Religion and spirituality in counseling: a multicultural perspective

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Religion and spirituality in counseling: a multicultural perspective

Abstract
As the counseling profession moves into the 21st Century a greater emphasis is being placed on multicultural and spiritual issues. It is difficult to see how the two entities can be separated. When counselors ignore that a client is Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, or Christian with the unspoken assumption that religion is irrelevant to their issues, this may jeopardize the forming of an effective therapeutic relationship (Burke, et al., 1999). Knowledge of religion and spiritual beliefs of ethnic groups can help professionals provide care that is culturally specific and sensitive to the beliefs of the individual (Bibbins, 2000).
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As the counseling profession moves into the 21st Century a greater emphasis is being placed on multicultural and spiritual issues. It is difficult to see how the two entities can be separated. When counselors ignore that a client is Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, or Christian with the unspoken assumption that religion is irrelevant to their issues, this may jeopardize the forming of an effective therapeutic relationship (Burke, et al., 1999). Knowledge of religion and spiritual beliefs of ethnic groups can help professionals provide care that is culturally specific and sensitive to the beliefs of the individual (Bibbins, 2000).

Philosophers and psychologists have struggled for centuries to define self, psyche, mind, soul, spirit, and its relationship, if any, to the body. Are they one? Are they separated? What are the spiritual aspects of a human being? Are they important to the process of achieving a fully functioning self? Study after study has suggested that a relationship does exist between the strength of one's spirituality and one's overall health and wellness (Bibbins, 2000). Furthermore, recent medical studies suggest that faith, prayer, and spiritual rituals can actually strengthen health and healing by triggering emotions that influence the immune and cardiovascular system (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999).

Neglecting an individual’s religious and/or spiritual beliefs leaves them less than whole. To do so ignores those precious aspects that make up the essence of human nature and personality, which, in combination with behavioral and genetic attributes, contribute to an individual’s real self. Karen Horney (1950) offered insight when she said, “I speak now of the real self as that central inner force, common to all human beings and yet unique in each, which is the deep source of growth. Growth, as presented here, is referred to
as that of free, healthy development in accordance with the potential of one's
generic and individual nature” (p. 17). Ignoring religion and spirituality in the
counseling setting is to overlook an important resource for sustaining a healthy
balanced life.

The need to include spiritual life in treatment and therapy is beginning to
be recognized by the mental health profession (Kornfield, 1993). Corey
(1996), emphasized this point:

From my perspective, spirituality entails the belief in a higher power
than ourselves, and it involves an attempt to align our life toward this
higher power. Whatever one’s particular view of spirituality, it is a
force that can help the individual make sense of the universe and to
find a purpose (purposes) for living. For some, spirituality entails
embracing a religion, which can have many different meanings.
Others value spirituality, yet do not have any ties to a formal
religion. There are many paths toward fulfilling spiritual needs, and
it is not the therapist’s task to prescribe any particular pathway.
However it is the therapists’ responsibility to be aware that
spirituality is a significant force for many of their clients. It is
especially important to pursue spiritual concerns if the client indicates
them. Therapists inquire about their clients’ general physical health
and their attitudes and practices about their physical health. In a like
manner, it is in the realm of duty for therapists to inquire about their
clients’ values, beliefs, and the sources from which they have
attempted to find meaning in life. (p. 451-452)
The counseling profession should begin to place an emphasis on integrating spiritual and religious beliefs into the therapeutic practice (Corey, 1996). However, at present, most counselor education programs give cursory attention at best, to the subject of spirituality (Burke, 1998). This paper will explore changes and current trends regarding the inclusion of religion and spirituality in the training of counselors. A cultural overview of the major world religions and spirituality will be presented to provide a historical background in understanding the role of religious and spiritual beliefs as a source of strength in the life of people since ancient times. Included is a review of recent literature by professionals in the field of mental health which seems to support the inclusion of religion and spirituality as a means to care for the whole individual.

Changes and Current Trends in Counselor Education

Until recently little, if any, attention was given to religion or spirituality in the education of counselors. This was thought to be the domain of priests, ministers, rabbis, and other spiritual leaders. Religion and spiritual issues were most often being left out of the therapy room, either for fear of crossing the boundary or, more likely, the lack of knowledge. Burke, et, al. (1999) shared, “as a new and evolving profession, counseling has been inclined to conform to and draw from the ideologies of current intellectual giants and established professions, even if these ideologies undervalue the spiritual dimension of human life that counselors know to be important” (p. 251).

Arredondo and D’Andrea (2000) addressed this very issue as they offered several multicultural resolutions for the new millennium for consideration by the American Counseling Association Governing Counsel.
Their fifth resolution stated:

Fifth, it is hoped that counselors will demonstrate a greater resolve in communicating an increased sensitivity, understanding, and respect for the ways in which clients' religious/spiritual identity influences their lives. Although the fields of counseling and psychology have historically avoided addressing this aspect of clients' lives in the past it will be increasingly important to do so when working with clients from diverse ethnic and racial groups whose notions of mental health and personal well-being are deeply embedded in their religious and spiritual beliefs and traditions. (p. 29)

Fortunately, as we move into the 21st Century, educators are beginning to realize the importance of training future counselors in religious and spiritual issues. Clearly, if counselors are to meet the challenge of addressing the role of religion and spirituality in counseling, they not only need training in this area in both their coursework and in their field experiences but also need inspiration and leadership from their teachers (Corey 1996).

There is increasing evidence of counselors' need to be knowledgeable and competent in the area of religion and spirituality in counseling. A session on infusing the spiritual dimensions into the CACREP core curriculum was held at the Association for Counselor Educator and Supervision (ACES) October 1996 Winter Conference in Portland. The session was attended by approximately 35 counselor educators and supervisors. The CACREP standards were revised with the intent of incorporating religious and spiritual competencies and were scheduled to become effective January 1, 2000 (Miller
in 1999). The competencies are as follows:

In order to be competent to help clients address the spiritual dimension of their lives, a counselor needs to be able to: 1) explain the relationship between religion and spirituality, including similarities and differences, 2) describe religious and spiritual beliefs and practices in a cultural context, 3) engage in self-exploration of his/her religious and spiritual beliefs in order to increase sensitivity, understanding and acceptance of his/her belief system, 4) describe one’s religious and/or spiritual belief system and explain various models of religious/spiritual development across the lifespan, 5) demonstrate sensitivity to and acceptance of a variety of religious and/or spiritual expressions in the client’s communication, 6) identify the limits of one’s understanding of a client’s spiritual expression, and demonstrate appropriate referral skills and general possible referral sources, 7) assess the relevance of the spiritual domains in the client’s therapeutic issues, 8) be sensitive to and respectful of the spiritual themes in the counseling process as befits each client’s expressed preference, and 9) use a client’s spiritual beliefs in the pursuit of the client’s therapeutic goals as befits the client’s expressed preference (Burke, 1998, p. 2, as cited in Miller, 1999).

The above would indicate that, at the very least, a general understanding of the various religious, ritual, and spiritual practices from different world views would be necessary. Gaining knowledge and information related to religious and spiritual views of others would decrease concerns in discussing such issues when they arise in the counseling setting. An overview of the
major world religions and spirituality will provide both historical and cultural background to understand the professional movement to include religion and spirituality in counselor education.

Cultural Overview of Major Religions

The major religions of the world are Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, all of which are represented in the United States. The cultural perspectives of these major religions, over time, have diffused throughout the world. This diffusion has created fragmentation and divisions within the major groups although the original tenets, for the most part, remain the same (Jordan & Rowntree, 1990).

Jordan and Rowntree (1990) provided an excellent overview of the world religions and described two major categories of religion, both of which are further divided into various groups, sects, and denominations. These are universalizing religions, that actively seek new members with the goal of conversion of all humankind, and ethnic religions, each of which is identified with some particular ethnic or tribal group and do not seek converts. Universalizing religions grow out of ethnic religions-the evolution of Christianity from its parent Judaism is the primary example.

Christianity, a monotheistic religion (worship of only one God), is the largest universalizing religion, both in area and number. Over the centuries Christianity has diffused throughout the world. The single greatest division is between Eastern and Western Christianity, each of which is vastly divided further. Eastern Orthodoxy is found in areas such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Kurdistan, Irídá, Greece, Russia, and Serbia.
Western Christianity has also splintered, most notably in the Protestant breakaway from the Roman Catholic Church in the 1400s and 1500s. Since that time the Roman Catholic Church has remained strongly unified, but Protestantism, from its beginnings, tended to divide into a rich array of sects. These splits have effected not only denominational traits and religious ideology, but intensity of commitment as well, which reflects the variable cultural importance of religion.

Islam is another great monotheistic, universalizing faith, that claims as many as perhaps 820 million followers. It is centered mainly in the great desert belt of Asia and Northern Africa, but extends as far east as Indonesia and the Philippines. Although not as severely fragmented as Christianity, Islam too has split into two major sects. The Shiite Muslims form the majority in Iran, Iraq, and Bahrain, with substantial groups in Afghanistan, Pakistan, North Yemen, Kuwait, Turkey, India, and Lebanon. Shiites are also the strongest among Indo-European groups. Sunni Muslims form most of the remaining majority within Islam. Their strength is greatest in Arabic-speaking lands, though non-Arabic Indonesia now contains the world’s largest Sunni Islamic concentration, with other large clusters in Indo-European Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Judaism, the parent of Christianity, is another monotheistic religion and closely related to Islam as well. The Hebrew prophets and leaders, such as Abraham and Moses, are recognized in all three religions. Judaism has close to 14 million adherents throughout the world, with almost half of the world’s Jewish population living in the United States. In contrast to the other two monotheistic faiths, Judaism does not seek converts and has remained an ethnic
religion through most of its existence. It has split into a variety of subgroups, partly because of the dispersal of the Jews in Roman times and the subsequent loss of contact among the various colonies. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed large-scale migration from Europe to America. The disaster that befell European Judaism during the Nazi years involved the systematic murder of perhaps a third of the entire Jewish population of the world. Europe ceased to be the primary homeland of Judaism as many of the survivors fled over seas, mainly to Israel and America.

Hinduism, closely tied to India and its ancient culture, claims 650 million adherents, and is decidedly a polytheistic religion, involving the worship of hundreds of deities. It is also linked to the caste system, a rigid segregation of people according to ancestry and occupation. It also practices the veneration of all forms of life, involving noninjury to all sentient creatures, and a belief in reincarnation.

The skin color of the Hindu population ranges from dark to light, and the faith takes many local forms. No standard set of beliefs prevails, and some Hindus eat fish, venerate military prowess, or even practice monotheism. This suggest that Hinduism was once a universalizing religion, but it has long since reverted to the status of a regional, biethnic faith.

Buddhism is the most widespread religion of the Orient, dominating a culture region stretching from Sri Lanka to Japan and from Mongolia to Vietnam. It began in India as a reform movement within Hinduism, much as Christianity did within Judaism. It is based on the teachings of Siddhartha, the Buddha who promoted the belief that life is full of suffering; desire is the cause of this suffering; cessation of suffering comes from the quelling of desire; and a
path of proper personal conduct and meditation which permits the individual to overcome desire. The resultant state of escape and peace is known as Nirvana.

In the process of its spread, particularly in China and Japan, Buddhism fused with native ethnic religions such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Shintoism to form composite faiths. Buddhism’s tendency to merge with native religions, particularly in China, makes it difficult to determine the number of its adherents. Estimates range from 300 million to 800 million people. While Buddhism in China has become enmeshed with local faiths to become part of an ethnic religion, elsewhere it retains a decidedly universalizing character. Along with Christianity and Islam, Buddhism remains one of the three great universalizing religions of the world.

Buddhism is making inroads in the United States, mainly among well-educated young intellectuals. Perhaps the most popular form of Buddhism in America is Zen, derived from Japan and ultimately from China. Zen Buddhists seek to realize the nature of things, the nature of being, and their oneness with the universe. In their search they try to break from the everyday, logical thought processes that, as they see it, shackle and confine the human mind.

It is easy to see from the cultural aspects of the major religions presented by Jordan and Rowntree (1990) how much there is to learn from a study of the world religions. It must also be remembered that this does not address the intricacies of the deep-seated beliefs, rituals, and traditions within these religions. Nor does it offer a true comprehension of the spiritual issues related to these major religions.
The world view of religion and spirituality goes far beyond that of Western culture. In the United States all of the major religions are widely represented, as well as several spiritual orientations not previously thought of as common to this society. Counselors could much better serve the client if he or she was, at the very least, educated in the major religious and spiritual beliefs of other cultures.

Many counselors may have fears related to talking about religious and spiritual issues with an individual due to his or her own lack of knowledge of other religions. Counselors raised in the Christian tradition, for example, may become intimidated when Hindu, Jewish, or Mormon clients bring up their faith during the counseling session (Bart, 1998). A study of the major religions of the world can be most helpful in broadening the world view of those involved. Understanding the basic concepts and cultural traditions of the various world religions can increase the counselor’s comfort in discussing these issues with clients. Knowledge of religious and spiritual beliefs of ethnic groups can help health care professionals provide care that is culturally specific and sensitive to the beliefs of individuals (Bibbins, 2000).

It is often difficult to separate religion from spirituality, as many individuals think of them as one and the same. Few would argue that one’s religion, by definition, is part of one’s culture (Bart, 1998). Religion is firmly interwoven in the fabric of culture, a bright hue in the human mosaic. It involves a set of beliefs and practices, a social system through which people seek mental and physical harmony with the powers of the universe, through which they attempt to influence the awesome forces of nature, life, and death (Jordan & Rowntree, 1990). Religion most often refers to organized
structures that center on particular beliefs, behaviors, and traditions (Bibbins, 2000). However, it is quite possible to be a very spiritual being without a formal religion.

Spirituality is the human longing for a sense of meaning and fulfillment. It is expressed in societal myths, rituals, and symbols. Spirituality goes beyond institutionalized religious beliefs (Bibbins, 2000). Although both religion and spirituality involve the sacred, spirituality is a more subjective experience, whereas religion is a set of beliefs or doctrines that are institutionalized. As such spirituality is a universal experience with fewer limitations (Stanard, Sandhu, & Painter, 2000).

**Spirituality in Counseling**

The 1994 edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) has included under “Other Conditions That May Be a Focus of Clinical Attention (V Code) Religious or Spiritual Problems” (American Psychiatric Association, 1994 p. 685). This brings religious and spiritual issues into the counseling setting. Religious and spiritual beliefs can be very important in helping people find meaning and direction in their lives and maintain good self-esteem and interpersonal relationships (Seligman, 1998). The majority of clients have some level of religious and spiritual beliefs. Myers, Sweeney, and Witmer (2000) suggested that spirituality is the core characteristic that gives a healthy individual a deep sense of wholeness or connectedness to the universe. Additionally, Nugent (1994) argued, “If clients believe that counselors do not sense the significance of religious or spiritual matters, they will either be reluctant to bring up their beliefs or decide to drop out of counseling” (p. 63). Over the past decade a vast amount of literature
has been produced addressing the spiritual needs of individuals. A review of recent literature by professionals in the field of mental health supports the inclusion of spirituality in counseling as a means to care for the whole person.

A Review of Spirituality as Related to Counseling

A literature review of mental health professionals from various cultures and religious orientations offered a broad view of spirituality. They also demonstrated the close relationship between spirituality and counseling. This included the need to gain insight into self, a belief that change is possible, accepting responsibility for one’s own actions, and the importance of ritual in daily life. Interestingly, in the final assessment, the goal of each was ultimately the same: A life lived without spirituality, is not truly a life lived at all.

Borysenko (1995), firmly believed in the connectedness of the mind, body, and spirit as the key to physical, emotional, and spiritual healing within one’s own mind. The development of a positive spiritual framework can transform one’s life, relieving the psychological impact of negativity in the forms of fears, anxieties, and anger. She recommended that the mind, body, spirit connection could be achieved through the daily use of mindfulness, meditation, and prayer.

Borysenko, raised in the Jewish tradition and trained in cancer cell biology, is a licensed clinical psychologist. She examined hidden beliefs, opportunities to develop faith and meaning in life, and overcoming fear and anxiety. She defined healing as a process of self-realization, the discovery of an individual’s sense of wholeness, acceptance of responsibility for one’s beliefs, thoughts, and actions, as well as the fact that much of what an individual does is by personal choice.
Borysenko’s work provides an in-depth understanding of the association between physiological responses to emotions, thoughts, and feelings. This includes a respect for the power of prayer and a positive attitude toward life, others, and the universe. In the counseling setting her recommendation of relaxation and imagery might be used as a beneficial adjunct to therapy. Practicing meditation exercises may increase self-awareness and enhance spiritual growth. A mindful positive approach to daily life could be key to effective and healthy living. For a counselor, dealing with other’s emotional problems, having the ability to center and release stress may be of particular value.

Carpenter (1999), a registered nurse trained in alternative medicine, supported Borysenko in her concept of holism. She described holism as a constantly evolving process of well-being in which an individual’s mind, body, emotions, and spirit are balanced in relation to each other. They are in harmony with, and guided by, an awareness of self, society, nature, and the universe. The ideas that thoughts, feelings, and emotions are not isolated events, but are translated into bodily changes that effect the whole body were discussed. These changes can be either negative or positive and practitioners should be aware that interventions to one part of the body or mind affect the entire human system.

Carpenter presented a comparison of the concepts of modern Western allopathic medicine and the holistic model based on the ancient understandings of the Chinese and Indian cultures. According to Carpenter the allopathic model traditionally treats the individual as if he or she were distinct and separate from nature and the universe. The person is seen as a body only, with
disease as an entity that can be healed through medical treatments. The holistic model views the individual as a spiritual being, a microcosm of the cosmos, the harmonious and indivisible whole. This model understands disease as a process that may be a valuable signal of internal conflict as it relates to living an unbalanced life. This serves as a warning for the person to balance one’s own life while participating in the natural give and take of life. One is reminded to respond to the needs of others while reaching for what is needed for oneself, all from a position of strength, confidence, and empowerment.

Carpenter’s concepts offer an individual the opportunity to explore his or her own values, thoughts, and ideas, as well as accepting other cultural beliefs. One is not only responsible for the balance of self, but the world in which one lives also. Using these ideas an individual may be able to move from a self-centered existence to an understanding of a responsibility for what is happening to those around him or her as well.

Chopra (1991), a medical doctor, trained in India and the United States, is a leader in the field of mind/body medicine. He brought together modern medicine and ancient Indian traditions in an attempt to demonstrate how an individual’s perceptions create reality for good or ill. He contended that one’s way of thinking has an impact on one’s physical and emotional health. Thoughts and feelings are a powerful force with the potential to heal or kill. He also discussed the power of the mind and spirit, and the importance of finding meaning in everyday life. Few have a sense of meaning in life until a crisis, physical or emotional, creates a situation in which a search for meaning begins.
He proposed that the loss of spiritual experience in both the East and West has shattered the higher aspirations of human life. Spiritual experience is necessary to increase self-awareness, mindfulness, and openness to enrich and fulfill lives. Chopra suggested that a more universal spiritual approach to life, through an understanding that each person is only a part of the greater whole, would increase positive thinking. Each individual effects all other individuals and are intertwined with every living thing, as well as every inanimate object. A person has the choice to broaden his or her thinking, experience positive thoughts and activities, participate in self-discovery, and engage in becoming part of the greater whole.

Acquiring a positive outlook on life, with the belief that it not only makes one’s life better, but the universe also, should increase an individual’s desire to participate in things that will assist in accomplishing this. Chopra discussed the power of meditation and exercises in relaxation and guided imagery. These activities produce positive thoughts and feelings, as well as a sense of peace and spiritual well-being.

Chopra’s ideas could greatly benefit an individual’s personal and spiritual growth. Gaining an understanding that one is a part of the greater whole, has the freedom to choose what he or she thinks and believes, and has control over his or her personal sense of well-being may be powerful forces in improving emotional health. Choosing to approach daily life from a positive point of view could add new spiritual dimensions to one’s life.

The practice of Vipassana insight meditation was presented by Kornfield (1990) as a means of gaining self-awareness and mindfulness as a way of life. These meditations come from the Theravada Buddhist tradition, and involve an
individual becoming aware of his or her reality by opening one's mind, body, and heart. He discussed the teachings of The Buddha regarding the Eightfold Path, the goal being, not to find eternal life in heaven, but to live and experience life in the present, in tune with reality. This reality included accepting pain and suffering as a part of living, and that much of one's suffering comes from self. He also presented the importance of respect for all living things and a reverence for the earth and the universe.

Kornfield, a Buddhist monk and clinical psychologist, has taught meditation since 1974. He described the meditation technique as a method to increase spiritual growth through becoming more self-aware and mindful of one's thoughts, feelings, and emotions on a daily basis. He suggested that it is a valuable method of quieting oneself, living in the moment, and becoming more aware of the world. The techniques are not intended as an escape, but rather an opportunity to experience the present moment in its fullness. This self-understanding will help one to live in and experience the present, thereby gaining a sense of acceptance of oneself and one's world.

Buddhist traditions offer a different view of life for Western minds. These ideas support a holistic approach to life, and a method for learning to live in and accept the present moment. Individuals struggling with problems related to past issues, future directed goals, or daily difficulties may find comfort and peace in these spiritual practices. Learning to live in and accept the present moment could be a powerful tool for life. Accepting the realization that nothing stays the same, one owns nothing but the moment, and one is but a small part of the greater whole may be strong emotional medicine.
The soul and the importance of integrating this aspect of self into everyday life was discussed by Moore (1992). Moore, a Roman Catholic, lived as a monk for twelve years and is a Jungian psychotherapist. He indicated that human suffering could be alleviated by approaching life problems in a positive soulful way. Life would be fuller, richer, and less painful if the soul received ongoing attention in every aspect of life. He described it as essentially a cultivation of ordinary things in such a way that the soul is nurtured and fostered. New meaning and sacredness could be brought to one’s life by the involvement of ritual in the simplest acts that human perform on a daily basis.

Moore presented the necessity of soulfulness in our daily lives, as well as the importance of an individual creating a special place for spirituality, ritual and sacredness. He also emphasized what he believed could be gained by going beyond that which is material, and finding a deeper more meaningful place for self to grow. Relating spirituality and soulfulness at the everyday level would enhance personal growth.

An individual who acquires an understanding of how to accentuate the positives of daily life could gain hope, and find pleasure and meaning in the simplest activities of one’s day. This is of particular importance in light of the fact that many expect that there should be more to life than what one is presently experiencing. To find some measure of pleasure in the simplest activities of one’s day may be an avenue to bring real meaning into his or her life.

Lastly, Strohl (1998), like the previous scholars of religion and spirituality discussed the importance of spirituality in everyday life. He also believed in an expanded sense of identity, including a deeper sense of
wholeness, relatedness, and connectedness. He focused on the effects of spirituality and consciousness on personal transformation and health to explore the optimal levels of human functioning.

Strohl is a transpersonal psychologist. This perspective is an outgrowth of the humanistic approach of the 1960's and supports Eastern concepts of awareness and unity of all reality, as well as the interconnection of space and time. He indicated that transpersonalists emphasized spiritual issues and believed that these issues are relevant to psychotherapy. The transpersonal counselor is committed to client self-exploration and personal growth. Favorable outcomes are facilitated by positive and constructive thought patterns. Meditation techniques, guided imagery with a spiritual focus, and spiritual books are recommended to clients. He believed that the greatest contribution of transpersonal psychology is the awareness that the divine source of nurturance and acceptance is not external but at the center of one's being.

Strohl's work revealed that there is a formal school of thought that incorporates most of the spiritual issues previously discussed. However, to be an effective counselor, versed in the various aspects of spiritual issues, does not require one to belong to any particular theory. The counselor's goal should be to accept the client's reality, help him or her to realize their responsibility, and guide him or her in the deeper spiritual meaning of life which he or she is seeking.

In summary, the selected literature, even though gathered from a variety of cultural and religious beliefs from mental health professionals, provided essentially the same message. Each individual is responsible for his or her own
reality, and each has the power to change. Becoming self-aware, reaching outside of self to better the total existence of our earth, and living in the present moment should strengthen one’s overall health and wellness.

Conclusion

There is a growing awareness and willingness to explore religious and spiritual matters within the context of counseling and counselor education programs (Burke, et. al., 1999). This paper has presented a cultural overview of religion and spirituality to demonstrate the relationship between these subjects and counseling. For counseling to be truly effective it must help the client explore core feelings, beliefs, values, and self-understanding from the perspective of the whole individual. By incorporating religious and spiritual dimensions, the counseling process can be taken to a deeper level, allowing the client to engage in meaning seeking, self-exploration, self-awareness, and personal growth if he or she so desires.

Inclusion of studies in religion and spirituality into the counselor education curriculum will assist the trainee in his or her own personal growth and development as one explores one’s own religious and spiritual values. In addition, providing counseling students with a means to explore a diversity of religious and spiritual beliefs will increase cultural sensitivity related to the practices of others. Knowledge such as this will also assist counselor trainees in becoming comfortable with, and respectful of, spiritual themes that may arise in the counseling setting. It is possible as well, that students may discover new ways to approach old problems such as depression, anxiety, and helping clients find meaning in life.
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