to enhance his or her well-being and personal development.

The questions presented in this article are valid, and they require more than pro forma answers. As the counseling profession evolves and continues to develop, it can more fully address all of the needs of a person. Spirituality and religion are areas where there is still uncertainty; yet much progress can occur and should occur in respect to the issues of spirituality and religion. Far from shrinking from this challenge, there should be an open inquiry into what progress means for counseling and supervision. The skills needed to become more holistic professionals, both as counselors and supervisors, are important.

The development of counselor competency is enhanced through the acquisition of specific skills. Skill development is critical because spirituality is a central part of the human experience that pervades virtually all aspects of psychological and emotional functioning (Gartner, 1996; Thorsen, 1999). Bishop (1995) offered several suggestions aimed at helping counselors become more competent in addressing spiritual issues in the counseling process: (a) help the client to feel that his or her religious values are an accepted part of the therapeutic process; (b) view religious values as part of the solution to the client's problem, not just as part of the problem; (c) become more educated about cultures, religious values, beliefs, and practices and strive to understand how these issues are integrated with psychological theory and counseling practice; (d) become involved with community or professional activities that promote interactions with persons from diverse cultures who have a variety of religious values; (e) explore and evaluate personal religious values; (f) be aware of what counselor resistance toward or cautious maneuvering around religious issues may convey to clients; and (g) develop a simple straightforward language to use in communicating with clients about religious values. Richards and Bergin (1997) and Burke et al. (1999) offered additional recommendations for developing counselor competence.

Supervisors may wish to consider several options for responding to the vignettes presented at the beginning of this article. In dealing with Situation 1, it may be useful to discuss with the counselor her or his beliefs about abortion in terms of the moral implications as well as in terms of the client's emotional functioning and the relationship she has with her boyfriend. The supervisor may wish to review with the counselor the community-based resources (e.g., crisis pregnancy counseling, adoption, and medical clinics) that can be useful to the client. It is also important to direct the counselor to

explore past personal experiences that may contribute to countertransference into the counseling session. Furthermore, it may be important for the supervisor to seek consultation regarding countertransference issues.

In supporting the counselor in Situation 2, the supervisor may want to role-play with the supervisee a variety of responses for use in the session. The counselor likely needs to engage in self-exploration regarding a personal position on the issue of the role of spirituality in mental health. It may be useful to direct the counselor to resources such as Bishop (1995), McMinn et al. (1998), Richards and Bergin (2000), and Worthington (1993) and encourage dialogue in supervision about whether spirituality should be integrated and synthesized into or compartmentalized and separated from the counseling process.

In Situation 3, it is important for the supervisor to explore why feelings of unease were experienced. It may be necessary for the supervisor to review information with the counselor about policies and procedures as they relate to particular agency requirements and limitations for including spiritual practices, such as prayer, in the counseling session. Because prayer, as an intervention, seems to have been beneficial for the client, it seems unreasonable to summarily prohibit it; rather, it seems important to establish clear expectations for the counselor to discuss such interventions with his or her supervisor prior to their implementation in session, thus helping to assure the supervisor that the counselor can competently use the desired intervention.

To strengthen a foundation for developing effective supervision strategies, we are calling for an infusion of spirituality into the supervision process. Regarding the application of these ideas to supervision, we urge counselors, trainees, and supervisors to (a) engage in dialogue regarding the nature of spirituality, its definition, and its relevance to counseling and particularly to supervision; (b) spend regular time in self-examination and contemplation regarding personal experiences in spiritual matters; and (c) develop specific scientific bases for the inclusion of spirituality in the supervision process. This final area includes at least two subcomponents. First, it is essential to expand existing models of supervision to include a place for spirituality as it relates to the client, supervisee, and supervisor. Second, it is necessary to derive specific hypotheses from these models and put the hypotheses to empirical test.

These efforts could be aided by the development of a series of research questions that are based on theoretical as well as applied concerns. Following are examples of these types of questions:

1. How does the similarity of supervisors' and supervisees' spiritual values affect the supervision process?
2. How does the supervisor's level of comfort with spirituality affect the supervision process?
3. How does the supervisee's level of comfort with spirituality affect the supervision process?
4. How do different spiritual traditions affect the supervision process?
5. Does the impact on supervision differ depending on one's faith tradition (e.g., Buddhist, Christian, Islamic)?

6. What is the impact of the similarity of values (as seen in common themes such as hope, charity, or love) across faith traditions in the supervision process?
7. Is there a difference in the supervision process when the supervisor and supervisee have different faith traditions?

We are in the process of developing additional questions and scrutinizing them empirically. Our desire is that others who are interested in enhancing the competence of counselors through the supervision process will consider ways to make contributions to the discovery of new knowledge regarding spirituality and supervision.

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