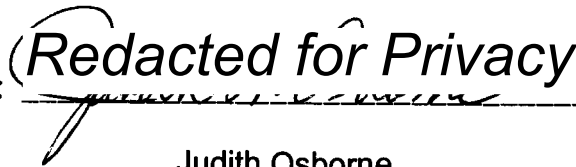


AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Katherine Zimmer Souza for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Counseling presented on April 26, 2001. Title: Exploring Counseling Students' Perspectives on Spirituality Using a Postmodern Feminist Paradigm.

Abstract approved:

*Redacted for Privacy*  


Judith Osborne

In this study, I explore the ideas of doctoral level counselor education students on spirituality using a postmodern feminist research paradigm. I have found spirituality to be vital aspect of my own life and have been pleased to see its importance recognized within the counseling field.

I analyzed the data through an intra case analysis and a cross case analysis. Within the intra case analysis, several findings were described including: definitions of spirituality, religion, spiritual experiences, counseling clients, counselor education, ethics, and more.

From the cross case analysis, I perceived two themes. The first theme included questioning important aspects of life. The second theme was related to the ethical concerns surrounding spirituality in the education of counselors and in the counseling of clients. The participants seemed concerned about a counselor or

professor imposing her/his beliefs on clients or students. Several mentioned they preferred to wait for clients to bring up spiritual issues rather than bring these issues up themselves. Suggestions for future research are given.

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**Exploring Counseling Students' Perspectives on Spirituality Using a  
Postmodern Feminist Paradigm**

**by  
Katherine Zimmer Souza**

**A DISSERTATION  
submitted to  
Oregon State University**

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Doctor of Philosophy dissertation of Katherine Zimmer Souza

presented on April 26, 2001.

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I understand my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

  
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Katherine Zimmer Souza, Author

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sincere thanks to my committee for their genuine commitment to my success: Judith Osborne, Warren Suzuki, Karen Higgins, Michael Ingram, and Barbara Roth. Thank you God for being with me in every aspect of my life. Thank you Mom and Dad for encouraging me in my education and teaching me the only limits are the ones I place on myself. A big hug and kiss thank you to my husband, Theophane Souza. You are my heart; thank you for your unconditional love. I also thank my little girl, Faith Zimmer Souza, for your patience. You sat by me smiling and playing while I wrote this.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my daughter, Faith Zimmer Souza, who is on her way to becoming a strong, compassionate, and wise woman.

# Exploring Counseling Students' Perspectives on Spirituality Using a Postmodern Feminist Paradigm

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Initial Focus and Evolution**

The focus of this research was to explore the ideas of doctoral level counselor education students on spirituality using a postmodern feminist research paradigm. I define spirituality as a secular or religious belief system that brings meaning and purpose; one that is not imposed on another and is related to goodness. It differs from religion in that it includes secular ways of believing such as existentialism, atheism, feminism, and more. Spirituality is also not generally organized or exclusive.

I have found spirituality to be a vital aspect of my own life and have been pleased to see its importance recognized within the counseling field. In the literature, the case for the importance of spirituality to clients has been made (DoRozario, 1997; Frame & Williams, 1996; Hall, 1998; Lemoncelli & Carey, 1996); surveys have been done on its importance in counseling programs (Kelly, 1994,

1997; Pate & High, 1995), and one organization called the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) has taken the lead in pushing for the inclusion of spirituality in counselor education accreditation standards.

I was curious to know what counseling students thought about spirituality. I found no studies to date that have addressed the student perspective. I chose to examine the perspective of current doctoral students in counselor education because these students are likely to become the counseling professors of the future. Their perspectives on spirituality may strongly influence how spirituality is addressed in their work with counseling students. I hope that this research informs the practice of counselor education in the following ways: addresses the participants' definition of spirituality, participants' personal and professional experiences of spirituality, the differences between spirituality and religion, the inclusion of spirituality in counselor education, and potential ethical concerns around the inclusion of spirituality in the curriculum.

After my review of the literature and a preliminary study on the topic of spirituality with masters' students (Souza, in press), I developed a set of questions to serve as guides for interviewing participants of the study. Additionally, a pilot test of the questions assisted me in creating the content and order of the questions. I

tested the preliminary set of questions with two people, an assistant professor in counselor education, and a doctoral student in counselor education. The purpose of this pilot test was to see if the questions were easily understood and if they generated discussion effectively. None of the responses given by pilot test participants are included; we verbally agreed that none of their responses would be used in this research. Only two people were selected due to time limitations.

The final draft of participant questions follows:

1. Please briefly describe yourself as you would for someone who doesn't know you.
2. How do you define spirituality?
3. Describe a specific situation, personal and/or professional that was influenced by your spirituality.
4. Do you differentiate between spirituality and religion? If so, how? If not, why not?
5. What do you think of including spirituality as an area of education of counselors? If you think spirituality should be included in the education of counselors, how should it be included?
6. What are some of the ethical issues that come to mind as you consider spirituality in counseling?

With so many possible questions to ask of participants, it was difficult to choose just a few. Stake (1995) said, "Perhaps the most difficult task of the researcher is to design good questions, research questions, that will direct the looking and the thinking enough but not too much" (p. 15).

The six questions listed above guided me as I interviewed the participants. I opened all of the interviews by asking participants to describe themselves for someone who did not know them. From there, some interviews flowed to the questions naturally without my asking them, with others, I had to ask the questions to prompt discussion. No two interviews were the same. This fits with my postmodern feminist paradigm, which sees each dialogue as dynamic, and changing.

One question included in this study was asked of myself and not asked of participants: What are some of the epistemological and methodological issues in using the postmodern feminist paradigm for studying spirituality in counseling? This question is answered in chapter two on methodology and under the heading of research issues in chapter four.

## **Importance of the Study**

Spirituality has been considered within several disciplines related to counseling, including psychology, social work, teacher education, and nursing (Dudley & Helfgott, 1990; Hall, 1998; McSherry & Draper, 1997; Rolph, 1991). Spirituality has become more acceptable as an area of research and recognition of its importance appears to be growing.

While counseling studies have surveyed counseling faculty and reported the importance of spirituality in the clinical setting, no studies to date have explored the perspective of counseling students (Burke and Miller, 1996; Kelly, 1994; Pate and High, 1995). I think there is a clear need for a study which examines the ideas of counseling students on the topic of spirituality in counseling. Exploring the ideas of counseling students gives a better picture of how to approach spirituality in counselor education, how counseling students differentiate between spirituality and religion, if they do, and how they see spirituality functioning in their personal lives and professional work as a counselor.

While there are numerous articles on the importance and applicability of spirituality in counseling clients, there are fewer articles on the importance and applicability of spirituality to the training of counselors. The scarcity of published work on spirituality

in counselor education is a part of the rationale for the need of this research.

This study is relevant to the counseling profession, in that the profession is investigating the spiritual dimension of clients (Bergin, 1988; Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992; Hinterkopf, 1994).

Developing a clearer understanding of the student perspective on spirituality might assist counselor educators in choosing how to educate students on spirituality. It could make a substantial contribution to the field as it breaks what I see as new ground in seeking to better understand the ideas of counseling students on the topic of spirituality.

One professional organization, The Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC), has become a major contributor to the discussion of spirituality as it relates to counseling. This organization supports incorporating spirituality into counselor education and supervision. Cheston (1999), president of ASERVIC, explained, "Spiritual and ethical education is one of the major goals of ASERVIC" (p. 1). She continued to describe ASERVIC as a forum for discussion on spiritually relevant issues. "ASERVIC has always served as a place [where counseling professionals]...can openly discuss their faith, their values, and their religious commitment" (p. 2).



Miller (1999), a key member of ASERVIC, examined the role ASERVIC has played in developing a spiritual focus for counseling through national counseling standards and national counseling associations. "CACREP standards are currently in the process of being revised with the intent of incorporating spirituality competencies" (p. 499). ASERVIC is defining spiritual competencies for the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP).

Miller also described a summit on spirituality that took place in 1995. The members of this summit worked to define spirituality and explore key competencies for counselors regarding spirituality. ASERVIC has been working in connection with the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the Association for Counselor Educators and Supervisors (ACES) to "...clarify issues related to the infusion of spirituality into counseling" (p. 500). ASERVIC has been an important catalyst in focusing the counseling profession's attention on spiritual issues.

The Ethical Standards for the American Counseling Association (ACA, 1995) and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 1994) emphasized the importance of diversity in training counselors. Proposed changes of CACREP standards for 2001 address the

“growth of the human spirit.” Within the Social and Cultural Foundations Standard, religion was specifically addressed as part of our diverse society (CACREP, 1994).

Several researchers have shown that spiritual practices are an integral part of a client’s well-being (Burke & Miller, 1996; Lawson, Drebing, Berg, Vincellette & Penk, 1998; Pritt, 1998). Spirituality appears to be particularly relevant when working with clients living with HIV/AIDS, clients who have been abused as children, and those living with a chronic illness or disability (DoRozario, 1997; Hall, 1998; Parker, Horton & Watson, 1997).

Spirituality has also been identified as an integral part of the African American and Native American cultures (Frame & Williams, 1996; Matheson, 1996; Southern, 1996; Stout, 1995) among others.

Miranti and Burke (1992) saw spirituality as a prevailing force in the counseling process. They said, “Good mental health can be defined as the balance and integration of all the dimensions of personhood. There occurs a longing for...the transcendent and a connection with the mysterious “other”” (p. 2). These counselor educators considered spirituality to be one of the central dimensions of one’s identity and one that contributed to mental health.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Participants**

I interviewed five doctoral students in counselor education. After performing a preliminary study with masters' students in counseling, it was my assessment that their perspectives regarding the professional relevance of spirituality were limited. This may have occurred because the masters' students have not yet been in practice as a counselor. The doctoral students interviewed provided richer material on how spirituality functioned in their lives. The doctoral students also provided rich material on the professional relevance of spirituality due to their experience of being counselors, teaching courses, and supervising masters students. I was also interested in interviewing doctoral students in counselor education because these students are likely to become professors and influence how spirituality is addressed in the future curriculum.

I chose to purposefully sample participants. Bogdan and Bilken (1998) described purposeful sampling as choosing "...particular subjects [sic] to include because they are believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory. This is not random

sampling...” (p. 65). My purpose in sampling was not to gain representation of a population, but rather to choose participants who would aid in understanding of the student perspective of spirituality in counseling. Due to the irrelevance of generalization, it was not important for me to select a large number of participants. The selection of five participants assisted me in my purpose of understanding doctoral students’ perspectives on spirituality in counseling.

I subjectively determined which participants I considered to display an intense interest in spirituality. The importance of gaining participants with intense interests in spirituality made it vital that I had some knowledge of their interest level prior to selection of voluntary participants. This influenced my decision to use doctoral counseling students with whom I was familiar. I requested the participation of specific doctoral counseling students who I thought had an intense interest in spirituality.

I used individual and group interviews to gather data. Four people participated in one, one-hour individual interview. One person participated in two individual interviews, of one hour each. Four people participated in the group interview; one participant was unable to attend. The interviews occurred at a time and place that was mutually agreed upon by the participants and myself.

I recruited participants by placing a letter requesting their participation in their university mailboxes. I knew that Tam was a Buddhist, Beth was a Christian, and that Helen was an agnostic. I was not familiar with Gabe or Abby's spiritual beliefs, however when I spoke of spirituality in their presence they appeared interested. I selected the participants who I requested to participate due to the diversity of their spiritual beliefs and based on what I considered a high interest level in spirituality.

Due to the small size of the counselor education program, it is likely that members of my committee could pick out who the participants are by reading the transcriptions. To increase confidentiality, my committee members and myself agreed to have transcriptions reviewed if necessary, by Dr. Cynthia Baldwin, a former counselor educator at the University of Nevada Reno. Dr. Baldwin was my advisor during my master's program and was happy to assist in this manner.

Participants provided information regarding their personal and professional experiences with spirituality verbally during the individual and group interviews. I believe this research was somewhat invasive for the participants. This invasiveness was tempered by the participants' ability to control how much information and what kind of information they shared. Participants were also

informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time.

Participants made informed decisions on participating in the study through information provided about the study in the letter requesting their participation. My postmodern feminist research perspective is reflected in my considerations regarding participants and sample size. I was open with participants about my perspectives, concerned about harm to participants, and I wanted participants to understand their participation was voluntary. In regard to sample size, I was concerned with richness of information rather than generalization.

### **Data Trustworthiness**

To address data trustworthiness, I compared what I found in the present study with the literature on spirituality in counseling. I also kept a journal of my thoughts throughout the study. This allowed me to track when specific ideas originated and how they changed or remained stable.

To enhance confidence in the conclusions, as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) I explicitly linked the conclusions “with exhibits of condensed/displayed data” (p. 278). They also

recommended "...a record of the study's methods and procedures" (p. 278) which was provided through my reflective journal.

Data trustworthiness increased by making necessary changes throughout the study. My research questions changed as the study progressed. Stake (1995) stated, "Initial research questions may be modified or even replaced in mid-study by the case researcher...if early questions are not working, if new issues become apparent, the design is changed" (p. 9). I had a guide for beginning the study yet was not tied to the order and content of questions that did not work. Stake said, "...the researcher makes a flexible list of questions...and seizes opportunities to learn the unexpected" (p. 29). Maintaining flexibility lessened the suppression of the emic or participant perspective, and allowed this to emerge throughout the advancement of the study.

Trustworthiness was also attended to by the documentation of information provided by participants through the transcription of audiotapes. To minimize potential harm to subjects, these documents were only accessed by Dr. Cynthia Baldwin and myself. I was responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of the documents.

My research perspective is seen in my consideration of data trustworthiness. As a postmodern feminist researcher, it was important that I maintained the portrayal of the participants as

humans with individual perspectives and worked to minimize the inevitable objectification and misrepresentation of participants.

My postmodern feminist perspective came through in my attention to reflectivity. Regarding reflectivity, Lather (1991) stated, “Determining the constructs that are actually occurring rather than mere inventions of the researcher’s perspective requires a self-critical attitude toward how one’s own preconceptions affect the research” (p. 67). I maintained this self-critical attitude while I reviewed transcriptions and fostered my awareness of what my preconceptions were in regard to spirituality in counseling.

Additionally, I worked to achieve several types of validity, including, catalytic, paralogical, rhizomatic, and voluptuous. My concern for these non-traditional types of validity clearly demonstrated my postmodern feminist perspective. These types of validity “...[fly] directly in the face of the positivist demand for researcher neutrality” (p. 68). My attention to catalytic, paralogical, rhizomatic, and voluptuous validity represented a distinct departure from positivistic research paradigms. Next I detail how each type of validity was present in this study.



### Catalytic Validity

Lather (1991) considered the issue of validity in praxis-oriented research. I used the concept she called catalytic validity in my research. “Catalytic validity represents the degree to which the research process re-orientes, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it” (p. 68). Catalytic validity recognizes the “...reality-altering impact of the research process” (p. 68).

In establishing catalytic validity, I looked for the participants’ experience of a transformed reality regarding spirituality. Through my research, I channeled “...this impact so that respondents gain[ed] self-understanding and, ultimately, self-determination through research participation” (Lather, 1991, p. 68). I found several instances of catalytic validity; participants appeared to experience greater self-understanding through their participation in this exploration of spirituality. The following quotes show what I interpret as the presence of catalytic validity in this research.

At the end of her individual interview, Abby said,

[The interview] has actually helped me. It has helped me articulate better what [spirituality] is about a tiny bit. Maybe it has just helped me put a label on my life more, which is extremely helpful. I can say I’m on this spiritual journey

and I'm not supposed to figure it out right now, so that's okay.

The interview process helped Abby to gain more self-understanding.

During the group interview, Abby spoke about her individual interview. She said,

Well I know I felt happier after the interview and the next day. I think I was just happy that I could talk about it. Because before the interview I didn't think I could talk about anything because it's so difficult for me to define. So it was helpful that I could say something and you understood it. At least I got that impression. I wasn't completely crazy.

Abby appeared to feel more confident about her ability to discuss spirituality.

Beth also spoke of her experience of the individual interview during the group interview.

It made me wonder why I couldn't talk about [spirituality] more openly. [Talking about spirituality] probably would have continued my level of peace and happiness. I felt wow, this is really refreshing. Because growing up, that's pretty much all we talked about was spirituality and religion. So it made me wonder if I could continue to talk like that.

Beth seemed to become more energized regarding talking about spirituality.

Abby responded to Beth as she said, "I like that word refreshing. I did find it to be refreshing because I don't think I've ever been asked what spirituality is to me and my opinions and in an environment where it was okay to say whatever I thought." I saw Abby as feeling safe enough to discuss spirituality. She echoed Beth's experience of finding it refreshing.

Participants discussed some of their coursework that related to spirituality. Abby said, "I think I'm going to revamp my nature of people and professional disclosure statement after these discussions because I didn't realize how big a part [spirituality] is of everything I do." Beth also wanted to rewrite this paper. She said, "Why don't I just go and redo [my paper] how I want to do it?" Both Abby and Beth decided to make major changes in an important paper due to participation in this study.

Beth later sent me an email that appeared to demonstrate the impact of her participation. She gave me permission to include this email. She said, "I have decided to incorporate spirituality in my dissertation! I have gained hope in being true to my spirituality in doing research. I feel like I've found my niche. Thanks for helping

me give myself permission.” One of the results due in part to Beth’s participation was the inclusion of spirituality in her dissertation.

Helen also appeared to have been affected by her participation. In response to my question about including spirituality in counselor education, she said, “I hadn’t thought about it really until right now. I would think that people need to be aware of and sensitive to diversity issues within religion and spirituality so yeah, I think it does need to be brought out.”

### Paralogical Validity

Lather (1993) described additional kinds of validity that I established within my research. She discussed paralogical, rhizomatic, and voluptuous validity. Paralogical validity “...is about the search for instabilities...recognizes the multiplicity of language games and the ‘temporary contract’ of any consensus” (p. 679). In creating paralogical validity in my research, I revealed complexities, was open to counter-interpretations, and foregrounded how my theoretical grounding in postmodern feminism shaped my analysis.

Abby explained that not knowing the meaning of life is or why she is here has helped her in working with clients. Since she doesn’t know these things, she can’t impose her beliefs on clients. She seemed to contradict this later when she said it is important to

understand one's own spirituality in order to better help clients find theirs. This shows my interpretation of the temporary nature of conclusions. My postmodern feminist approach created an appreciation of such complex counter-interpretations.

Tam seemed to have found a paradox between absolutism and relativism. The ethics and morality in counseling seem to call for absolutes, yet counseling also prompts us to be more relative and not impose our beliefs on clients. He said, "How you can combine the two and live with that paradox? That's what we have to deal with. It's difficult. I haven't found a solution. That's the paradox of life." This shows my interpretation of the "...search for the oppositional in our daily practices" (Lather, 1993, p. 686) that is a part of paralogical validity.

A temporary conclusion was apparent to me as Beth considered if compassion and intuition could be taught. She said, "...I don't think so, but maybe it is possible." After some thought, Beth said, "My take on it right now is that compassion and intuition probably can't be taught." As I searched for instabilities as an aspect of paralogical validity, I found one in Gabe's consideration of spirituality and atheists and agnostics. I asked Gabe, "Do agnosticism and atheism fit into your idea of spirituality?" He responded, "That's interesting. Do they have a core sense that

sustains them? I think they can. I think they might have that. Definitely they would have that quality.” Gabe showed what I interpreted as the instability of his conclusion as he moved from questioning the possibility of their spirituality to considering it a definite quality.

### Rhizomatic Validity

Rhizomatic validity was the next type of validity Lather (1993) discussed. Rhizomatic validity “...subverts and unsettles from within...works against the constraints of authority, regularity, and commonsense, and opens thought up to creative constructions” (p. 680). As I established rhizomatic validity in my research, I reflectively rethought my attitude toward the research.

I found rhizomatic validity in Tam’s consideration of the Truth. He seemed to think it was important for students to understand there are multiple truths. He said, “If you could make the students become more aware of the fact that the Truth from this side of the Perennes may be not the Truth from the other side of the Perennes, then that’s probably one of the most important things that we need to emphasize.” This shows the “...multiple openings, networks, complexities of problematics” (Lather, 1993, p. 686) of rhizomatic validity.

Helen appeared to explain that she was overwhelmed by the amount of information on religions that appeared to be necessary for a counselor to have according to the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC). She said, "I want to be competent as a counselor but I don't know that I would be motivated to put that sort of energy into that sort of skill, so I have a little bit of a push pull or cognitive dissonance with it." She experienced what I interpret as disagreement with an authority on how much knowledge she needed to be a competent counselor. That Helen felt comfortable enough to share this showed what I saw as rhizomatic validity. Rhizomatic validity, "...works against constraints of authority" (Lather, 1993, p. 686).

Gabe seemed to have unsettled thoughts on counselor disclosure as he said, "You feel like it's important to bring your biases up front so there's a double edged sword there; how I identify myself might create an obstacle in our relationship and yet I also believe the client has a right to know what biases I bring in." Rhizomatic validity "...unsettles from within, taps underground" (Lather, 1993, p. 686).

### Voluptuous Validity

The last type of validity Lather (1993) considered was voluptuous validity. Voluptuous validity includes "...explicit

incompleteness, tentativeness, the creation of space for others to enter, the joining of partial voices...authority then comes from engagement and self-reflexivity, not distanced 'objectivity'" (p. 682). In facilitating voluptuous validity, I spoke autobiographically to reduce distance, generated tentative conclusions, and engaged myself as an active constructor of incomplete knowledge. The participants appeared to be engaged when I created space for disagreement and new ideas as I revealed my tentative conclusions with participants during the group interview.

Another quality of voluptuous validity is how it "brings ethics and epistemology together" (p. 686). Ethically and epistemologically, I had to protect the identity of my participants. At the end of her individual interview Helen said, "It will be interesting to see what happens in the group discussion. It's going to be the doctoral students, isn't it?" I responded, "Well you know ethically I can't say exactly who is going to be there, but hopefully it will be all of the people who have participated in the individual interviews, unless they choose not to attend, and me."

My open manner during the interview process may have allowed the tentativeness of voluptuous validity to emerge. While discussing training counselors on spirituality Abby said, "I'd like to say it should be required but I think people are less open to things



that are imposed on them.” Shortly after this statement, she said, “On the other hand, I don’t think that should be a reason not to include things because we’re worried that people won’t be as open to it.” Abby did not seem to support requiring a course on spirituality, however, this stance was tempered by what I interpret as her belief that spirituality should be included in some way even while some students may not be open to it.

Voluptuous validity also “creates a questioning text” (p. 686). This questioning text appeared to me as Tam described an ethical aspect of counseling. He said, “It’s unavoidable for me to unconsciously impose some of my belief on my client.” Yet later he said, “As long as I’m aware of my spiritual bias then I can avoid imposing those kinds of [personal beliefs] on [clients].” Tam appeared to say that he inevitably imposes some of his beliefs on clients while also saying that he can avoid imposing these beliefs when he has an awareness of his spiritual bias. This created the question of how Tam reconciled what I saw as opposing attitudes.

### **Data Analysis**

In reporting what I learned, first I performed an intra case analysis for each case and described relevant research issues. I organized the intra case themes according to the order of the

questions. For example, I asked about spirituality before I asked about counselor education, so spirituality appeared before counselor education in the presentation of themes. I placed themes that did not directly relate to the questions at the end because they appeared to flow best that way. In ordering the participants, I chose not to have the two male participants follow one another and not to have those without an organized religion follow one another.

Second, I performed a cross case analysis and showed what similar themes appeared across cases. Stake (1995) said of this process, "Two strategic ways that researchers reach new meanings about cases are through direct interpretation of the individual instance and through aggregation of instances until something can be said about them as a class" (p. 74).

I wrote in my reflective journal concerning the intra case analysis. I said, "I am analyzing, reading thoroughly each participant's words, one participant at a time. I am not yet looking for themes, but rather I am attempting to understand what one participant is saying before comparing this to other participants" (June, 2000). Regarding cross-case analysis, I wrote,

I read each transcription from each participant and found individual themes. I did this for all participants then looked at those individual themes to see what common themes occurred across participants. These were very

rough, imprecise, and were revised after more reviews of the transcriptions (July, 2000).

I was somewhat concerned about the redundancy that would be created by performing both the intra-case and cross case analyses. I wrote:

There will be some redundancy with the cross-case themes section because these quotes will have been explored within individual themes. However, the cross-case analysis section will show the importance of which themes have reoccurred across participants. Writing both an intra and cross case analysis is more thorough and respectful of participants (July, 2000).

I expected in both analyses that my interpretations of the participants' words would be prominent. "By custom, researchers are privileged to assert what they find meaningful as a result of their inquires" (Stake, 1995, p. 12). Yet I was also open to variation from my perspective. This occurred when some participants appeared to disagree with my view that counseling students should be required to learn of spirituality. While I did not tell participants that this was my view, I think it was obvious by the questions I chose to ask. However, I wanted to report this variability as a way of maintaining the multiple realities that exist regarding spirituality.

I expected to find contradictions within the participants' words. Stake (1995) said, "...the qualitative researcher tries to preserve the multiple realities, the different and even contradictory views of what is happening" (p. 12). Abby seemed to explain that not knowing her meaning and purpose helped her in working with clients by preventing her from telling clients what life should mean for them. However, she later appeared to contradict this statement as she said, "It's important to know what spirituality means to us because I think we're better equipped to help people figure it out for themselves. We're likely to do less damage if we're aware of our own beliefs." Abby's contradiction shows us the dynamic, changeable nature of thought.

What I interpreted as a contradiction occurred with Helen's statements regarding the inclusion of spirituality in counselor education. At first, Helen mentioned she supported including spirituality in counselor education, yet a moment later she seemed to say it wasn't important enough to her to include it. As she continued, she appeared to return to her first position supporting its inclusion. The presence of what I see as a contradiction makes the interpretation challenging but much more interesting. I suspect that Helen felt pressure in knowing that I support including spirituality in

the education of counselors. Of course, I did not intentionally create pressure for this position, but it may have been present nonetheless.

I reported each of these contradictions without trying to resolve the tension. Stake (1995) stated, "Seldom will it be necessary to resolve contradictory testimony or competing values – any of them may help us understand the case" (p. 134). Ross (1992) echoed a similar acceptance of complexity as she said, "Ambiguity is not to be dismissed or resolved dualistically, but explored as a way of amplifying and correcting the ways in which human experience is interpreted" (p. 123).

While I kept in mind to allow contradictions and tension, my first step in both the intra and cross case data analyses was description. I described participants' responses to the questions "...in such a way that others reading the results can understand and draw their own interpretations" (Patton, 1990, p. 375). To assist in this description, I provided quotes to take the reader into the participants' worlds as I saw them.

My second step in each analysis was interpretation. "Interpretation involves explaining the findings...attaching significance to particular results, and putting patterns into an analytic framework" (Patton, 1990, p. 375). This was done subjectively as is appropriate for postmodern feminist research. Patton said of

qualitative data analysis, “Because qualitative analysts do not have statistical tests to tell them when an observation or pattern is significant, they must rely on their own intelligence, experience, and judgment” (p. 406). Stake (1995) stated, “...there is much art and intuitive processing to the search for meaning” (p. 72). I experienced the art of qualitative data analysis as I allowed my intuition to assist me in deciphering meaning.

I wrote in my reflective journal regarding interpretation: “It is difficult to decide how frequently something should occur in order to be a theme. Sometimes it isn’t very frequent but appears very important to what they have intended to express” (August, 2000). I also had difficulty in deciding how much identifying information to leave out: “How far do I go in cutting out identifying information? Obviously I’m not putting names in, but what about work sites, previous states lived in, and things like that? I think I can provide participants with the most protection possible by leaving these potentially identifying details out” (June, 2000).

Early on in the data analysis, I recognized that participants used incorrect grammar at times. At first I thought I would leave the incorrect grammar of all participants as I was hoping to give the reader a richer, more realistic picture of the participants. I communicated this decision with a committee member who said that

in another study where grammar was not corrected participants were angry because this made them appear unintelligent. Based on this information, I decided to correct participants' grammar.

I struggled to find the language best suited for a postmodern feminist dissertation that recognizes multiple realities. I wrote in my reflective journal:

"I feel torn in my language. I want my interpretations to be speculative, tentative, incomplete as a postmodern writer, but also assertive and knowledgeable as a feminist writer. Feminists would be against passivity, but also against imposing meaning on others. I want a balance between acknowledging my partial knowledge and appearing to be unknowledgeable. I am working on it (March, 2001).

It was a challenging process to make sense of the large volume of information I obtained. I necessarily had to limit the large volume of data through my choice of themes. Miles and Huberman (1994) explained, "A chronic problem of qualitative research is that it is done chiefly with words, not with numbers. Words are fatter than numbers and usually have multiple meanings" (p. 56).

Lather (2000) addressed the task of data analysis. She said, "The key is to use the "breakdown of meaning and the illusiveness of signification" (p. 5) to foster our capacity to notice the vantage of the other and the obligation of our own implication" (p. 3). I used my

inability to put my finger on the participants' meaning to enhance my recognition of the difference between their perspective and my interpretation. Lather also emphasized that it is vital not to stop interpreting while we also understand our impotence to reflect an original Truth. This encouraged me to continue my efforts in data analysis without resorting to hopelessness.

My research perspective was seen in the data analysis as I used quotes to support both my descriptions and interpretations. In this way, I more validly portrayed participants as Lather (1999) suggested. Quotes also assisted me in getting out of the way of what participants had to say and created a more balanced design by providing both my voice and the participants' voices.

While engaged in data analysis, I thought more about using a feminist methodology. In my reflective journal I wrote:

By calling my methodology feminist am I privileging, valorizing, essentializing a methodology that uses the feminist principles of collaboration, vulnerability, and subjectivity? Am I gendering a specific methodology that would be better considered a general sort of methodology? (July, 2000).

In this turmoil, I turned to what Davaney (1987) said of looking at the consequences of a judgment. I found no harmful consequences to calling my methodology, "feminist." Being a



postmodern feminist does not prevent me from making pragmatic, provisional judgments such as labeling my methodology. I determined that I should not be prevented from making any judgments at all because of the risk of essentializing. I cannot become paralyzed by that possibility.

By using a postmodern feminist methodology I found that providing both description and interpretation allowed the reader to more easily judge the data for her/himself. This aided me in refraining from essentialism. By using both description and interpretation, I supported the multiplicity, plurality, and differences that are so vital in postmodern feminist research (Tong, 1998). This methodology also prompted me to use a reflective research journal. The use of this journal was not only helpful for data trustworthiness and data analysis but it also created a way of bringing myself into the research. I removed some of the distance created in traditional research and celebrated my subjectivity.

In keeping with this methodology, my purpose was not to make generalizations as I reported my interpretations and conclusions. Stake (1995) mentioned, "The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization" (p. 8). The emphasis was on the uniqueness of each case and understanding what might be similar among the cases. I hope I have provided detail, context,

and insights that inform the practice of counselor education. My goal was, “not necessarily to map and conquer the world but to sophisticate the beholding of it” (Stake, 1995, p. 43).

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

I aimed to protect participants by informing them of the purpose of the research. I described the procedures they could expect, such as participation in at least one individual interview for one hour, their possible participation in up to three additional individual interviews to expand on or clarify what they have said, and participation in one group interview. Participants were informed of foreseeable risks and discomforts, which included the possibility of reevaluating their belief systems due to increased awareness of spirituality. I also suggested the possibility of gaining a better understanding of their perspective on spirituality which can help in their own lives and may, in turn, result in benefits to the clients they see and the students they supervise as a potential benefit of participation.

Participants learned that all information was to be kept confidential and that only Dr. Baldwin and myself had access to the transcriptions. Audiotapes will be destroyed upon completion of the dissertation. Pseudonyms are used in the current study and will be

used in any future summaries or publications. Participants understood that their participation was voluntary and that she/he could withdraw at any time. I assumed that by volunteering, participants had a reasonable understanding of the risks and were willing to expose themselves to these risks. No participants have withdrawn from the study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCHER'S DISCLOSURE**

I include a disclosure about myself so that the reader is informed regarding my biases as best I understand them. My current biases include an interest in the inclusion of spirituality as an area of education for counselors. This bias has come about through personal and professional experiences. An important personal experience showed me how vital spirituality is during difficult times. In 1996, I became very ill. I lost 20 pounds and had difficulty walking short distances. I weighed 98 pounds when I went to the doctor. After a few months, I recovered and started gaining some weight. This experience taught me to hold on to my spiritual strength within and to be compassionate of others who are experiencing challenges.

Professional experiences have also shown me the importance of spirituality. As a counselor I have seen clients who have had heart-wrenching experiences where spirituality has been a key resource. I led a group for survivors of domestic violence. These women were the essence of what having "spiritual guts" is all about. I helped others to rely on their spiritual insight while I facilitated a group for couples on using their intuition. In my three years of volunteer service at the Crisis Line, I spoke with many suicidal

callers. This showed me what can happen when people lose sight of purpose in life. As a mediator at a family court, I assisted divorcing couples as they worked out child custody plans. This experience brought home for me how bitterness and hatred can crush the spiritual core.

My perspective thoroughly influences this research. In reflecting on my perspective for this study, I recall being twelve years old and asking myself, is this all there is? I thought there must be more to life than kids going to school and parents going to work. I wanted something more even at twelve. My thoughts on the meaning and purpose of life prompted me to study philosophy in college. I thrived in this exchange of ideas. Yet I also wanted to affect others' lives. I felt that devoting myself to philosophy might be rather selfish. Spending all that time in my head and writing philosophical arguments would not affect others' lives in a positive way as much as another route might. During my undergraduate years, I decided to explore psychology as a path to examining my own thoughts and feelings and those of others.

I found my niche in the counseling profession as a graduate student. Counseling allowed me to take a non-pathological route to helping. In addition, I found existential counseling as a way to include my philosophical perspective. More recently, I have turned

to transpersonal psychology as a theoretical grounding for my clinical work and supervision of counseling students.

My journey to this doctoral degree has been a substantial piece of my epistemological growth. I expected that I would fit myself into the quantitative mode of research that was considered by many to be appropriately rigorous. I thought at least I could do a descriptive study, since this was the only quantitative design I was somewhat interested in. I was surprised and overjoyed to find that qualitative research is accepted in my program. So many doctoral students I meet at conferences say that while a qualitative dissertation is not forbidden in their departments, it is understood that if you were to choose this option your life would be made very difficult.

I began to examine qualitative research paradigms. As I looked at postmodernism I was excited. It seemed so fresh, rebellious, and complicated. I appreciated the ideas of subjectivity, multiple meanings, discourse, and deconstruction. It also satisfied my philosophical leanings as it is rooted in French philosophy.

As I investigated postmodernism, my interest in feminism deepened as well. I discovered postmodern feminism which allows for each person to be a feminist in her/his own way. I appreciated this idea because I had always thought I was “doing” feminism wrong

with the previous feminist paradigms. My beliefs just didn't quite fit with the beliefs of liberal or radical feminism. Postmodern feminism is suspicious of knowledge claims, as I am. It advocates transforming society through writing. Through this paradigm, I have recognized how important it is not to define someone in only one way. I am appreciating the multiplicity and differences among us. Postmodern feminism has unsettled my settled beliefs. I have benefited from seeing the competition between discourses through the creation of new ways of thinking. There is no going back once this process has begun.

I came to the decision that postmodern feminism would serve as the theoretical grounding for my dissertation. Using this paradigm, I wrote in first person and shared personal experiences. I worked to hear what my research participants were saying, while I understood that there was some ambiguity that I could not get beyond. I did not fully know or understand their experience because I did not live it. I lost the pretension of being an expert. I was human and vulnerable. I delighted in my own subjectivity.

In the following sections, I describe in detail how postmodernism and postmodern feminism have influenced my perspective.

## **Researcher's Perspective and Postmodernism**

I agree with postmodern researchers who have found logocentrism to be problematic. Logocentrism is the belief that there is a fixed, singular, logical order or Truth that can be found (Derrida, 1976). As a postmodernist, I find every meaning is historically contingent and contextually bound. Logocentricism relies on duality or opposites. Yet there is meaning that does not fit into dualistic categories. Rather than using either/or categories, I choose to use a both/and approach (Derrida, 1978). For example, rather than seeing a person as a male or female, one can have characteristics of both. Likewise, rather than seeing a person as spiritual or religious, one can have characteristics of both.

I suspect, as Derrida found, that we cannot overcome the ambiguity that necessarily exists between an object and our perception. A gap between reality and our perception of it is inevitable. Nevertheless, I found I could use the concept of multiple meanings/realities to create options so that neither the participant nor I was pigeonholed within one box that does not suit us. Multiplicity was helpful for reminding myself that I must not assert my perspective as Truth.

Weedon (1987) found the postmodern concept, multiple meanings attractive. She said, "...discourses ...are in competition



for meaning. It is the conflict between these discourses which creates the possibility of new ways of thinking and new forms of subjectivity” (p. 139). I looked for the multiple meanings of spirituality, which were generated by discourse. Through this awareness of multiple meanings, new ways of considering spirituality came about.

For postmodernists, and Derrida (1978) in particular, language does not provide us with the essence or meanings of objects or concepts; it provides us with one description from which many descriptions could be construed. For example, the word spirituality describes many things, rather than having one singular essence or meaning. Knowledge of how language is problematic rather than essentialistic assisted me in seeing the many descriptions of spirituality.

Objectivity is not possible for the postmodernist. Since there is no singular Truth, subjectivity rules. Within subjectivity, contradictions and changes are expected. I am bound by my historicity and linguisticity (Heidegger, 1962). I am subjective as I interpret meaning from my own context. I cannot objectify language and history from myself because they are inseparable parts of my existence. It is part of my nature to interpret my experiences through

my language and history (Souza & Do, 1999). Through my research, I acknowledged and appreciated my subjectivity.

I want to add an important caution about my subjectivity. It could be said that due to my emphasis on subjectivity, I am relativistic in that all perspectives are equally important. Yet, I am not relativistic in this way. Scheurich (1997) explained postmodern relativism well. He said, "I intend to signal that this postmodernist version of relativism is not 'anything goes' because there are always social and historical constraints on what is allowed, though what is allowed is always open to challenge and change...this postmodernist relativism is social and not individual" (p. 33). Whatever is supported and considered Truth will be judged by social standards not individual, therefore, postmodern relativism can be referred to as social relativism.

Scheurich further stated, "...historically 'anything goes' is never possible. What is possible...is always embedded in historical conditions" (p. 39). Whatever perspective prevails or is even contemplated is always linked to social acceptability. Perspectives are also not equal due to the inequality created by the power attached to some viewpoints. He explained, "Truth is not power-free; it is power-laden" (p. 34).

Attending to the idea of inequality in postmodern relativism, Scheurich explained, "Some sort of social relativist or postmodernist epistemology is necessary but certainly not a romanticized 'everyone is equal' one or an 'all positions are equal' one. A contentious, self-critical pluralism ...of shifting coalitions and conflicts, might be best" (p. 40). I find that social relativism as described by Scheurich accurately reflects the characteristics of my subjectivity.

### **Researcher's Perspective on Reconciling Spirituality and Postmodernism**

I had tremendous difficulty reconciling my belief in the essence of all things, which is central to my spirituality, and the position of postmodernism on logocentrism. Believing in an essence can be interpreted as belief in a fixed, single Truth. Yet, I have come to see logocentrism as focusing on duality or opposites. I propose that my belief in an essence is not fixed or singular and does not relate to duality or have an opposite. Essence as I see it, does not have an opposite. The essence is not fixed because it changes appearance. It is not singular because it can be viewed in multiple ways.

I should explain in more detail what I think about the essence so that you have a clearer picture. The essence is located

everywhere. Everything we look at, including ourselves, has the essence within it. It is in every molecule, every strand of hair, each book, each picture frame, and each person. This essence can take on physical characteristics temporarily; this would include my body, inanimate objects, plants, and animals. When my body dies, my essence lives on; it never dies. The essence is the source of love, wisdom, and creative inspiration. There is a universal connection among all things (people, plants, animals, inanimate objects, etc). Because of this universal connection I am you and you are I. We share the same core essence. We are not separate; we are one. Ruether (1983) described the essence as the divine that surrounds us and exists in spirit and matter.

Another way to speak of the essence is through the concepts of immanence and transcendence. By immanence, I mean the essence is in everything, throughout everything. By transcendence, I mean it is more than everything is. McFague (1987), who called this essence God, said, "Such universal immanence is but one side of God's presence: the other is worldly transcendence" (p. 185). In other words, McFague saw God as immanent and transcendent.

For example, I see the immanence of the essence in my daughter, my plants, my body, my cats, my desk, and the trees outside. At the same time I believe the essence is transcendent; it is

more than my daughter, my plants, my body, my cats, my desk, and the trees outside. The essence is both immanent and transcendent.

In particular, I relate the concept of our transcendent essence to the idea that I am more than my body or personality. While I usually think of the essence as being formless, I believe the essence is unlimited and can take a form such as a body. Because the essence is more than my body, even when trauma occurs to the body of a person, one does not lose their essence. When brain activity ceases, the essence is still there. When a person is born without a brain, the essence is still there. The essence is more than our bodies, including the brain.

I was born recognizing my essence. As a baby I recognized my essence. It is most natural for me to recognize my essence. This recognition could have become lost until my death when I would have clearly recognized my essence. Occasionally, I lose my essence as I am influenced by society's discourses and become pulled in different directions, away from my essence. Discourse is another way of describing my experience of society.

McLaren (1999) described discourse as "...myths which oppress and marginalize" (p. 51). Societal discourses interfere with the recognition of my essence. As I have grown spiritually, I have

reconnected with my essence. My essence has always been with me, but I tend to forget this through my experience of society.

There exists the question of where this essence was before my body came into being. Since the essence is more than my body, it exists independent of my body (it is transcendent) as well as within my body (it is immanent). Before I was born, the essence existed in what I call the spiritual realm. I was a part of this spiritual realm before I was born. I do not easily understand this spiritual realm and it can be difficult to explain; this is because I went through a process of forgetting this realm when I was born.

As Socrates described in the Theaetetus, all knowledge is a process of recollection (Benardete, 1986). As I go through my life, I can recall the knowledge of the spiritual realm. In this realm, I easily recognize my essence. I had a veil of forgetfulness around myself until I went through spiritual development. I became aware of this veil of forgetfulness and choose to remove it; in doing so I recognized my essence. The essence then, existed in the spiritual realm, the realm I once existed in as well, before I was born. After physical death, I will return to this spiritual realm.

There are two schools of thought on the essence in relation to change. One school sees it as unchanging; the other sees it as changing. Heraclitus, an ancient Greek philosopher, saw the

essence as changing. He said, "On those who enter the same rivers, ever different waters flow" (Barnes, 1987, p. 116). Another school of thought saw the essence as unchanging. "Truth is unalterable, eternal and unambiguous. It can be unrecognized but it cannot be changed" (Anonymous, 1996). I find a middle ground between the polarities of a changing or unchanging essence. I think the essence changes appearance because people have different experiences. The essence can also be defined in multiple ways.

Further reconciling postmodernism and my spirituality, both view the individual as being in relation to others, society, history, and culture. Neither is purely individualistic. In describing postmodern spirituality, Griffin (1988) stated, "The relations one has with one's body, one's larger natural environment, one's family, and one's culture are...constitutive of one's very identity" (p. 14). For me, spirituality often involves interconnection in my relation to others and my environment. Modernity focused attention on the individual, while spirituality and postmodernism find context to be vitally related to the individual.

Modernism separated humankind from nature, which led to a considerable emphasis on duality (Descartes, trans. 1986; Griffin, 1988). Postmodernism and spirituality are non-dualistic (McFague, 1987). The Upanishads, which are Hindu religious texts, stated the

futility of dualism. "However you exert yourself in dialectic, you will consume your labour in vain" (Radhadkrishnan, 1978, p. 590).

Postmodernism chooses multiplicity over dualism. "Postmodernists characteristically welcome a religiously pluralistic society" (Griffin, 1988, p. 19). Neither postmodernism nor my spirituality supports dualism.

Postmodernism supports the both/and position. In this way, postmodernism allows for the idea of an immanent and transcendent essence, which is central to my spirituality. Griffin (1988) explained, "...constructive postmodernists describe...naturalistic panentheism, according to which the world is present in deity and deity is present in the world" (p. 17).

I find several commonalities between postmodernism and my spirituality. The essence is compatible with postmodernism as it takes on multiple meanings and is not fixed. Both postmodernism and spirituality view the individual as being in relation and are non-dualistic. An immanent and transcendent essence is congruous with the both/and position of postmodernism. While postmodernism and spirituality are still somewhat ambiguously related, I have found enough common ground to be comfortable.



## **Researcher's Perspective and Postmodern Feminism**

Others and myself have found the traditional paradigm of positivistic research to be male-oriented. Fiorenza (1990) said, "The standard Western intellectual and scientific paradigm is androcentric, that is, male centered and patriarchal...far from being objective or descriptive, androcentric texts and knowledge produce the historical silence and invisibility of women" (p. 58). Since I could not find a place in positivism and did not want to find a place there, I explored different paths including postmodern feminism. It is critical that the paradigm I choose allows me to speak of what I see as important and is respectful of the research participants. I found this in postmodern feminism.

Postmodernism may appear to contradict feminism since postmodernism does not recognize essentialistic categories such as gender, race, and class. Yet contradictions and tension are supported by postmodernism. The both/and position of postmodernism would allow for one to be both a postmodernist and a feminist. Since multiple meanings are encouraged in postmodernism, postmodern feminism can be seen as one of the multiple meanings of feminism.

Tong (1998) gave a helpful overview of postmodern feminism. She explained that postmodern feminists do not promote one

overarching explanation or solution for women's oppression. They believe in multiplicity, plurality, and difference. "Postmodern feminists invite each woman...to become the kind of feminist she wants to be. There is no single formula for being a good feminist" (p.193). This applies to my research, as there is no single way to define spirituality. There are many ways to be a spiritual person.

Most postmodern feminists excel at theory and strive to write something new about women. Postmodern feminists emphasize the oppression of women through the limiting thoughts of society/patriarchy. They also appreciate the concept of otherness. Tong said, "The condition of otherness enables women to stand back and criticize the norms...that the dominant culture...seeks to impose on everyone" (p. 195). Patriarchy often justifies subordination due to difference. It is precisely this difference that allows women to see the injustice of domination. Otherness allows for the plurality and difference which postmodern feminists stress as important. I experience this otherness as a woman in a patriarchal society. I also encounter otherness as a postmodern feminist researcher attempting to escape limiting thoughts and listen to the voices of counseling students which have not yet been heard on the topic of spirituality.

As a postmodern feminist, Cixous (1981) challenged women to write themselves out of the world men constructed for women.

Feminine writing is the beginning of a substantial change in social and cultural standards. As a feminine writer, I hope to contribute to the movement to include spirituality as an area of education for counselors.

Cixous also urged women to put themselves into words. She revealed that women transform our patriarchal society through writing. As I put my voice and the participants' voices into words, I am contributing to a transformation of counselor education. Cixous believed women have the desire and ability to lead the Western world out of the dualism of dominance and submission. Of feminine writing Cixous (1995) said, "...a feminine text can't be predicted...isn't knowable and is therefore very disturbing...it is really the text of the unforeseeable" (p. 175). Feminine writing passes on what is cut out by the belief that there is only one Truth.

Subjectivity comes up as an important concept in postmodernism and postmodern feminism. Another postmodern feminist, Irigaray (1985), advocated bringing subjectivity into science by using words like I, you, and we in our writing. This helps to displace the dominant patriarchal society. Using the postmodern feminist paradigm, I take Irigaray's suggestion of bringing subjectivity into science by using words like I, you, and we in my research. I

include my personal experiences. In doing so, I make myself human rather than an objective expert.

Using subjectivity in writing involves standing by one's perspective. Irigaray stands by her perspective that seeing God as woman is vital. Irigaray (1996) explained that men have created a male God. She saw a feminine God as necessary. She said, "...as long as woman lacks a divine made in her image she cannot establish her subjectivity or achieve a goal of her own" (p. 476). A woman is forced to comply with models that do not suit her. God is the other women cannot do without. Without a female God, there is no one to inspire or lead women.

I agree with Irigaray in that a female God is vital. By envisioning a female God, a woman sees part of herself in aspects of the world. How one sees God often correlates with how she/he views the world. A female God promotes the image of a caring, connected God rather than a punishing, fearsome God. Women have been deeply betrayed by religions that teach them they are inferior. Christ and Paslow (1979) stated, "Religion must be reformed or reconstructed to support the full dignity of women" (p. 1). Yet I differ from Irigaray as I think that a woman can be inspired and establish her subjectivity without experiencing a female God. The experience of a female God would greatly assist in inspiring a

woman and in helping her to establish her identity, but it is not the only way.

Another prolific writer making important contributions to postmodern feminism is Lather. Lather is a neo-marxist feminist who has been active in the educational field. Lather and Smithies (1997) wrote *Troubling the Angels*, a unique book of split text, with the research participant's voices through the top half and the researchers' voices through the bottom half. They wrote, "this is also a book about researchers both getting out of the way and getting in the way...this book is about the limits of what can be said and known about the lives of others" (p. xiv). They strove to make the research collaborative and to avoid the role of an objective expert.

Lather explained some of the difficulties she had as she said, "The weight of the indignity of being studied, the violence of objectification required by the academic pursuit...this almost paralyzed me as I entered the room" (p. 154). I also see that participants become objectified as researchers study them. I encountered some discomfort with my actions as an investigator. I felt that I was putting the participants in a vulnerable place with the knowledge that professors might identify them. I rationalized that their participation was voluntary and that if they were very concerned about being identified they could choose not to participate or to

withdraw, yet I still felt concerned. I attempted to maintain the portrayal of the participants as humans with individual perspectives, yet some objectification still took place. I reminded myself throughout the research that participants might find benefits in considering their ideas on spirituality. The knowledge that this research may also influence the education of counseling students on spirituality also assisted me in easing my discomfort.

Lather (1998) was struggling with the postmodernist critiques of the central feminist concept of praxis. To many, postmodernism does not appear to allow for praxis. It is a delusion of authority to think one can empower another person. Lather attempted to reconcile the concept of praxis within postmodernism. To maintain the concept of praxis she wrote, "I call on Derrida's practice of *sous rature* or writing under erasure; keeping something visible but crossed out, to avoid universalizing or monumentalizing it" (p. 6). She sought an unaggrandized praxis as informed by postmodernist critiques. "My interest is in a praxis that attends to poststructuralist suspicions of rationality, philosophies of presence and universalizing projects" (p. 8). Lather maintained a realistic praxis aided by a suspicious awareness. I see that praxis functioned in my research as I informed the practice of counselor education in regard to spirituality. As Lather cautioned, I avoided unnecessarily

aggrandizing my focus on praxis and attended to suspicions of universalization.

Lather (1999) considered hard questions on the practice of research. Investigating validity she said, “The key is respectful and appreciative validity practices...such practices help us resist putting the other quickly and firmly within habitual interpretive molds and, instead, foster an explicit tentativeness” (p. 2). In order to more validly portray the participants, I used their words in establishing catalytic, paralogical, rhizomatic, and voluptuous validity, which I addressed in chapter two. In addition, I compared emerging themes to the data as a whole and exercised caution around my conclusions.

Britzman (1997), a postmodern feminist, examined the troubling concept of voice. She said, “We find in educational research the voice of the researcher, the researched, and even the reader. And even as a voice may well want to be left alone, first it must pass through the stages of having itself heard” (p. 31). She contended that voice has been elevated within our research and that we risk essentializing voice. I was careful not to assume that my research was authentic just because I used participants’ voices. In using the paradigm of postmodern feminism, I faced the apparent complications in research, such as the temptation to essentialize voice.

Postmodernism and postmodern feminism provided the epistemological and methodological framework for my research. In applying these paradigms, I disrupted what was assumed and wrote in a nontraditional voice. I supported differing and individual ways of finding meaning and lost the pretension of being an expert. I was humble, vulnerable, and became inspired by ambiguity and tension. I created an awareness of the complexity of the issue of spirituality in counselor education.

### **The Researcher's Perspective on Reconciling Spirituality and Feminism**

There are some aspects of spirituality and feminism that I have given considerable thought. Flinders (1998) put her finger exactly on what has been troubling me regarding spiritual and feminist values. She described spiritual values as including; being silent, putting others needs first, not identifying as a body, and turning inward. She described feminist values as including; finding voice, identifying needs, reclaiming one's body, and moving about freely without fear. These values appear to be in direct contradiction. I have come closer to a resolution of these apparent conflicts by escaping the duality created through opposition. I have chosen to place the following on continuums:



Silence -----Voice

Self last -----Self first

Meet no desires-----Meet all desires

Detach from the world-----Be completely in the world

I do not have to be completely silent or constantly voicing my opinions, I can find a middle ground between these. I find the same resolution for the other values. It is vital to balance these rather than going to the dualistic extremes.

Farley (1976) described four sources of sexual inequality within the Christian tradition. These included: the failure to find femininity in God, the insistence that woman is derivative from and hence secondary to man, the assumption that woman is characterized by passivity, and the tendency to identify women with bodiliness as opposed to transcendent mind. I identify with feminist theologians who are working to deconstruct the old traditions and construct new traditions that promote sexual equity in religion.

Loades (1990) said, "Feminist theologians are optimists, in the sense that they hope that old stories can be retold and new ones invented to verbalize God in an inclusively human manner" (p. 10). I have found the work of feminist theologians helpful in reconciling my conflicts around spirituality and feminism as the denigration of

women in religion has been revealed and change has been occurring.

As Lather (1998) worked to reconcile the concept of praxis within postmodernism, I want to further reconcile my concept of essence within postmodern feminism. As I mentioned earlier, essence could be interpreted as a fixed, single Truth. Following Lather's lead, I chose to use Derrida's idea of writing under erasure to maintain my idea of essence just as Lather maintained praxis through this idea. In this way, I did not essentialize essence, but sustained a healthy suspiciousness of it while I was able to see it but also keep it crossed out, and write with essence under erasure.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS AND REFLECTIONS**

In this chapter, I present themes from Abby, Tam, Beth, Helen, and Gabe individually (intra case analysis). After individual themes are described, I explore themes common across participants (cross case analysis). Pseudonyms are used throughout the text to protect the participants' identities.

#### **Intra Case Analysis**

##### **Abby**

##### ***Self Description***

Abby described herself as a 37 year-old Caucasian.

I look 25 probably and I probably act 25...I spent until the age of 18 [outside of the US]. I'm a doctoral student in counselor education. I spent seven years in the field working as a counselor. My upbringing was very strict. It was a productive household. I was an athlete most of my life, a good student. I didn't cause a lot of trouble. I followed the rules. Since I left home at 18, I've chosen not to follow the rules all the time and that in a way to me relates to spirituality, because I have really done

things to broaden what my life is about, what my life means.

Rules seem to be a source of irritation for Abby. She explains that she has difficulty with religion, in part I think because of the rules. From her words, I have interpreted that for Abby, life may not be best lived by following the rules.

Abby shared some of her religious background.

I was baptized Anglican. I was in the Church of England and my kindergarten was in a church. When I was in my 20s, running around, I did go to church for a couple years. I went to different churches trying to...find someone that I could believe or a lecture that I didn't react to. I don't consider myself religious and I don't follow any guidelines from any organized religion. I have trouble with anything like that.

### *Spirituality*

I asked Abby what spirituality meant to her.

I guess what really comes to mind is...why am I here? What is life about? What am I supposed to do here? Where am I supposed to be, how am I supposed to act? I see spirituality as much more individual [than religion]. It is deciding which beliefs I'm going to take and which ones I'm going to let go of and living day by day with those. My choice [to be spiritual] is coming from more than just what someone stands up and says publicly or what I read in a

book. It's also from what I feel from within or what I feel from other people. It just seems much more flexible to me than religion... spirituality is also about pain. That's what my experience in life has been.

The spiritual path for Abby has been what I would say is painful with much questioning and seeking. I think Abby sees the spiritual path as a conscious, individual decision of what to believe in. Spirituality seems to create the basis of Abby's life work. "A lot of the work I do is spiritual...spirituality is really why we're here."

### *Religion*

Religion does not appear to be Abby's favorite subject.

I do a lot of driving and I flip around the radio stations. So much [religion] is talked about. It's all coming at me, what I consider religion. There are several people spewing stuff on how we should live. It's pretty intimidating to talk about something when you don't really know what to say about it and someone else, they've got their little canned performance down. I think when someone belongs to a camp, I consider them camps, the different religions, and they go to church, they do have a canned presentation that they can talk about and I find that intimidating. So it encourages silence at least on my part.

Abby does not appear to appreciate the dogmatism of some religions. This might relate to what I have interpreted as her disdain for rules.

I have a hard time with religion. I have a hard time being told what to do. I think because of my upbringing. I'm not going to follow the rules and so if someone writes something...or let's just take like the celestine prophecy for example. I consider that a religion. Someone wrote this text and hundreds of thousands of people decided it was the meaning of life. I have an immediate reaction when a lot of people like something or when things are made easy. Like if you read this, you follow these guidelines, if you have these values, then everything will be all right. I guess that relates exactly to my upbringing. I don't think that anyone can figure it out for me. I don't think I'll ever find a book even the Bible, the Koran, or anything that's going to help me. It can't be that easy.

I see Abby relating the spiritual path to pain and difficulty as she tells us it can't be easy. She appears to know that no one can give her the answer, and she wouldn't want anyone to give her the answer; I think she will find her own way.

### *Spiritual Experience*

Abby described the experience of her grandmother's spirit visiting her on what Abby later learned was the night of her death.

My grandmother is my mum's mum and she was the last of my grandparents alive. I think it was three years ago last month that she died at 93. She was the person I was closest to in my life, closer than my parents. We took 2 trips to Europe. We were very closely connected, although she lived a long way from me. She was put in a home for old people who couldn't take care of themselves. The last year of her life she was miserable. She would cry on the phone and my grandmother was extremely stoic, tough. She had been in bed for months. When I went to visit her with my ex-husband, she got out of bed for 2 days. She sang and she told stories. It was a really amazing experience. She started talking about getting better for the spring, saying she'll go another year. Then about a month after that she had a couple more strokes and then she died. I knew she wasn't well. I knew she had another stroke and she couldn't talk, but one night I woke up and it was about 11 o'clock at night. I remembered what happened the next morning, it was like a dream but it wasn't really a dream. It felt like it had happened and I very rarely remember my dreams. She had come to me and she had given me this big hug and she said she loved me. It's pretty amazing. I remember waking up that morning and thinking grandma was here in the middle of the night. It was really amazing. That afternoon I got a call from my mother or my dad saying that she had died in the night. So I didn't know she had died when I had this experience. I just know she came and said goodbye. It's really comforting. I do think of her as with me. Lately I've been praying, which is a very odd thing for me to do because I don't really believe that anyone's looking out for me but I do pray to my grandmother for guidance as if there's a God. I don't know if there's a God or not. If I talk to anyone it would be her because I do feel like she's around.

When I asked Abby what about this experience made it spiritual, she said, "There was a connection at some other level, other than reality." Abby seemed to be very close to her grandma and it may be that her visit in spirit helped Abby to know she was okay. Abby seemed to have recognized her visit as a spiritual connection and saw that connection as continuing as she said she looks to her grandma for guidance in the same way many people look to God for guidance.

The next spiritual experience Abby discussed involved learning that she would not live happily ever after by following all the rules given to her by her parents.

I think for the first 18 years of my life, my purpose was to go to school, to follow my parents' rules. One of the rules was to pick a sport. Whatever I did, I was to succeed. Life was about finding some sort of sport or profession or whatever it was and pursuing it. You would pursue it and you would achieve it. You would marry someone, and you would live happily ever after, just like my parents. I learned that was not true. That's the lesson I learned when I was 17 because of the Olympic boycott. I had done everything that I was supposed to do. That's what my life was about, I was a gymnast and that was my whole identity. My meaning in my life was I was a gymnast. Then I learned that I really wasn't a gymnast...that was no longer an option. It wasn't a profession that God had anymore. So I ran around for at least ten years. I think I still run around, trying to figure out what life is about. Is there a God? Is there some one out there? Is there a force out there



that can help us with what we're supposed to be doing here?

Abby appeared disillusioned when life did not go as planned.

I think it was a painful experience to lose her identity as a swimmer.

I feel betrayed. My parents are brilliant but they didn't really know anything about the meaning of life. It was this setup for life. As if life is about going outside yourself, not listening to your inner self, not listening to emotions or anything. It's just practical, eating your breakfast, getting up, going to school or going to work, earning your money, coming home, being with your partner, having kids, going to bed. I wish I could do that. Maybe other people can but it's much more difficult than that.

It seems Abby found that the path her parents wanted for her did not work out. She appears to be in search of a more meaningful and fulfilling path.

I don't know why I'm here and I'd really like to know. It used to be once a month, now it's every 2 weeks I have an existential crisis. It's at least an entire day about why I'm here, what the meaning of life is. Where am I going? What am I doing? It's awful. I cannot answer it and no one can answer it for me. I think I've been doing some sort of spiritual work for a long time. I just can't figure it out.

How many of us really know what the meaning of life is and what our purpose is? I think Abby shows us the distress this

questioning process creates. Pain sometimes causes clients to make necessary changes in their lives. When a person becomes uncomfortable enough, she/he may seek to change the situation. This pain and discomfort can bring growth.

*"I Can't Articulate It"*

It appeared to be difficult for Abby to describe how people are connected spiritually with one another.

I think I connect with people on a spiritual level, on some other plane. I can't articulate it...I do think there's another level that connects everyone. I would like to be able to access that so that I could articulate it. I know I access it; I would just like to be able to ask a question and have an answer come back in something I would understand.

It looked like it was also challenging for Abby to explain how her spiritual journey might be more than what can be seen on the surface level. "People always...think that what they see is what they get but...I kind of see my whole life as a spiritual journey. I just don't know how to say it or how to articulate it."

### *Counseling Clients*

Abby said she saw the work of a counselor as spiritual. “I think it's an important concept that we work spiritually with people. I see my work as a counselor as spiritual.” She expanded on this in the group interview. “I think [spirituality] is a part of everything I do. It involves helping people understand what their lives mean to them. For me, it's the base of all I do...so that's the way I operate as a counselor.” Barret (1995) also found his work as a counselor to be spiritual. He said, “My work as a counselor is one of the places in my life that is the most sacred” (p. 108). Barret explained that counseling can be a spiritual experience as he said, “...the process of counseling enables many to tap into an inner source that, previously denied or lost to awareness, imbues life with abundant meaning and purpose” (p. 109).

Abby mentioned that she has found not knowing the meaning of life has assisted her in working with clients because she cannot impress her beliefs about the meaning of life upon clients. “I don't know what the meaning of life is and I don't know why I'm here and what I'm supposed to do...and it has helped me work with people because I can't tell them. One of my beliefs about counseling is I can't tell them what to do.” Abby might appreciate Smith's (1995) description of psycho-palliative counseling. The psycho-palliative

theory is other-centered, non-evaluative, and non-judgmental.

Through the use of psycho-palliative counseling, the counselor seeks to care for the other, just for the sake of caring.

While counselors should not tell clients what to do, Bergin (1980a;1980b) supported consideration of spiritual and religious values in therapy. Bergin considered values to be a pervasive part of the therapy process. He contended that science has lost its authority as a dominating source of truth and that values are inherent in science even though it has attempted to be objective.

Abby described an aspect of her work as a school counselor. She said, "It seemed like an unusually high percentage of people wore this shirt, 'what would Jesus do?' It was right on their shirt, so it was an opening but I don't know the Bible. I thought I was not appropriate to work with them." Not being knowledgeable about the Bible may have prevented Abby from using this shirt statement as an opening to discuss spirituality with students. Mattson (1994) claimed that counselors should not be afraid of spiritual or religious issues which arise in the field of counseling. He also recommended that counseling students be exposed to spiritual and religious issues just as they are exposed to other multicultural issues.

Abby explained that she has not discussed religion with clients because she has not found religion to be helpful in her own

life. "I know [religion] was addressed in assessments in some agencies I worked for. I know I never addressed it because I would just look at it and say oh I don't believe in it, all it does is let you down. So my own bias was just not to even deal with it because I didn't consider it important because it hasn't helped me" (p. 4). I suspect that many people who happen to be counselors have had negative experiences with religion and these experiences may prevent them from addressing it with clients as I think it did for Abby.

### *Counselor Education*

When I asked Abby if she thought spirituality should be included in counselor education, she said, "I think so, yes. I think that's what our work is." In considering how it should be included she said,

Well I'd like to say it should be required but I think people are less open to things that are imposed on them. I think a lot of people have an emotional reaction towards spirituality and some people equate it with religion but I don't. On the other hand, I don't think that should be a reason not to include things because we're worried that people won't be as open to it. I think to be responsible educators we should plant seeds for all facets of counseling and I consider [spirituality] a pretty important one.

Abby was concerned about requiring training on spirituality but thought it should be addressed.

Abby seemed to perceive religion as a taboo subject in counselor education. “I think it’s pervasive throughout the profession that it’s not okay to talk about some of those true, core values. I don’t think it’s safe these days to talk about anything that could be linked to religion. Religion has such a bad rap. But we’ve gone to the other extreme to not even including it.”

As we discussed including training for counselors on spirituality at universities, she said,

I know it would cause a lot of uproar because people define it in so many ways. I think when people in the community would hear that we are offering a course in spirituality, there would be a tendency to make an assumption that the university is preaching to people about values and this is the way life is and this is the way you should live it. I think it would be important to educate people about what the course would be about. And maybe that it’s not required, although I would hope it would be an important part of the curriculum somewhere.

Abby again appeared to support the inclusion of spirituality in the training of counselors while not requiring it.

## *Ethics*

From my perspective, Abby considered it an ethical matter for counselors to understand their own beliefs on spirituality. "It's important to know what spirituality means to us because I think we're better equipped to help people figure it out for themselves. We're likely to do less damage if we're aware of our own beliefs." I explore this contradiction Abby has made regarding knowing one's spirituality in chapter two under the data analysis section. Maher and Hunt (1993) also urged counselors to recognize their own definition of spirituality.

Abby thought counselors should disclose their beliefs on spirituality to clients since these beliefs influence how the counselor conducts sessions. "I think it's important for [counselors] to disclose what they believe. We're more likely to be ethical counselors if we know our values, whether they're a part of a religious doctrine or not. I think it's important to disclose those. That dictates how you do therapy. Then the [client] can choose."

Abby seemed to question whether spirituality could be taught and might see a course that imposed specific spiritual mandates on students as unethical.

I don't know if you can teach spirituality. I think it's important to have people figure it out for

themselves. It would be unethical if it were imposed on people. If there was a class on spirituality that said these are the ten commandments of [counseling], go out there and help your clients that way; that would be unethical.

### *Research Issues*

I strove to make each participant comfortable through the interviews. At the end of Abby's individual interview I said, "So I hope that you were able to feel comfortable." Abby responded, "Yeah I was a little nervous but I'm okay and I think I got more relaxed as we went. So I'm kind of like revved up now for this group thing" (p. 59). I enjoyed hearing her enthusiasm about the group interview.

### Tam

#### *Self Description*

Tam described himself as a 53 year-old Vietnamese American working as a counselor at a community college. He is also a doctoral student in counselor education. He gave some background information on his education and career path.



I came to the United States in 1978, so I have been here 22 years. I used to be a teacher in Vietnam. I was teaching for about ten years over there. I wanted to teach [in the US] but I did not have the credentials when I first came, so I couldn't teach. I had to work as a bus boy and as an assembler. Then I went back to school, got the training and became a mental health counselor. I got my master's degree in 1981. I almost got my master's degree in Vietnam, but due to collapse of Saigon, the advisor fled away so I couldn't finish my thesis, but I did all my coursework. After I got the degree in the United States, I started to work in a white-collar job, working in the public schools for four years. Then there was an opening [for a counselor] at the community college. I applied and got the job; I've been there for ten years. I will stay there until I retire in about four years. Then I plan to teach at universities.

Tam also explained where he is currently in his life's journey.

I feel like I have already achieved in life. My son is grown up. I own a home. I am happy with what I am doing now. I am helping students. I have a decent salary. I can survive. I can live sufficiently and happily. I want to help students and clients, but at the same time I know that I am moving away from that. I'm starting to look forward, to a more meaningful purpose in life, a spiritual purpose. I'm focusing more on how I can harmonize with nature, going back to my Buddha nature, as well as trying to discover God and paradise. Many of my activities right now are less and less earthly and more and more spiritual.

## *Spirituality*

I asked Tam how he defined spirituality. "Spirituality itself is something innate. It's an innate need or innate drive of human beings. Because of our human condition, we are limited. We have a need to transcend, to move on, to look at something above us or even something inside us that we haven't discovered" (p. 30). I think Tam might appreciate Chandler, Holden and Kolander (1992) definition of spirituality as, "...an innate capacity to...transcend one's current locus of centrality" (p.169).

Tam continued by describing the complementarities of Maslow and Chopra's views on spiritual development. Maslow is a psychologist who created the hierarchy of needs. Chopra is an East Indian medical doctor who described spiritual development. Tam appeared to respect both Maslow and Chopra's ideas on spirituality. He said,

Maslow talked about the need for self-actualization in later life. After you have met with all the other kinds of needs in life, you need to have something beyond life. It might be religion; it might be an ideal for you to serve. For me particularly, it's Buddhism and Taoism. These two religions help people who have already achieved things in life start to detach from life and understand more about the universe. In the East, for example, Deepak Chopra explained that the spirit is the last stage of the development of a human being. I believe

that [Maslow and Chopra's ideas] are complementary. If you look at Maslow's theory for example, he talks more of how you can meet your needs, from basic needs to safety needs and then belonging needs. After you meet with those types of needs you move onto esteem and achievement needs. Finally you start to think of spiritual needs. That's the final stage in life. From another point of view, Deepak Chopra talked about the stages of the innocent and the ego. The stage of the ego seems to be somewhat similar to Maslow's need for belonging. I think Maslow believes that you have a need to belong and it's a good way to try to attach to other people, to have somebody to care for. On the other hand, Deepak Chopra seems to talk more about the negative aspect of the belonging stage. He says the ego starts to be fearful, no longer innocent like the baby. You are afraid of separation from the mother. You are afraid of other people harming you instead of having the innocence of the previous stage. In my view, [Maslow and Chopra] are complementary. I think that both Maslow and Chopra talk about the two sides of being human. Maslow is more positive and Chopra is more negative. I believe in the yin and yang theory. I believe that we have to have both sides. The interesting point is that after you move to what Maslow calls esteem needs trying to get recognition, money, and fame, then you start to help other people too so that your self-esteem is enhanced. Similarly, Deepak Chopra talked about the stage of the achiever and the giver. You achieve things in life and then when you get enough for yourself you start to think about giving to other people your knowledge, your money, your charity, whatever. So [Maslow and Chopra's thinking] seems to be overlapped. However, in the East, it's a negative sense. You belong to the world. You don't see; you haven't seen the real things yet. You are still working in ignorance of what is meaningful in [the achiever] stage. While Maslow thinks that what we can

achieve in the world is significant. I think that both of them are right. It's just the dilemma of the yin and the yang. You always have something beyond and you always have something present, but they are complementary. Both of them talk about the spiritual need. I believe in both because my belief is that we have to compromise, we have to harmonize the two yin and yang factors.

### *Religion*

Tam explained that religion promotes spiritual awareness. “I think religion is something society creates, formal activities, procedures so that people can become more aware of the spiritual direction. Sometimes because of the social pressure religions may go astray. They may even go against spirituality.”

He also said a dangerous battle goes on among religions for the Truth, but added that religion is necessary to live fully.

There are many branches of Christianity and Buddhism; they even fight each other. They want to say that they own the Truth. With religious wars, people start to believe in something and impose that on other people. They do whatever they can to force other people to accept the kind of spirituality that they socialize. They believe what they think is the Truth can be the Truth for everybody else. So I do think that religions sometimes are very dangerous if we don't know our limitations. However, we need [religions], if we want to live a full life.

If there is only one Truth, which religion has it? I believe that there are multiple truths. I see each religion as having a truth, but not the Truth. As Tam said, a religion becomes dangerous when one thinks only their religion has the Truth.

Next, Tam contrasted the emphasis on external reliance in Christianity with the internal reliance in Buddhism.

People tend to look at things differently due to different experiences. In Christianity, people look for some external help to get to paradise. You have to rely on the savior. You have to rely on God, on Jesus Christ to help you. You cannot get to paradise by yourself because innately you are sinful. On the other hand, Buddhism teaches people to try to help themselves without relying on an external force. Yet Buddhism also talked about what they call shanga. That means the community would help you to become a Buddha. You have to rely on external forces. So if we just say one way or the other it's not true. All the time you have two factors involved. I think both [reliance on self and others] are the basic needs of a human being. We want to rely on ourselves but we know that we are limited. We also wish to rely on some external power or God. I believe that we need both. Due to culture or stage of life, we might focus more on either the internal or external to help ourselves. Again the yin and the yang interact.

I interpret Tam as saying that people can hold two differing points of view at once. Clients might feel both exhilarated and

nervous about an upcoming life event such as a marriage. They may also rely on themselves and others during difficult times.

Contrasting the absence of a god in Buddhism and the presence of a God in Christianity, Tam said, "In Buddhism, we don't have any God; that's just the nature of Buddha. In Christianity, we do have a God." However, Tam noted a commonality between Buddhism and Christianity. "The interesting part is that even in Buddhism everybody can be a Buddha. In Christianity, everybody is the image of God. Each religion emphasizes an aspect of a human being."

Tam described how the Vietnamese progress through the three religions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism.

It's kind of hard to explain to a Westerner because religions for a Westerner seem to be one, but for us there are three teachings. We combine Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. When I was younger, about 20 or 30, I was very, very Confucian. Confucianism advocates for engagement in life. You have to make a name. You have to become famous. You have to contribute to society. You have to help other people, according to your talents. A typical Vietnamese tends to be very Confucianist when he or she is younger in life. At the age of 30 or 40 they start to go away from Confucianism and move more toward Buddhism and Taoism which advocate for detachment from life and finding meaningful things beyond current life.

Tam found his escape from Vietnam prompted him to change his focus from Confucianism to Buddhism. “At the time when I escaped, I was still very Confucian. I was still trying to achieve. That's why I escaped, to find a better life, and to fight against Communism. But when I was in danger, Confucianism completely went away and I thought on Buddhism.” In escaping from Vietnam, Tam moved his attention from achievement in Confucianism to what I interpret as detachment in Buddhism.

Tam said that his wish was for Easterners and Westerners to learn from each other's religions.

I think that when Western people look at the East or Eastern people look at the West, we tend either to say the other side is better or the other side is worse. But as a person who has lived in the United States for more than 20 years and more than 30 years in Vietnam, I think we need to enhance the notion of complementary contributions of both cultures and religions. I think that in each of the religions there are a lot of good things as well as a lot of bad things. We can learn from each religion.

I suspect our clients, students, and world would be better off if we took Tam's advice of learning from each religion and appreciating the complementary aspects of religions.

## *Spiritual Experience*

Tam described two spiritual experiences. The first involved a problem with his sight and the second was his escape from Vietnam.

In 1991, I got a detached retina and I thought I might lose my vision. I was hospitalized and they did several surgeries on my eye. At that time I was so involved in the achieving stage. I was trying to get a better job, trying to buy a better car, and hoping to buy a home. I was involved so intensely in achieving, but then boom, the illness attacked me. Everything lost its meaning in life. Life became so absurd. What's the use of trying to accumulate everything and then become a blind person? I really experienced that life is absurd and you have no control over your destiny. It happened to me, one out of a hundred thousand people, and it just happened to me. I asked the physician, "why me?" He said, "I don't know why you, it just happened." I felt so bad at that time, helpless. I could not control my destiny. Some external force gave it to me, imposed it on me. Out of all of my friends, nobody got a detached retina. Why me? I asked that question several times and I started to see that I could not find the answer. It's just life. At that time I was thinking deeply about what I learned from Buddhism. It became revealed to me that being born is suffering. Getting older is suffering. Getting sick is suffering and dying is suffering. Those four noble truths are unavoidable truths in life. Nobody can avoid them. At that time I really experienced being sick and I started to think about all the golden paths and I looked at myself. I was more than 40 already and I started to expect aging. I know that it's unavoidable. Aging is unavoidable and it's suffering. I will have to die. I cannot just live forever. So I came to terms with Buddhism and



I could be calm. I found the meaning in Buddhism. I survived it and became okay.

Next, Tam explained how his spirituality helped him during his escape from Vietnam.

We were about three days and three nights on the ocean. We escaped in a small boat. The sea was pretty rough at that time. When I was lying in the boat, all I thought of was my ancestors, my parents, and a Buddha named Quan Yin. I couldn't believe in myself because I was totally out of control. I had to depend on some luck or some external force. Quan Yin is a female Buddha. She is famous for helping people in danger. I was praying to her. So you see that even in Buddhism we believe that sometimes we need external help.

Tam appeared to look outside himself for help in surviving his escape.

### *Counseling Clients*

Tam emphasized assisting clients in helping themselves. He also found it inevitable that he imposes some of his beliefs upon clients.

In terms of my counseling theory, I believe in Rogers, Maslow, and Buddhism. They are compatible in the sense that you respect the other person, your client, and you believe that they can help themselves. All you can do is facilitate their growth. I also am aware

of the fact that as a believer in spirituality, it's unavoidable for me to unconsciously impose some of my beliefs on my client.

Watkins (1992) also considered the imposition of his beliefs on clients. He described his experience of counseling a client who wanted to learn to depend on God more. He said the client "...wanted to adopt a way of being I had totally rejected" (p. 24). Watkins asked himself, "Could I defer my personal opinions and slants enough to assist him?" (p. 24). The client's experience created a complicated over-identification for him however, he explained how he was able to push his opinions aside and connect with the client.

I wonder, is it really possible to put aside one's opinions and beliefs while counseling a client? A postmodern feminist would say, "No, we are bound to communicate these to clients however we try not to." Yet I find myself wanting to say that we can withhold some of this. Is it all or nothing? Postmodern feminism allows for more than one possibility. There is no singular Truth, just as there is no singular way to counsel. I have not resolved this dilemma.

### *Counselor Education*

I saw Tam as strongly advocating the inclusion of spirituality in the education of counselors.

I think that we must include spirituality in [counselor education] because everybody has a spirituality, even if you say you are an atheist, you believe in something; you believe that there is nothing to believe in. You believe in life. You believe in humanism. Your client also has a spiritual aspect in his or her life. People focus on spirituality, especially people who are in distress, who are sick, or who are near death. A lot of people like that come in to get help. If you don't understand more about spirituality, then you don't serve them very well. So I do believe that in counseling we have to incorporate spirituality.

Tam added that counseling students need to learn about intuition. "Carl Rogers himself talked more about intuition toward the end of his life. He talked about something that is beyond observation or cognitive understanding. He talked about a pure kind of intuition in the relationship that heals. That's something that we need to explore and teach to counseling students."

I asked Tam how he thought spirituality might be included in counselor education.

It's difficult and it's controversial too. However, we could have groups with self-disclosure where students talked about the religious or spiritual beliefs in their families. That brings the awareness to students that people believe in different things. I think the group experience would be a necessity. A course is also useful, a course about all kinds of spiritual directions including all the varieties of religions. Then students know how people can be different

from each other in terms of spirituality and religions. I think we'll need to make a distinction between religion and spirituality in the course.

Regarding the group idea Tam mentioned, it would be important that the students who participated in this group discussion did not feel required to self-disclose. They should have the option not to participate. There are also ethical challenges around who could lead this group. The students could feel vulnerable if a faculty member facilitated the group. They might worry about what the faculty member would do with the information he/she learned in the group. If the program had the resources, a counselor could be hired to lead this group. Tam also made a point that I appreciated regarding differentiating between spirituality and religion in a course on spirituality. Students, like many others, might confuse the two.

Tam appeared to consider it vital that students recognize there is more than one Truth. I think this is important in accepting the numerous ways clients have of being spiritual. He also pointed out that some people would have trouble with this concept because they believe there are absolute good and bad. Some students may consider one client's spirituality better than another's. Tam said,

When people think of religion or spirituality, at least from the Western point of view, you usually think that there is the Truth. If you could make the students become more

aware of the fact that the Truth from this side of the Perennes may be not the Truth from the other side of the Perennes, then that's probably one of the most important things that we need to emphasize. When you talk about multiple truths a lot of people may have a problem with that in terms of relativity in morality. So how could you create a setting where you can find the common truth among all?

Tam raised an excellent question. A postmodern feminist would contend that one could not create a setting to find a common truth because a common truth does not exist, only multiple perspectives. Is there a common truth to reach in spirituality? Is there one aspect of spirituality that we have in common? I have incredible difficulty with these questions. Earlier, in chapter three, the researcher disclosure section, I discussed more thoroughly how I resolved this idea of a common truth.

### *Ethics*

Tam appeared to see it as unethical to judge a client's spirituality as right or wrong.

I don't think that we can be judgmental in terms of whether [a client's spirituality] is lost, right, wrong, or goes astray. It creates a problem. I think we have to respect the individual to look inside him or herself or to believe in God. When you start to socialize it, or impose it on other people, like in some of the

great religions, then it becomes problematic. I don't believe that what a person believes in can be wrong or right because it's purely personal. It's always right for that person and we need to respect that.

A concern exists here for me surrounding racists or sexists or other "ists." These are belief systems that bring them meaning and purpose. Are these beliefs neither right nor wrong? Should a counselor attempt to persuade such a person to believe otherwise? Do we need to involve morality in decisions of what or who is spiritual? In my interpretation, Tam finds the right or wrongness of a client's spiritual beliefs irrelevant.

Tam spoke for some length regarding a counselor's disclosure of spiritual beliefs. I think he saw disclosure as an ethical duty of the counselor who is working with clients on spiritual issues.

For my practice, I always disclose [my spiritual beliefs], especially when I have to deal with self-actualization needs or spiritual needs. If I just have to do career counseling or some interpersonal problem; then it's much easier as long as I'm aware of my spiritual bias; then I can avoid imposing [my spiritual bias]. When a person starts to talk more about spiritual needs and religion, then I have to bracket myself and try to understand the client from his or her perspective. That's why I did a lot of research in Christianity. I did a lot of research in other kinds of religions so that I could understand how people believe the way they believe. I feel like sometimes I need to clarify my standpoint, and with a lot of American clients usually I would

say, 'this is how I see things, however I respect what you see and together we can work it out'. So with a lot of Christian clients, I have to forget my part and try to be on the journey with them. I try to empathize with how they feel spiritually, but I self-disclose my bias and tell them that I am a Buddhist. I am a Taoist.

In further discussing disclosure Tam said,

I don't think that it's effective or not effective, but I think that it's a duty. I feel that [disclosure is part of] an ethical code. It's a responsibility of the counselor to self-disclose his or her spirituality if he or she deals with a client in terms of spiritual problems. Sometimes it may not be effective. Sometimes if they know that you are Buddhist then they pipe down a little bit. It's strange, but most of the time it's okay.

Tam brought in an important point regarding the client's response to the disclosure. The disclosure may create distance in the counseling relationship. The client might appreciate it. This is a risk that Tam appeared to see as necessary in being an ethical counselor.

Tam also appeared to see including spirituality in counselor education as an ethical imperative as he said, "We must include, we have to include spirituality in there because everybody has a spirituality...when you work with clients, all the time your client also has a spiritual aspect in his or her life." Theodore (1992) might agree with Tam's position. He considered three systems that made

up the characteristics of human behavior. These included the physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions. He said, "If psychologists insist on intervening on only the physical and the psychological characteristics of the client, then they are working only with the parts, not the whole" (p. 20).

### *Research Issues*

After the interview with Tam, I thought more about how I define spirituality. Currently, I consider spirituality to include secular and religious belief systems that provide meaning and purpose. I appreciated Tam's point that counselors should not judge if a person's spirituality is good or bad. This caused me to think about the morality of spirituality. Does spirituality include Satanism and racism, maybe it does until one imposes this belief system on another. I decided to add to my definition of spirituality. My definition for spirituality then became a secular and / or religious non-imposed belief system that provides meaning and purpose. What about the Satanist or racist who doesn't impose her/his beliefs on another and maintains these beliefs for her/his own life? Must spirituality relate to goodness? I don't want to be the judge of another person's spirituality but it is important for my spirituality to relate to goodness.



## Beth

### *Self Description*

Beth was interviewed twice because she was particularly rich in her descriptions related to spirituality. I synthesized information from both interviews to create the themes detailed here.

Beth is a 31 year-old Caucasian doctoral student in counselor education. She described her education and family life.

I went to all private schools. I was raised in a religious family background; we went to church. My mom divorced a couple of times, so my brother and I experienced what that was like. We're very close because of those things. My grandparents were probably the biggest influences on my life as far as spirituality goes. That's where I learned how to pray and how to read the Bible. I'm currently a doctoral student and enjoying it. I think I want to teach at a regional school. I like the smaller schools because I don't like to compete. I have been married for five and a-half years. We have no children; I hope to have children someday. I like to have fun, laugh, smile, and not be stressed. That has been a challenge lately.

### *Spirituality*

I asked Beth what spirituality meant to her. She said, "It is a relationship with God, that would be something that is very personal

and very different for each individual. It has different levels for different people.” This is similar to Shafranske and Gorsuch’s (1984) idea of spirituality as a unique and personally meaningful experience.

For me, spirituality is having a constant connection; praying and talking to God is not necessarily a formal thing. I can just walk down the street and say thank you Lord for the sunshine; it’s a great morning. In my teens I tried to make [connecting to God] something that was automatic because I would forget all the time. It really bothered me. How could I forget something so important? So I asked for him to give me reminders. Since then, I wake up in the morning and the first thing I do is say good morning God and check in. I still forget, just not on a daily basis. It is so easy to forget. I think it is part of being on planet earth. It’s like a fog, it’s harder to communicate; harder to share and to be focused on what’s really important.

It seemed important to Beth to feel connected to God daily. She said being on earth made it harder to maintain this connection. Maybe the many distractions available make it difficult to focus on God. Maybe God can be found within these distractions. For myself, I reframe these distractions as opportunities to remain focused. Many clients, counseling students, and yes, even counselor educators experience difficulty in remaining focused on what is important to them. Part of one’s spirituality may include continued effort towards focusing on what one considers important.

Beth seemed to want to express the meaning of spirituality more easily but it looked like she lacked the right words.

I remember realizing a while ago that there probably is a language that we don't know that would be able to tap into more of the meaning, emotion, and content of spirituality. I remember getting so frustrated because there were things I wanted to say and I couldn't find the words. It dawned on me, maybe sometime I'll learn of a language that's different from what we speak. One that is more in tune with the spiritual part.

Beth did find connection to be an appropriate description of spirituality according to my interpretation.

Growing up, a lot of the adults in the church were giving us what we needed to know about religion but there was no spirituality connected at all. That's the glue. Spirituality is the glue that keeps you connected, together, and healthy as a community and a family. It wasn't there, so the kids and some of the adults were just scattered to the wind, so to speak. They were not connected, not growing or developing. So [religion] didn't stick. When [the students] got out of the boarding academy that I went to, nobody would go to church. They did a lot of drinking and a lot of drugs. They just went totally rebellious because there wasn't that spiritual [connection].

I think for Beth, spirituality is a unique relationship and connection with God and other people that might be difficult for her to express in words. Spirituality appears to be an important daily

aspect of her life. Her concept of another language existing for purposes of expressing spirituality is intriguing. What would this language be like? Can a language that precisely conveys our meanings exist? I also thought it was interesting that Beth considered her peers not spiritually connected due to their drinking and drug use. This may have occurred as a normal developmental process of experimentation and individuation. For Beth this seemed to reveal a lack of connection to God and others, possibly because excessive drinking and drug use harms oneself and often those close to the user.

### *Religion*

Beth described the social context of religion.

Religion to me is man made. It's something that men and women try to make sense of. Due to the different translations of the Bible, we have so many different religions. Everybody feels his or her translation is the right translation. They've done what they need to do to get those translations, praying and asking God for the Truth. So if everybody's doing that and we're all coming up with all these different religions, what is the Truth? And is the Truth with religion even that important?

It appears that Beth saw the futility of making truth claims in regard to religion. She seemed to question the importance of the

truth when it came to religion. Maybe it is more important that one finds a relationship and connection to God rather than the truth through their religion.

Beth explained that religion helps people develop and remember their spirituality.

Religion to me is more man made. The spiritual comes from the Holy Spirit and is more important than religion. I think religion helps the development of spirituality. Being raised in a certain religion, reading the Bible about God and Christ, and participating in rituals are important to help us remember our relationship with God.

Remembering her connection to God appeared vital. She remembered this connection through reading the Bible and participating in religious rituals. I think her spirituality developed through these actions.

I saw Beth as finding a place for religion in connection to spirituality. While spirituality seemed most important for Beth, she also appeared to find religion key in inspiring one to develop and continue a relationship with God. It occurs to me that religion may also lead one away from their spirituality. When one kills others to maintain the supposed superiority of his or her religion, I don't think this person sees her/his connection to those she or he is killing. It

seems that religion or religious leaders may prompt people to grow spiritually or to lose their spiritual connection.

Beth spoke of experiencing harassment due to being a Christian on her visit to Israel.

We were told while we were walking to steer clear of the cliff as far as we could because the children there would start throwing rocks, shooting bows and arrows, and yelling at us. I don't know what they were yelling. We had to go through that and dodge a little bit of the rocks coming down to get to this one area. That was really fascinating.

This might be an example of religion creating a loss of spiritual connection to others. It could also be an example of children learning the stereotypes of their parents and carrying these on.

Beth described her own stereotyping due to assumptions based on religion according to my interpretation. During the same trip to Israel, an Arab market owner approached her and her mother.

We had an Arab market person, say to us, "Come into my store. I know that you don't want to come into my store because of what you've been told about us. You were told we don't like you and that we don't want you here, but we want you here. We have goods for you to buy." So my mom and I stopped and talked to him for a little while about why it is that we don't feel comfortable. He said, "Well we're not all like that." I appreciated that they're not all [against Christians] but you sure feel like it when you're there.

I think Beth experienced the assumption that all Arabs dislike Christians. Maybe remembering her spiritual connection to others would help dispel this stereotype.

While stereotypes can make us feel so different from one another, Beth next remarked on the similarities of religious stories. “It’s interesting that the Muslim religious stories, the Jewish religious stories, and the Christian religious stories all have similar events. The names of the people are different and they’re translated a little bit differently, but they’re all really similar. It is fascinating to me.”

Beth appeared to think the translation differences might be due to God’s creation of differing languages. It may be these differing languages that led to divergent translations of the Bible. She said, “At the tower of Babel, when they were trying to build a tower up to God, God made everybody speak different languages. I think that’s when different translations of biblical events started taking place” (p. 25).

Beth seemed to be striving for a common truth at the root of all religions that disappeared due to the creation of different languages. Is there a common truth among religions? Maybe the differences in religion have come about mainly due to differing

translations and at the core religions are the same. Is it the beauty of religions that they are so varied, demonstrating multiplicity?

### *Spiritual Experience*

Beth has had several spiritual experiences. She described a few to me.

I remember feeling the Holy Spirit. It was kind of like an overwhelming feeling of like an "Aha!" you know times a thousand, where you're just like wow this is so powerful. I was told by my grandmother what it feels like to have the Holy Spirit and to want to live a certain way because of having the spirit with you and I was just like, "oh that's nice." Eventually I had that feeling and I thought, oh this is what she's talking about. Wow!

I imagine that feeling the Holy Spirit has strengthened Beth's spirituality.

Next, Beth explained that she believes she is put in emergency situations because she has asked God to use her for "his" will. I think she surprised herself by feeling brave and calm during these situations.

I have these events in my life that I think are a little bit strange. They wouldn't have happened if I hadn't asked God to use me for his will. Things like being the first responder to car accidents and emergencies. All of a sudden I



am in this horrendous situation. I am able to be calm, focus, not panic, and help the people that are in these situations. I don't see myself as being a very courageous or brave person but when things like that have happened I've just known what to do. I tell people, "You come over here and turn off the engines, no smoking." All of a sudden we're responding to fires and my husband and I are like this is so strange. All of a sudden we're there and nobody else is.

In the next spiritual experience, Beth found herself praying with a needy stranger.

On the Fourth of July three years ago, I was walking on the beach. I was by myself and this barefoot woman came up to me. She said her name was Melissa. She said, "You know I need some money, do you have any money?" I said, "Oh all I have is this dollar." I gave it to her and she said, "Oh thank you so much" and then she just started crying, and I said, "Are you okay?" She told me her life story about alcoholism and drugs. She said her father's a minister and she's been terrible to her father. She mentioned wanting to get her kids back. Her ex-husband had them. She said she was with this man in California and that he's beating her up. I just listened to her life story and I'm talking to God, saying, "Okay I'm here for a reason. This is really bizarre. I don't just talk to people off the street. They don't just start talking to me about their personal experiences." She was talking about how she was getting so close to turning her life around but the alcohol was really making it hard for her. I just kept feeling like why don't you pray for her? You need to pray for her. I'm like, oh no God, no; I don't want to do this. I kept feeling like just try it. It's a new experience for you. I was like, okay. I was building up more and more courage as she was

talking. I said, "Melissa, I don't usually do this and I feel a little bit awkward doing it, but I feel like maybe if we pray together it might give you some peace and some direction." She said, "Yeah that would be great." So I started off the prayer awkwardly. "This is Melissa. She's pouring her heart out. She really wants to get help. Please give her the strength. Alcoholism is so difficult to overcome." She thanked me and I remember feeling, wow. Just talking about it, I'm tired because for me it was so hard to do. I probably would not have done that without my spiritual relationship with God because I wouldn't have been connected. I wouldn't have had the Holy Spirit there to kind of guide me. I'm an introvert, I don't even like to pray out loud in church. It is such a private thing. I saw her, a year later. She didn't see me. She had her two little boys and she looked great. The sores were off of her face. I think she was doing drugs before. She was clean. She looked like she was doing really well. I was like, wow. Maybe I didn't have a whole lot to do with it, but if that one time, that one connection did help, that's great.

Again, I think Beth surprised herself. This time she prayed rather spontaneously with someone she didn't know. This experience appeared to have an incredible impact on Beth. She seemed to take a risk in asking Melissa if she wanted to pray with her and Melissa responded positively. I think it solidified her faith in God and her belief in her own strength to help others.

Beth described her daily experience of spirituality.

I think on a daily basis my spirituality infiltrates everything that I do, how I talk to

people and how I feel about how people are treated. When I see that people aren't treated how I'd like to be treated, it really bothers me. I think being an example in everyday situations is something that is influenced by my spirituality. Sometimes I'm human too and I don't act like I should because of how I'm feeling. I might be preoccupied and not putting my priorities where they need to be and then [my connection to God] is less.

Since I see Beth as connected to God in all times and places, her spirituality influences every moment wherever she is.

In some instances her spirituality appeared to feel stronger, such as in the next spiritual experience she had during her visit to Israel. She said,

The biggest one for me, occurred in the garden before [Christ] was taken [to be crucified]. He asked his followers to pray for him but they fell asleep. He went up the path to pray, thinking they are praying also. He comes back and finds they're asleep. I think that was Christ's loneliest time. I remember walking through that garden area and just feeling overwhelmed. He was so alone. Here he is going to die for all of us, and nobody is there to pray for him or support him. So that was really difficult for me.

The spiritual aspect of this experience appeared to be her overwhelming feeling of connection to Christ. I think she was pained that Christ was alone during a difficult time. She may have felt the pain she imagined Christ felt as her own.

Because Beth has had numerous spiritual experiences, I asked if her spirituality influenced her decision to go into the counseling profession. She explained that it did. She said,

Since the age of 13, I read Proverbs. That was my guide to life. I decided I needed to dedicate my life daily to God and do his will because that's how you get meaning in life, peace, and happiness and so I would do that on a daily basis. I said, "Lord what is my calling? What is your will for me?" For years, I heard and felt nothing. Nothing, nothing, nothing and I was so lost, but I kept praying that same prayer. All of a sudden it dawned on me after my undergrad, counseling! That's what I should be doing, helping and supporting others in their pain and having empathy.

Beth appeared to have found her path to the counseling field through her connection to God.

### *Counseling Clients*

Although I saw spirituality as a large part of Beth's life, it seems that she has chosen not to incorporate it into her counseling work.

The counselor piece has been a little bit tough for me. Working in a public setting, I haven't really felt comfortable talking about spirituality with my clients. I remember talking with my supervisor about it. She really appreciated my boundaries with that because

there were some counselors who didn't have the boundaries in that setting and it was difficult. I remember telling her, "This is how I'm going to approach it; if one of my clients starts asking questions about God, I will talk about God because they brought it up. I'm going to dialogue with them about their thoughts and give them my experiences." She said, "That's great, if they bring it up, then go for it." I thought that was really nice. I always kept my religion and trying to promote a certain way of living out of the sessions because I am more interested in developing my own spiritual relationship with God than trying to convert people to a specific religion.

Beth thought it was inappropriate for counselors to initiate discussions on spirituality with clients according to my interpretation. I believe this has to do with Beth's linking of spirituality and religion. She appeared to see religion as necessary for the development and maintenance of spirituality. So if she were to discuss spirituality with clients she would necessarily also discuss religion. She mentioned she did not want to convert people to her religion. I don't commonly associate conversion pressure with spirituality but I do associate it with religious zealots. Yet for Beth initiating a discussion on spirituality with clients might mean that she was attempting to convert people to her religion. I think imposing her religion on clients would be unethical for Beth and I imagine that her fear of being perceived in this way prevented her from initiating discussions on spirituality.

Barret (1995) expressed concern over imposing his beliefs on clients as the participants did. He said, "I do not want to "lay my experience" on the client; I am hopeful that I can provide the freedom for the client to find personal meanings without being influenced more than necessary by my beliefs" (p. 110).

Although Beth seemed to consider it inappropriate for a counselor to initiate discussions on spirituality, I believe she thought it was vital for counselors to have a spiritual background in order to deal with the spiritually related issues brought in by clients. She said, "I think that it's really important as a counselor to have a strong spiritual background because of the things that you deal with, like death, loss, and grief. You have people questioning the meaning of life."

### *Christian Counseling*

It appeared that Beth did not to permit herself to initiate spiritual discussions with clients. Next she spoke about Christian counseling as offering an excellent way to get to the heart of the matter with clients. Maybe if she labeled herself a Christian counselor, she would feel it was appropriate for her to raise spiritual issues with clients because then clients might expect spirituality to be addressed.

For me Christ was the ultimate counselor. He's like number one. Maybe I should write my theoretical model on Christ. I've often wondered about going into Christian counseling because I felt like there was such a void in the public sector of not being able to address the most important issues. I mean I've had clients where I knew they were not going to improve, unless they had an entity like Christ or could pray. They were just so lost. I couldn't introduce that to them, but I knew that there was nothing in their life that would improve how they were doing. So that part's been really difficult for me.

Next, Beth described her experience as a client of a Christian counselor. I think she appreciated the explicit incorporation of prayer, scripture, and God in these counseling sessions. Christian counseling appeared to offer Beth freedom from what I interpret as her worry of initiating spiritual discussions with clients. She said,

I went to a Christian counselor because I wanted to see how she did it. It was neat because [in her disclosure statement] she had prayer, her beliefs, and how she conducts her sessions, where she offers opening and closing in prayer as an option. She asked me, "Is it okay if I open our counseling session with prayer?" I said yes, but inside I'm thinking this is really weird, because I'm not very open with prayer. It was fascinating. [The sessions were] strengthened by homework assignments to read scripture. What greater ally than [God] to have in a therapeutic relationship?

### *Counselor Education*

Beth seemed concerned about including spirituality in counselor education in public universities. She said,

I don't know if the public setting is the best place for spiritual courses because I don't know if everybody's on the same page yet. By same page I mean, I don't know if everybody believes in a spiritual part of life or is open to different definitions of spirituality. It's not something that people just openly talk about in a secular community. I think there are probably better settings for that kind of thing.

Maher and Hunt (1993) advocated for a more concrete and easily understood definition of spirituality. Beth, Maher, and Hunt (1993) might all see a definition for spirituality as important.

She also emphasized the importance that counseling students have a choice about studying spirituality in their programs.

I think that it's a very important thing for people to have a choice. In my high school years, I had a steady diet of religion and it was very difficult because we had to do things a certain way. We couldn't choose. It really turned off a lot of my friends towards continuing a spiritual relationship with God. I would not agree with requiring a person to take it because it might ruin the chances of that person eventually having a positive experience [with spirituality].



Due to Beth's experiences, I think it makes sense that she would not want to require counseling students to learn about spirituality. She saw her friends turn away from their religion due to the lack of choices. I think requiring counseling students to learn about spirituality could lead to positive experiences for the students and introduce them to spirituality as a source of support for clients. However, I saw Beth's point as a helpful caution. If students had the option to take a course on spirituality, those who choose to take the course would be more likely to enjoy and learn from it.

Our discussion led us to consider if principles such as compassion and intuition, which might be considered spiritual, could be taught. Beth said, "My first response is, I don't think so, but maybe it is possible." After some thought, Beth said,

My take on it right now is that compassion and intuition probably can't be taught. There are some individuals for whatever reasons aren't in tune with their intuition; maybe that's not one of their strengths. Or they might think they are in tune with their intuition and go with their gut feelings, and their gut feelings were not accurate at all. This could be very detrimental if it led to a client's suicide. I think there are probably individuals that go through counselor education programs who don't have intuition.

Beth said these principles could not be taught. As counselor educators look at the scientific aspect of counseling, they might not

want to admit that intuition plays a role in counseling, however in looking at the artistic aspect of counseling, counselor educators may see intuition as a tool that counselors use. I think that many in the counseling profession would agree that compassion is a significant aspect of counseling, but may not agree that compassion can be taught. What an intriguing idea. Could counselor educators teach compassion and intuition? Would we want to attempt this?

Beth discussed a paper she wrote on the nature of people for a counselor education course. She was grappling with the decision to include her spirituality in this paper.

That was a real struggle for me and I ended up totally changing it. I think I will go back and put it back the way I had it. I started off with my thought that people are born innocent. I talked about good and evil and how that came into play. I thought I would quote the Bible, but I decided I shouldn't do that. I was reluctant to put my personal spiritual base in there.

I think it is unfortunate that Beth felt reluctant to include spirituality in her paper. Covering spirituality in counselor education might make students like Beth feel more comfortable about including their thoughts related to spirituality.

## *Ethics*

Considering the ethics of influencing clients, I asked Beth, “Don’t we put our values across in the questions we ask and in our theoretical orientation?” Beth responded,

Yeah, I’m sure that we influence people. As non-directive as we want to be, how the session goes is a reflection of who we are and what we believe in, but when a counselor starts talking to a client about specific aspects of religion or how to believe, that is dangerous territory because of the power differential.

Schulte (1992) asserted that counselors influence clients based on their understanding of morality. Schulte stated, “Values held by a counselor will inevitably influence his or her counseling decisions and actions. Value neutrality is an impossibility” (p. 37). In judging the morality of our influence, he supported considering our rationality, intentions, and one’s awareness of the effects of one’s words and actions. In looking at client change and the means used to affect the change, he suggested considering whether the changes are beneficial, harmful, or neither to the client and others. Examining these aspects of one’s influencing ability could provide a counselor with some guidelines around her/his choice of words and actions with issues of spirituality in counseling.

The place of values in counseling has been debated (Bergin, 1980a; Christopher, 1996; Ellis, 1980; Schulte, 1992; Strupp, 1980). Beth seemed clear about the inappropriateness of telling clients how to believe religiously or otherwise. I think there is one vital ethical principle for counselors, to prevent harm to the client and others. Of course what constitutes harm can be debated in some cases. It is likely that counselors agree harm would result from their client killing another person but it is not as easy to say that harm will result from discussing spirituality with clients. I think speaking about spirituality in a dogmatic way with clients is harmful, while considering it as a coping skill in an open-ended fashion might be helpful.

Considering the ethics of judging another's spirituality, I asked Beth, "How do we know if [a person's] spiritual connection is good or bad? Ultimately is it up for us to say?" Beth responded, "I guess only when it's detrimental to the client because that should be our focus." Again the ethic of preventing harm arises. If a counseling student's spirituality harmed a client counselor educators would be likely to consider it 'bad'. However, does the opposite hold? If a counseling student's spirituality does not harm a client, should we consider it 'good'? I think a counselor educator's focus should be on what is helpful to the client, not on whether a counselor's spirituality is good or bad. This makes it less relevant for counselor educators to judge

a person's spirituality as good or bad, and makes it more relevant for counselor educators to judge the results as being helpful or harmful.

*"Okay God I Asked for It"*

Beth mentioned earlier that spirituality involved a connection to God. Through this connection she had asked to do God's will. In the theme on spiritual experience she said, "I have these events in my life that I think are a little bit strange. They wouldn't have happened if I hadn't asked God to use me for his will." In discussing her thoughts on being used by God to help others, Beth said, "I first ask oh my goodness why me? Why am I here in this situation? And then it's like ding...you're on. Then it's, okay God I asked for it, so now give me the strength. Then I get the strength to do it." Beth's connection to God seemed to flow both ways. She was connected to God and God was connected to her. She appeared to gain guidance from this connection and may have felt useful in serving God.

*The Counterfeit*

Beth explained that the counterfeit, or the opposite of goodness, always exists.

Whenever there's something good, there's an exact opposite of it. There's a counterfeit to everything that's good. Like we were given the ability to be sexual beings, which is a beautiful, wonderful thing, and on the other end we have sex abuse and prostitution. I haven't thought of spirituality with a different kind of connection. You could have a relationship with Satan. It's the exact opposite or the counterfeit of what was good with spirituality.

According to my interpretation of Beth, a person can be fooled into thinking the counterfeit is the right path.

There's always an illustration of how important it is to walk the narrow path. Stay with the Truth and don't be fooled. Don't follow or branch off, like the Branch Davidians. It was a branch of the church that I grew up in. I lost some friends in that because they followed the wrong path. They were persuaded into a cult-like religion. So there's that counterfeit going on all the time and you have to really be aware of it and stay with the Truth. We're always affected by the negative, the sinful.

Beth appeared to warn that one must be on guard against the counterfeit. What if a client considers their religion to be healthy for him or her and the counselor considers it the counterfeit, maybe a cult? Beth might suggest, as she did earlier when I asked her how we are to judge if a person's spiritual connection is good or bad, that the counselor determine if the religion seems detrimental to the client.

*“Gender Isn’t Really that Important”*

Our discussion led us to consider the role of gender in religion. I interpret Beth as thinking that gender is a result of being on earth and is not relevant in the heavenly universe. She said,

There are lots of questions I’m going to ask when I get to heaven. One of them is about gender and the Bible. I think that gender is pretty much just an earth thing. I think the angels are genderless and the people in the Bible have gender because they’re here on earth. I think that our minds will be opened [in heaven] and we’ll see gender isn’t really that important. When I think about my beliefs and spirituality I don’t see gender at all. It’s part of the world but it’s not a part of the heavenly universe.

Because I had heard Beth referring to God as “he” throughout the interview, I asked her why she called God “he.” Beth responded,

Growing up you’re given pictures [of God] and “he” is talked about. I had such a good role model with my grandfather. I always thought if this is what God is like, you know, right on. So talking about God being a he for me is comfortable. It’s a traditional thing. Due to how I have been socialized and my connection with my grandfather, God to me is a he.

We continued by discussing gender's role in the Bible specifically. I mentioned a part of the Bible that said man was not made from woman but woman from man. Beth responded,

It's a cultural thing. I don't think it's spiritually based. If we were able to invite God to sit in that chair and ask him about it he would probably explain about culture of the time and how at that time women were viewed differently. I think that there are times when you see a glimpse of what's really important, it's not gender; it's about living your life according to his word. So I've always just looked at that and not really paid much attention to it because I thought it was cultural and not a spiritual fact.

While gender may or may not be part of heaven, it is a part of our lives on earth, as Beth mentioned. When counselor educators consider spirituality within counseling, we might also consider religion and the impact of gender. Many religions recognize both men and women as making vital contributions. Some religions continue to view women in a lesser role than men. These differences may be explored within counseling classes, as clients are likely to come from a variety of religions with differing views on the roles of men and women.



### *Research Issues*

The interviews with Beth led to different topics than the interviews with other participants. I think this occurred because Beth was familiar with the Bible and had considered the place of gender in religion. I asked about her ideas on these matters because I thought it would add to the richness and depth of the research. I chose not to ask all participants about the Bible and gender in religion because these topics were not central to the study. I was also aware that some participants were not familiar with the Bible or a specific religion.

I had difficulty withholding my opinions during the interviews with Beth. I disagreed with her view that gender isn't very important. I see gender as a primary organizer for our society and at the root of biologically based injustices. I also disagreed with Beth that spirituality does not belong in public institutions. I did not express my disagreement in words yet I imagine my nonverbal expressions gave her clues as to how I felt. I think the reporting of views contrary to my own strengthens the reader's confidence in an accurate portrayal of participants' sentiments and thoughts.

At the end of Beth's first interview, I raised a concern over identification. Members of my dissertation committee might be able to identify the students who participated in this study based on

information provided in the dissertation. Concerning potentially identifying information, I asked Beth, "Is there something on the tape you've mentioned that you'd prefer I not have in there?" Beth said, "I don't think so, maybe just the background information. Age is fine. Will I be able to read the transcript eventually?" I told Beth I had not planned returning transcripts to participants but that since she asked I would give her a transcript of her interviews. I assessed that the risk faced by the students if identified was no more than minimal.

My research perspective has influenced my choice not to use member checking in this research. Member checks are not appropriate since what I have reported is my interpretation of what the participants think about spirituality. Member checks assume that the participants' understandings are static as opposed to dynamic. Returning to verify information would not have assisted me in getting closer to the "True" information since the pursuit of "True" information is futile and not achievable. My decision not to use member checks was directly related to my belief in temporary and individually constructed reality. Stake (1995) stated, "The stronger one's belief in constructed reality, the more difficult it is to believe that any complex observation or interpretation can be triangulated" (p. 114).

Regarding member checks, I wrote in my reflective journal:

I am concerned about member checking. It is not appropriate in postmodern feminism research because it assumes the participants' understanding will not have changed when I return to check back on information. Returning transcriptions or discussing the research again with participants would simply give another perspective and would not bring me any closer to the "Truth" or make my data any less biased. Things are constantly changing including research participants' viewpoints. I expect substantial criticism from positivists and postpositivists alike (December, 1999).

## Helen

### *Self Description*

Helen described herself as a Caucasian agnostic. She is also a doctoral student in counselor education.

I see myself as very engaged in my life process. I turned 50 last August and that's made a difference to me. I didn't think it necessarily would. I'm very excited about some of the projects I'm working on now like social advocacy for people who are survivors of psychiatric labeling and mental health care reform. When I got to this university, I found the words to describe what I wanted to do. This is a very exciting time in my life, but because I tend to take a non-dominant [stance on many issues], it's also sort of a sad time for me too. I'm used to being in an educational environment where ideas are shared and I haven't found that. To an

extent it's sort of a bittersweet time. I would say that on the whole I see myself as having an excitement about life. It matters to me to be able to give back what I've taken out. I use air and consume things and so I want to be able to give something back. That's my sense of purpose in life. It's important to me.

Helen explained she grew up as a Methodist. She later left this faith because it didn't provide answers to her questions. "I was raised Methodist. The branch I grew up in didn't do literal translation of the Bible and we didn't proselytize. I'd say it was fairly middle of the road as far as conservative versus liberal." Helen briefly described her transition from Methodist to agnostic. She said, "I was able to answer my own questions and one of the answers was, 'I don't know'."

Her agnosticism has caused her to be excluded occasionally. "I'm cautious when I'm excluded. On the whole I expect to be excluded." Despite this exclusion, Helen seemed to find her place as an agnostic. Describing her agnosticism, she said, "I define myself as a devout agnostic, that is different to me than somebody who just doesn't believe, because I believe in a lot. I'm the only agnostic I know that has the set of values that I have."

*Spirituality*

For Helen, spirituality seemed to be a core sense of self that provided purpose and explanations for the unexplainable.

I define spirituality as my core essence or my sense of self. Spirituality is another area of identity that can be a very core defining area. That essence is something that gives me a purpose. Spirituality is also a belief system with explanations for the unexplainable. I think that spirituality would subsume religion, yet religious people might see it as just the opposite.

The idea that spirituality “would subsume religion” is supported in counseling literature. Pate and Bondi (1992) considered spirituality to be a more inclusive term than religion, while religious faith may result from this spirituality. I liked Helen’s use of the word essence. This is a word I also use to describe spirituality, however I did not use it during her interview, so I was surprised to see it emerge.

### *Agnosticism*

I asked Helen what agnosticism meant to her. She said,

Agnosticism is the belief in and comfort in not knowing. I’m comfortable with the answer I don’t know, because that is an answer. To me it’s like the null set, the null set is a set, just because it’s an empty set doesn’t mean there is nothing there. I see my agnosticism as self-defining. I wouldn’t be me; it would take away

my essence if I were not agnostic...I'm very content with my answer. I'm not striving...the only thing that I lack with my belief system as an agnostic is faith in a power beyond me that will take care of me. I don't have that and I did enjoy that benefit when I was a Christian...but as an agnostic I can still do good things. I can still be a moral person. Some people think that you can't be if you're not spiritual or religious.

I think it is important not to make assumptions about agnostics, such as the assumption Helen mentioned about agnostics not being moral. Agnosticism is one of the many possible belief systems those in the counseling profession may encounter.

While Helen has not experienced what she considered "overt prejudice" due to her agnosticism, she has lost friends.

Other [agnostics] have had folks say ugly things to them. I have lost friends over my spiritual belief. They were nice about it, but they didn't want to affiliate with me if I couldn't see things from their position. I've never had anyone treat me with overt prejudice (p. 49).

### *Spiritual / Agnostic Experience*

Helen detailed one spiritual/agnostic experience.

One of the biggest instances around my agnosticism was in 1993 when my mom died. Her death wasn't a traumatic death, but it was an unexpected death. It happened to come at a point in my life when things weren't as stable as

I would like, so I had problems dealing with it. I didn't get a chance to say goodbye to her which was important to me. What do you do if you're agnostic and you don't have an afterlife to believe in? This is when things became very interesting for me. Since I don't know [if there is or is not an afterlife], I was able to hold as a possibility that I could see her again. I wasn't quite ready to let go of the fact that she wasn't in my life. Agnosticism provided me with the flexibility to play around with the idea of an afterlife and being reunited with her at some point. When I worked through that, I didn't need [the belief in an afterlife] anymore. So now I'm back on "I don't know." I don't know if there's an afterlife; I have no idea what form it would take. It might happen and it might not happen.

The painful experience of her mother's death appeared to prompt Helen to rethink the possibility of an afterlife. I think the flexibility of her agnosticism became an important resource. She seemed to challenge the consistency of her standard answer to the unexplainable and briefly relied on the belief in an afterlife.

### *Counseling Clients*

Helen explained that while she does not raise spiritual issues with clients, she attends to these issues if they develop.

In practice I try to be particularly aware of spiritual issues and make sure I'm not bringing my biases in. I don't usually raise these issues, but in doing assessments and asking about their religious background I try to be particularly

mindful to make sure that if spirituality is an issue for the client, that they are comfortable...if the client in an inpatient setting needs my help to see their pastor, I work really hard to do that. I could certainly see a situation where the pastor or priest might give the client the most sensitive help, being with someone who spoke a common language.

I think Helen saw the value of bringing in a religious leader for a client. Counselor educators can bring religious leaders in for panel discussion with counseling students on spiritual issues. I see religious leaders as sources of support not only for clients but also for counselors and counselor educators with questions relevant to religion.

Helen expressed what I interpret as concern over working with clients on spiritual issues due to her agnosticism. She seemed to believe that clients might not be comfortable working with her because of this.

Spirituality is probably the issue that I can't follow all my clients with. Although I've never gotten to the point where it was necessary to refer out. I have to work on projecting what I used to believe and what they believe now. I don't think I would do a good job if that were one of the main issues. I also think [clients] might not be happy with me because there's a lot of distrust for [agnostics]. We're considered bad, undesirable. We have lots of stigma.



It is likely that many counselors encounter clients with belief systems different from their own. Counselor educators can assist students in gaining familiarity with a variety of belief systems, allowing them to be more comfortable and effective in discussing spiritual issues.

### *Counselor Education*

I asked Helen if she thought spirituality should be included in counselor education. She said,

I think that it needs to be a part of it for sure. I have no idea what form it should take, but I think that it needs to be included because so much harm can be done inadvertently through insensitivity and lack of awareness. Multiculturalism is very important to me. I see spirituality as a multicultural and social justice issue.

It appeared that Helen supported the inclusion of spirituality in the education of counselors. I responded, "So it sounds like from your perspective spirituality is an important component of counselor education. You might not have your finger on how it should come out in the program but it needs to be present in some way." Helen's response surprised me. She said,

If you want me to be real honest about it, I wouldn't go that far with it because it's not that important to me. I hadn't thought about it really until right now. I would think that people need to be aware of and sensitive to diversity issues within religion and spirituality so yeah, I think it does need to be brought out.

I interpreted this as a contradiction and discussed it further in chapter two under data analysis.

I'm glad that Helen mentioned her hesitancy in including spirituality in counselor education. I think other counselor educators might also perceive spirituality as not being that important to them. It may be that if spirituality is not an important resource for ourselves, then we are less likely to think it could be a resource for another person.

### *Ethics*

Next we discussed the ethical issues around including spirituality in counselor education. I asked Helen, "Assuming that at some point spirituality was included in counselor education programs, what do you think would be some of the ethical concerns that might come up around including that? What might be dangerous about including it?" She responded,

My first concern would be for people who believe it's their responsibility to enlighten

people. In a clinical setting I have concerns about that. I don't think it's appropriate for me to convert people. If they come to me for clinical issues, I'm going to try to work with them within their framework.

Helen appeared clear about the danger of a counselor attempting to enlighten or convert clients according to the counselor's belief system. I think it is difficult to draw a clean line regarding what is ethical and what is unethical treatment of clients. Counselor educators know that physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of clients is unethical but what parts of a counselor's belief system should we consider unethical?

Helen also had ethical concerns around the disclosure of her agnosticism. "If I were the only clinician in my unit or if I were a school counselor and I disclosed my agnosticism, my disclosure might make some people uncomfortable to the point that they wouldn't want to work with me, but I'm still supposed to provide services for everybody that comes through."

Should a counselor disclose her or his spiritual beliefs? I think one can be an ethical counselor whether they choose to disclose their spiritual belief system or not. If the counselor chose to disclose, it would be the client's prerogative to choose not to work with that counselor due to the disclosure.

### *Questioning "It's a Habit I've Had All My Life"*

I chose to include a theme on questioning because it emerged as an important character trait related to her agnosticism. Helen described the role questioning played in her choice to leave Methodism. "What happened to me is I asked too many questions, it's a habit I've had all my life. I had to deal with those questions. One of the biggest questions I had to overcome was the issue of life after death. I finally was able to resolve that."

Questioning also seemed to play a role in Helen's consideration of counseling literature regarding her choice to leave Methodism. "According to the literature that I've encountered, [when someone leaves their religion] it is due to some trauma. I didn't experience that so I end up questioning counseling theory because that doesn't explain my life." Helen seemed to be full of questions. I think the only satisfactory answer she has found to her many questions is agnosticism.

Barret (1995) had a similar experience of questioning. He said, "I will probably never make peace with the church. But I will go on asking my questions, aware that in the asking, a vital part of me is being expressed" (p. 110).

### *Research Issues*

I had incredible difficulty in deciding if agnosticism was Helen's expression of her spirituality. I mentioned to Helen, "I think of your agnosticism as your spirituality. Does that fit for you or does that sound kind of off?" She said, "It doesn't really [fit]." Here Helen appeared very clear that her agnosticism was not her expression of spirituality. Yet I think Helen referred to her agnosticism as her spiritual belief. She said, "I have lost friends over my spiritual belief." I am left unsure of whether she considered agnosticism to be an expression of her spiritual beliefs or not. I did not return to ask Helen about this because I chose not to do member checks. My reasoning for not doing member checks is explained under research issues in Beth's section.

### Gabe

#### *Self Description*

Gabe is a 30 year-old doctoral student in counselor education. He described his education and spiritual development.

I'm from the northwest. After my master's degree I worked in a boy's ranch. Later, I was a high school counselor for three years and guidance department chair for a year. Both of my parents are teachers; I would say I grew up in a lower middle class socio-economic background. I went to public school up until ninth grade and then to a private Jesuit high school and I went to a Jesuit college. Then I went back to public school for my master's degree and public school for my doctoral degree. I'm a convert to Catholicism. I went through discernment when I was 19 and explored four or five religions more in depth and chose, due mostly I would say to environmental influences, Catholicism as a faith community to join. I had been a pretty adamant atheist and probably an agnostic I would say for most of my life.

I asked Gabe what agnosticism meant to him, he said,

That you are unsure or haven't decided necessarily about whether life is just as we see it or if there is some sense of a supreme being that's unreal or untouchable. You might not have been exposed to the evidence of whether God exists or not. Or you might have been exposed to evidence on both sides that God exists, but you haven't been swayed one way or the other. For me, agnosticism was a place in between atheism and where I am now [as a Catholic]. My dad's father was a Presbyterian minister and both my parents grew up in the south, so their exposure to organized religion was very oppressive. They reacted to that by not putting any of those parameters on us, but they also didn't work to expose us to different religions. So originally I think I was an agnostic just because I hadn't been exposed to religion one way or the other. I hadn't done the internal work, thinking about good and evil. I lacked

exposure and lacked thinking about it. Then I moved into my atheist period of anti-organized religion. Once I started to think about [religion], I thought, I really don't buy this. People just accept these beliefs because of what they're taught. They haven't really done any introspection. They don't know any different. So I was very anti-organized religion. I thought if there was a loving God [bad] things wouldn't happen. I had a lot of evidence to believe that God didn't exist. I thought more about it. I was exposed to a different environment and took some classes in theology. I had a balance again, so I was back to being agnostic. I had some sense of goodness in people. The very fact that I can conceptualize a supreme being is an argument used by early theologians for the existence of God. If we can conceptualize God, God exists at some level. The fact that we have some sense of goodness comes from somewhere. Where does that come from, but some other source of goodness? So then I swayed further in the direction of wanting to search because of various experiences in my life and because of the overall introspection process. So to make a long answer short, I was an agnostic, then an atheist, then an agnostic again, and finally I converted to Catholicism.

### *Spirituality*

Gabe described what spirituality meant to him.

For myself I would say spirituality has a lot to do with the mystery of life, the mystery of other people, and the mystery of goodness. For sure it's two things, it's something beyond myself and yet something that incorporates me in terms of connection to other human beings and a sense of awe. There are things beyond laws of

science. There is something beyond that I can't comprehend; I can't understand, but I can experience. A part of that is certainly connectedness with human beings. There is energy that all people share, contribute to, draw from, and are pulled to as in discernment. I often think of spirituality as that which calls me to different directions. It is beyond my comprehension and yet, also something very present.

Gabe's description of spirituality as both beyond comprehension and very present reminded me of Hinterkopf's (1994) description of spirituality as "...a presently felt phenomenon involving ...transcendent dimension bringing new meanings... and growth" (p.166).

Gabe clarified his thoughts on spirituality.

To sum up in a sentence, I would say spirituality is that which sustains me, is beyond me, and is both internal and external. It is beyond behavior, interaction, or anything environmental. It is that which is core to you, and sustains you...spirituality is more powerful and encompassing than just religion. It is a lot broader for me than a religious denomination. I picture it as a giant Venn diagram. I see organized religion, my vocation, my relationships, and my physical self as pieces within the bigger circle of spirituality.

Gabe's idea of spirituality appeared to include mystery, connection, and a sustaining core. He included a paradox that appealed to me, describing spirituality as both beyond and present.



In my self-disclosure, I also describe spirituality as both transcendent and immanent. Paradox is something I think many people experience. One might feel both love and hate for the parent who abused she or he. A person may enjoy the way their partner laughs but become irritated by it years later. Counselor educators can teach students that clients will frequently come in with emotional paradoxes. I think it is helpful to give the client permission to feel these conflicting emotions. The student might then help the client to accept their experience of conflicting emotions and when needed, find ways to create resolution.

I am interested in the core sense Gabe described. I wonder where this core sense is. Is it within the person, outside of the person, or both? What does it look like? This core sense may be a resource for clients; helping them find needed strength. Clients might be skeptical of this nebulous core sense. Counselors can use their intuition in determining which clients this concept might assist.

I wondered if Gabe saw agnostics and atheists as spiritual. Agnostics and atheists have belief systems that bring them meaning and purpose, so I think of agnostics and atheists as spiritual. I don't think spirituality must be linked to a belief in God, but I wanted to know what Gabe thought. So I asked Gabe, "Does agnosticism and atheism fit into your idea of spirituality?" He responded,

That's interesting. Do they have a core sense that sustains them? I think they can. I think they might have that. Definitely they would have that quality. When I was an atheist and an agnostic, I don't think I had that sense of spirituality. My brother very much does and he's an atheist. He does volunteer work. He says why does it have to be about God? Why can't you do good things for fellow human beings because it's the right thing to do? Why do you have to connect it to spirituality? So some [atheists and agnostics] can have that core sense which sustains them without having it connected to spirituality or religion. In my experience of being an agnostic and an atheist, I didn't have that core sense sustaining me, but some agnostics or atheists have that core.

Gabe explained that agnostics and atheists could be spiritual, although he did not consider himself a spiritual person when he was an agnostic and atheist. I see spirituality as often self-defined and varying widely. One person may consider an atheist spiritual while another may not. This is an excellent topic that might generate a discussion for counseling students.

### *Religion*

Gabe appeared to see religion as created by people to provide a place to share core beliefs.

Religions and churches are human institutions which means they're going to have

faults. They're going to make mistakes. They're going to be slow to grow, slow to evolve and change. Organized religion provides a faith community where I can share certain core beliefs about human beings. We can discuss what it means to be an authentic human being. I certainly don't adopt all the doctrine of [the Catholic Church]. I recognize that [the doctrine of the Catholic Church] is not what sustains me. That's why I prefer the term faith community to organized religion.

Reframing the words organized religion into faith community seemed to be helpful for Gabe. The use of reframes such as this with clients might transform a previously negative implication into a positive one.

Gabe did not differentiate between religion and spirituality as I interpret his words, but appeared to recognize that others do. He seemed to find that religious and spiritual beliefs can conflict.

I use God, religion, and spirituality interchangeably because for me they are. Those things hold negative connotations for some people. My fiancé would not equate religion and spirituality at all. She would make a good argument that they're diametrically opposed. Religion and spirituality come into conflict at times. I don't believe in certain concepts that are a part of most organized Christian religions like original sin. There are constructs about eastern religions that I believe.

I think Gabe revealed an important point in that we cannot assume Christian clients believe in all Christian doctrines. This is

helpful to remember when using biblical quotations to counsel Christian clients; some quotations may not apply to their beliefs. Clients have had differing experiences with religion, positive and negative. The word religion might trigger very different images from the word spiritual. Finding the right words to move a client is part of the art of counseling.

It appeared that Gabe sometimes struggled with his membership in the Catholic Church.

I think institutions change from within. I don't want my membership in the Catholic Church to be condoning the condemnation of certain human beings in any way. That's where I struggle because Dr. King says injustice anywhere is a threat to justice anywhere. I definitely believe that. You don't just allow wrong things to occur. I don't want to condone those things by continuing to be a member. There may be a time when I feel like I am no longer facilitating change within this organization. There may be a time when I won't be able to change it.

Barret (1995) also described disagreement with his church's religious beliefs. Barret said, "Living in the South during the 1950s and 60s, it was hard not to question the faith I had accepted. I remember police carting off Blacks who had come to my church one Sunday" (p. 103).

A client could come in with an issue similar to Gabe's. The client might be Catholic and gay and have difficulty reconciling the two. Can the client live with being a gay Catholic or does he or she need to make a change? The conflict of one's religion and one's lifestyle can be incredibly complex. Within my self-disclosure, I discuss conflicts between my spiritual beliefs and my feminism.

### *Spiritual Experiences and Influences*

Regarding his spiritual experiences and influences, I asked Gabe, "What situations or experiences have you had either professionally or personally that you found spirituality has influenced your thoughts, feelings, actions?" He said,

I think that for me the crux of choosing an organized religion came about when this guy that I became close at work was killed in a motorcycle accident. For me that was pretty traumatic. Those weeks afterwards were...that was an important point of discernment for me. I considered what life is really about. What do these things mean?

Some people have had experiences like this. There is a moment in time when everything changes; things are turned upside down and we begin questioning the fundamentals of life. Grief often brings about spiritual growth in this way. Counselor educators may

educate students to be open to the beneficial aspects of grief as well as the painful effects.

Gabe described the sense of connection he gained from the rules and traditions of Catholicism.

For some people tradition and rules in Catholicism distance them from their sense of spirituality and other people. For me, [tradition and rules] create a connection because for 2000 years people have kneeled in this Catholic Church and thought about the very questions that I think about now. In 1050 they thought about what it means to live. It's not only a connection with other human beings currently but human beings across time. Tradition holds a sense of importance, a sense of spirituality, and provides a connectedness to other human beings across time and communities.

This sounds similar to Mack (1994) who considered spirituality to be a universal experience. Gabe continued, "I like that the order and readings at mass are the same in all countries. That provides a sense of cross-cultural connectedness too." Clients may feel disconnected at various times in life. Joining a church might provide a welcome connection to people and bring structure to one's life. Religious and spiritual groups can be tremendous resources for social support that counseling students may need to be aware of.

I asked Gabe to describe a spiritual experience he called discernment.

Discernment is a matter of answering a call. It is choosing, being pulled in different directions. I think part of my discernment is about whether I should work at a Jesuit institution or not. What's easiest for me is to go right into a Jesuit university because I could incorporate my own sense of spirituality into the coursework. The more difficult task would be to incorporate that into career counseling in a state school. It's a tough decision.

Clients frequently come in with tough decisions. This concept of discernment might be helpful. For example, a mother might be torn between working at home with her child and working outside the home. Which choice is she pulled towards more? What is her calling? What feels most right when she quiets and listens to herself?

### *Counselor Education*

I asked Gabe, "What do you think about including spirituality in a counselor education program?" He responded,

I think it's pretty key. I think it is included whether you want it to be or not on some level. An example would be if you asked me do I think that a paper on the nature of people should be included in a counselor education program. Whether we do a paper on it or not it is included at some level. People are either doing that individually or doing it in small groups. So the question is do we organize that in a structured

fashion within the program and if so how, do we do that.

Hinterkopf (1994) explained that by not training counselors on spiritual and religious dimensions, counselors and counselor educators risked being insensitive to spiritual and religious concerns of clients. She added that ignoring this dimension could result in missed opportunities for supporting psychological growth.

I next asked Gabe, "If we were to include spirituality in a structured way, would it be enmeshed throughout all courses, would it be a workshop, a required course, an elective course; what do you think?" He said,

I think in an ideal world it would be all of those things. It is similar to multicultural counseling in that it's an injustice to teach it as a separate course with one textbook. Maybe we ask students to submit that they have explored some piece of work. That allows for individualism. Ideally, it would be something that's incorporated throughout the program.

Gabe's mentioning that it would be ideal if spirituality were incorporated throughout the program surprised me. In my experience, topics that are incorporated throughout the program get lost in the shuffle. Because of this, faculty may relegate topics that they do not consider important to this position. However, I think it



would be ideal if a topic such as spirituality were considered important and truly incorporated throughout the program.

Gabe also raised an interesting method for including spirituality in counselor education. I like the flexibility that is provided by allowing students to submit a paper or presentation on an aspect of spirituality that interests them. My concern would be that too little guidance would be provided to keep students motivated. However, at the graduate level a student is more likely to be able to work independently. Also if spirituality were not included as a course, students may see this as an indication that spirituality is not as important as the topics they receive courses on.

Additionally, Gabe remarked on one West coast university that required all instructors to incorporate social service into their courses as mandatory for passing. Social service is already required of counseling students, although we don't call it a social service requirement. Their practicum and internships involve serving others. I see the social service of counseling as closely tied to the spiritual principle of serving others.

Describing his experience of assisting faculty in their interviews of masters' applicants, Gabe said,

I remember one applicant talked about their church experience as a strength. She thought she had a good strong foundation. Did

we explore that any further? Yes, we asked the person if this would lead her to condemn those who chose different sexual orientations, but we did not explore the positive aspects of her church membership. Religion is a whole closet area.

Gabe found his interview panel did not see the benefits of church experience. It is important for counselor educators to keep their biases in check. Students are keen to pick up on professors' preferences. Counseling students might be best able to assist their clients by recognizing both the pluses and minuses of religious participation.

Gabe detailed a role-play one professor did during his master's program.

[The professor] was so well versed in the Bible. [The student] was role-playing a minister's wife who was exhausted from all the activities connected with the church. Within her framework, the professor quoted biblical passages that said it was important that she take time for herself and don't overextend. It was fascinating to watch that level of [expertise].

While I think it would be effective to be able to use the Bible in counseling a Christian client, I am not confident of my own ability to do this. I am unsure if counseling students previously unfamiliar with the Bible could use it effectively with appropriate clients. It would be a challenge for one unversed in this Christian text.

## *Ethics*

Gabe mentioned several ethical concerns he had regarding incorporating spirituality into counselor education. He was concerned about counseling programs equating spirituality with religion and forcing particular spiritual ideals on students. He said,

It's important that [a course on spirituality] not be oppressive, that it not be erroneously tied to organized religion. I also think that you can do a detriment sometimes in trying to incorporate something to a program. My concern is with it becoming too organized into the program. It becomes a potential method for the institution cramming their ideologies down the students' throats.

Gabe's concern about equating spirituality with religion is similar to my own. I see spirituality is a much broader concept than religion. Currently, I define spirituality as a non-imposed belief system that provides meaning and purpose, while religion includes the ways that one expresses their beliefs in an organized format within the norms of an institution. Understanding this difference could assist clients who maintain spiritual beliefs but feel guilty about not attending religious ceremonies. The counselor might explain that the person's spiritual beliefs give their life meaning and purpose and these beliefs are still operating even if he or she chooses not to attend church. The counselor may provide reassurance that one can

be a moral and compassionate person without attending church. Gabe was also concerned about programs using education on spirituality as a way to force their ideals on students. Clearly this would be unethical.

Next, Gabe explained what I interpret as his apprehension around imposing our beliefs on clients.

We're really concerned about issues bleeding into sessions. There are professors that have animosity towards [religion]. I would have concerns about this animosity bleeding into a session with a client that wanted to talk about spirituality. The professor wouldn't be open to the benefits of belonging to a religion because of her/his own predispositions. Your biases can inhibit what the client needs. That's the challenge with clients, not imposing your own beliefs. It's inappropriate for me to impose my beliefs by talking about all the wonderful things that the Catholic Church provides me with a client but by the same respect it's inappropriate for me to negate religion's contribution to people's lives, whatever denomination they might be.

Taken to the postmodern extreme, nothing we do is neutral; everything we do influences others. From this perspective, we can say that counselors regularly impose their beliefs on clients. For example, counselors encourage self-growth in clients. However, from a less extreme viewpoint, it makes sense that counselors who are acting ethically do not impose their spiritual or religious beliefs

upon clients. Rather counselors might encourage clients to explore their own spiritual or religious beliefs and come to decisions regarding these beliefs based upon what is healthful for them.

Gabe also brought up the separation of church and state as an ethical concern. He said, "There's such a separation of church and state, I think that's part of the issue. We are concerned about opening the door to this and starting trouble." Should state universities be allowed to include courses on such topics as spirituality? State universities across the US offer courses on religion; some have departments of religious studies.

Analogous to state universities are public schools. In *Religious Expression in Public Schools*, the US Secretary of Education, Richard W. Riley (2000) stated, "Public schools may not provide religious instruction, but they may teach about religion, including the Bible or other scripture, the history of religion, comparative religion, ...are permissible public school subjects" (p. 1). Public schools and state universities consider the role of religion in numerous areas of education. It is likely that spirituality would be treated similarly.

I think what is more likely to prevent such courses is the fear of counselor educators that by educating students on spirituality, students will think they have been given the green light to impose

their beliefs on clients. This could be prevented by educating students otherwise through emphasizing an awareness of their own spirituality to lessen the chances that they would impose this on clients.

I appreciated another of Gabe's comments. He said, "There are ethical dilemmas, certainly to consider, but even given those, doing nothing is not good either." We cannot be paralyzed by fear. I support that in order to further ensure ethical treatment of clients, it would be helpful to educate counseling students on spiritual issues.

*"I See Sexuality as Tied to Spirituality"*

Gabe found sexuality and spirituality similar in that both are taboo. He said, "I see sexuality as tied to spirituality; it's not okay to discuss." Counselor educators have taken the lead in respecting individual sexuality. Just as counselor educators educate counseling students to appreciate sexual diversity, counselor educators may also educate them to appreciate a variety of spiritual belief systems. Spirituality's taboo can be removed.

Gabe appeared concerned about the Catholic Church's stand on homosexuality. He said,

The Catholic Church needs to take a look at certain things that they say. If you're a

practicing homosexual, then you're outside the community. If you're a celibate homosexual, then you're within the community. Yet it's also a Catholic teaching that part of being a full human being means answering your sexuality.

This is another interesting topic that might create lively conversation in a counseling class. I would ask students, 'How would you counsel a client who is Catholic and gay?' A role-play would be helpful. I think it is important for both Catholic and non-Catholic students to consider their own positions on homosexuality and how they would feel about counseling a gay person.

Gabe explained that the counseling profession's concern about counselors converting their clients to a particular religion is similar to the belief homosexuals can convert heterosexuals to the gay lifestyle, according to my interpretation.

I think in some ways the fear that counselors will convert their clients to a particular religion is analogous to the fear around people being open about their sexual orientation; that somehow there is a conversion factor. Some think that if a counselor is openly gay or lesbian that they are going to be converting the young impressionable minds of our sexual youth.

Gabe seemed to find an intriguing parallel here. Counselor educators are not immune to prejudice against gay people. Counselor educators are also not immune to the stereotyping of

Christian fundamentalists. I find it important for counselor educators to be careful not to let the fear of religious proselytizing dictate the curriculum by negating the education of counseling students on spirituality.

Giving an example of how one counseling professor dealt with criticism of his religion's treatment of homosexuals, Gabe said,

This professor was Mormon and one of my good friends was going to see him about some concerns he had regarding going into counseling. [The student] was gay and he brought it up. He was talking about his experiences with the Mormon Church and how it was oppressive. The professor turned and started typing on his computer, right in the middle of their discussion. My friend said, "So are we done?" [The professor] said, "Yes, we're done." I thought, what a funny way of handling it. I would have been curious to ask the professor, "So, you can no longer continue because it's too personally challenging for you?" He could at least address the student in some way, and say, "I realize now that it's probably not a good idea that I be the person you talk with about whether this is the right profession for you."

Both could probably have better handled this situation. It seems beneficial for counselor educators and their students to interact in a respectful manner, including when dealing with issues close to the heart, as spiritual and religious issues so frequently are. Yet counselor educators are not always up to peak performance.



Similarly, counseling students may expect that they will not always be the perfect counselor. I think both students and counselor educators need to maintain reasonable expectations of themselves and others.

### *Research Issues*

I noticed a lot of humor reoccurring through Gabe's interview. In my research journal I noted, "Is humor a part of spirituality? Gabe used humor throughout the interview; this seemed to be a way of connecting. Connection is important in spirituality according to my interpretation of Gabe, so I wonder if humor is a part of spirituality for him" (July, 2000). I considered creating a separate theme for humor in Gabe's individual section, but decided against it because it seemed to occur due to our familiarity with one another rather than as a result of the research questions.

I think that Gabe was comfortable enough to correct my misinterpretation of his meaning during his individual interview due to this familiarity. During our discussion of the definition of spirituality, I said, "So spirituality is a very broad concept, kind of like an umbrella." He corrected me and said that an umbrella was not really what he had in mind because an umbrella covers something and spirituality for him is interconnected with everything.

During the interview, I became concerned about the wording of the following question: Describe a specific situation, personal and/or professional that was influenced by your spirituality. Gabe asked, "Other experiences I've had that have influenced my spirituality...or how has spirituality influenced my experiences?" I clarified, "How has spirituality influenced an experience. If you didn't have this spirituality, you may have done a different action, had a different thought or feeling. It's a very challenging question." Gabe understood this clarification and we continued. I decided to leave the question as it was since no other participants before Gabe had difficulty with the question and thankfully no subsequent participants had this difficulty.

A confidentiality issue came up at the end of Gabe's individual interview as it did for Beth. I asked Gabe how the process felt for him. Did he feel comfortable? Did he feel awkward? Gabe said it wasn't an easy process for him because spirituality is difficult to talk about.

He also said, "There's also an element of...there's going to be an evaluative quality to the things I say. So I was a little bit aware about that I guess but not to the point that I would alter anything that I believe or say." Gabe was concerned that faculty might evaluate him poorly due to the views he expressed in his interview. I asked,

“Is there anything I can take out that would make you feel more comfortable?” He responded, “I don't think that there's anything that I would be embarrassed about saying and I guess if any of those things were a hindrance to my academic progress here then this would not be an institution that I would want to have a degree from.” We ended with an agreement that I could include his interview data in this dissertation.

### **Cross Case Analysis**

Two themes emerged across all participants. The first: I interpreted all participants as questioning the meaning of their lives or experiences. The second: all participants appeared concerned about ethics, specifically, the potential imposition of spiritual beliefs upon clients or students.

#### *Questioning*

All participants seemed to ask themselves questions in regard to spirituality. Abby questioned her purpose and meaning. Speaking of her existential angst she said, “It used to be once a month, now it's every 2 weeks I have an existential crisis. It's at least an entire day about why I'm here; what the meaning of life is. Where am I going?”

What am I doing?" I heard Tam question why he had a detached retina. "Why me? I asked that question several times and I started to see that I could not find the answer." When Helen lost her mother she asked herself, "What do you do if you're agnostic and you don't have an afterlife to believe in?" I think Beth questioned her purpose in life during her decision to become a counselor. "Lord what is my calling? What is your will for me?" Gabe seemed to question the meaning of life after the death of a friend. "I considered what life is really about. What do these things mean?" Counseling students might assist clients in determining which questions are the most important to answer and which ones are unanswerable.

### *Ethics*

All participants appeared to address ethical concerns surrounding spirituality in counselor education. The primary concern I interpreted was the imposition of spiritual beliefs upon clients or students. Abby said, "I think it's important to have people figure it out for themselves. It would be unethical if it were imposed on people." Tam said, "I think we have to respect the individual to look inside himself or herself or to believe in God. When you start to socialize it, or impose it on other people, like in some of the great religions, then it becomes problematic." Beth stated her concern about a counselor

or counselor educator attempting to "...make or persuade that person to believe a certain way." I think Helen had a similar thought. She said, "My first concern would be for people who believe it's their responsibility to enlighten people." Gabe commented on the possibility of a course on spirituality becoming what I interpreted as oppressive. He said, "It becomes a potential method for the institution cramming their ideologies down the students' throats."

Participants seemed straightforward about their thoughts regarding prescriptive counseling and teaching. As mentioned earlier, counselors and counselor educators must prevent harm, but what constitutes harm can be debated in some cases. These participants saw the imposition of beliefs onto clients or students as harmful, according to my interpretation.

Georgia (1995) described the difficulty of withholding one's beliefs and biases while counseling clients of different religious backgrounds. He stated, "...we are confronted with the problem of controlling our values, biases, and assumptions..." (p. 74). Georgia found phenomenology useful in facing this difficulty. He said,

With its emphasis on "bracketing" one's own judgment and respecting the intentionality of the data, the phenomenological approach to the study of religion permits the counselor to view others' religious beliefs in a relatively presuppositionless and nonjudgmental manner.

Miranti and Burke (1995) also considered the influence of counselors' values. They explained that some counselors are afraid of imposing their values on clients, but that a counselor's values, including spirituality, are implicit in counseling. They stated, "...there may be times when counselors cannot be effective because of their own strong beliefs, or because [of] unresolved spiritual issues...in such cases it becomes incumbent upon the counselor to acknowledge this limitation, and to refer..." (p. 2).

Grimm (1994) maintained that therapists' values are communicated to clients through their theoretical orientations and therapeutic goals. For this reason, he argued that spiritual and religious values cannot and should not be eliminated from therapy. He supported the idea that therapists should receive training on dealing with spiritual and religious issues. Grimm cautioned counselors against indoctrinating clients into the counselors' point of view.

The concern of counselors imposing values on clients is a central one for counselor educators. Some see counseling as an inherently moral and value oriented profession (Bergin, 1980a; Christopher, 1996). Others explain that personal values must not influence one's practice (Strupp, 1980). This issue is not one to be resolved within this dissertation. However, the controversy might be

within counselor training. Counselor educators can promote vital consideration of one's values and create a lively debate among students when presenting the issue of morality and values in counseling.

### *Research Issues*

After completing all interviews, I reflected on my request for self-descriptions from participants. I wrote, "Although I ask specifically for a self-description at the beginning, the entire interview is really a description of the participant" (August, 2000). Recognizing this, I thought maybe it didn't make sense to ask for a self-description, since each sentence the participant created described her/him. However, I think it was helpful in getting some information about the participants that may not have come out through the discussion on spirituality.

As I wrote the cross case analysis, I had difficulty in deciding what qualified as a theme across cases. At first, I considered a theme to be similar statements of two or more participants. Yet how can it be a theme across participants if only two or three of the participants are included in it? A theme with most of the participants might be considered what was typical or average, however, postmodern feminist researchers expect diversity and appreciate the

richness of diverging viewpoints. With guidance from my committee, I came to the decision that a theme across cases would be inclusive of all participants.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Summary**

My focus in this research was not to ask participants to provide a format for teaching a course in spirituality or even settle the question of if we should teach spirituality in counselor education. My goal was to explore the ideas of these counselor education doctoral students on the topic of spirituality. It was a very open ended study. It can be uncomfortable to close without definitive answers. I think good research provides more questions than answers. The resulting questions lead to further research. I think this study has provided numerous questions for counselor educators to investigate.

In the first chapter, I gave some background information relevant to the research, described the evolution of the study, and presented why I see this research as important. In the second chapter, I described my methodology. The methodology used for this dissertation was based on postmodern feminism. This has created a dissertation based on multiplicity, plurality, and difference. There is no single way to define spirituality and no single way to include spirituality in counselor education. Using the postmodern

feminist paradigm, I brought subjectivity in by using words like I, you, and we. I included my personal experiences and relinquished the idea of the researcher as the objective expert. I accentuated the ambiguity and tension created by the complexity of the issue of spirituality in counselor education.

I chose to purposefully sample participants not to gain representation of a population, but rather to aid my understanding of the student perspective of spirituality in counseling. To create data trustworthiness, I compared what I found in the present study with the literature on spirituality in counseling and kept a journal of my thoughts throughout the study. Additionally, I worked to achieve several types of validity, including, catalytic, paralogical, rhizomatic, and voluptuous. In reporting the findings, I performed an intra case analysis for each case and a cross case analysis, showing what similar themes appeared across cases.

For the third chapter, I included a disclosure statement to inform the reader of my preexisting biases and detailed how my spirituality interacted with my personal and professional experiences. Postmodernism and postmodern feminism influenced my perspective. I described my struggle to reconcile my spiritual beliefs with both postmodernism and postmodern feminism.

In the fourth chapter, I presented the intra case and cross case analyses of my view of the participants words. From the participants, I saw similarities and differences from myself. I related to the struggles that each described. I agreed and disagreed with their opinions. From Abby, I heard the voice of someone searching for her purpose; someone who no longer seemed willing to go with the crowd and follow the rules. She found it difficult to articulate spirituality and had not found religion helpful in her life, according to my interpretation. She appeared to think it was important to include spirituality in a counselor education program, although not in a required manner.

I think Tam saw spirituality as an innate need in humans. He appeared to appreciate Chopra and Maslow's ideas on spirituality and seemed to think it was important to harmonize the dichotomous, yin yang aspects of life. While Tam worked to avoid imposing his beliefs upon clients, he said he found it inevitable that he would impose these. He appeared to strongly support including spirituality in counselor education and may have considered it unethical to judge a client's spiritual beliefs as right or wrong. Beth seemed to consider spirituality to be a personal relationship and connection with God. I think religion held an important place in her life. She thought it was inappropriate for a counselor to initiate a discussion with a

client on spirituality and did not think spiritual courses should have a place in public universities, according to my interpretation.

Helen seemed to find that agnosticism provided her with flexibility and comfort. She appeared concerned about counseling clients on spiritual issues. I think she felt that if spirituality was the main concern of a client, she might not be the counselor for her/him. Helen seemed hesitant to include spirituality in counselor education because she had not found it to be an important resource for her, yet thought harm could be done to clients if counselors were not sensitive to spirituality.

From my interpretation, Gabe felt that spirituality sustained him through a connection to others and that it should be a key aspect of counselor education integrated throughout the curriculum. He seemed to struggle with some of the doctrines of the Catholic Church and did not want his membership in this Church to condone what he considered unfair treatment of some individuals, yet he also appeared to find comfort in the traditions and rules of his religion.

From the cross case analysis, I perceived two themes. The first theme included questioning important aspects of life. The second related the ethical concerns surrounding spirituality in the education of counselors and in the counseling of clients. The participants seemed concerned about a counselor or professor

imposing her/his beliefs on clients or students. I think participants believed that clients should be allowed to find their own way spiritually and in other aspects of life. Some sounded concerned that the counselor's spiritual beliefs may prevent or adversely affect a counseling relationship. Several mentioned that they preferred to wait for clients to bring up spiritual issues rather than bringing these issues up themselves. Next, I provide my conclusion and recommendations for future research.

## **Conclusion**

I see counselor educators as being in the early stage of recognizing the importance of spirituality and considering it as an area of education for counseling students. A few counselor educators have published articles on the place of spirituality in the counseling profession. I published a review of studies that addressed spirituality and religion within counseling and counselor education (Souza, 1999). Kelly (1994) found that most counselor education programs did not offer a course specifically on religion or spirituality nor did they offer a course with significant attention paid to these topics. However, the majority of the counselor educators considered religion and spirituality very important or somewhat important. He pointed out that a discrepancy existed between the

acceptance of the importance of these topics and the amount of attention given to these topics in courses.

Under the social and cultural foundations section of the CACREP (1994) standards (Section II.J.2.b), it states that students need to have an understanding of attitude and behavior based on religious preference. However, Kelly (1997) reported spirituality and religion were absent from the curriculum of 48% of CACREP accredited programs. He concluded that the lack of spirituality and religion from so many CACREP programs was surprising since religion has been explicitly mentioned as an area to be taught to counseling students in the CACREP standards.

Pate and Bondi (1992) suggested that counselor education include religion and spirituality through course content, student experiences, case studies, and collaboration with religious helpers. Pate and High (1995) reported that when program heads were asked, "How important is a counselor's awareness of a counselee's religious beliefs and practices in your program?" only 16% reported that religious beliefs were a very important part of a counselor's awareness in their programs. Pate and High believed this to be a low percentage of counselor educators who considered religious beliefs and practices to be very important. They explained that the

counseling profession would not be satisfied with this finding if it were an issue of race or sexual orientation.

Matthews (1998) described integrating the spiritual dimension into traditional counselor education programs within addictions counseling. He also supported fostering the spiritual development of counseling students through counselor education.

After I reviewed the literature, I came to believe that the best way to educate students on spirituality would be through a separate required course. I thought this would be the best way to give counseling students the knowledge they needed on the variety of ways of believing. Yet I heard the cautions from several participants regarding requiring such a course.

Through listening to participants, I have come to see many potential ways to address spirituality in counselor education. Counselor educators might hold a series of workshops, seminars, or group discussions on spirituality. An elective course could be offered. Advisors could suggest related courses in other departments such as philosophy, history, or women's studies. Spirituality might find a place in the multicultural curriculum, yet this may not be the best route since these courses are often overburdened with important material already.

I appreciated Gabe's suggestion of asking students to submit that they have explored some aspect of spirituality. This could be presented through a paper, oral presentation, or both. I liked the independence and individualism this approach would allow.

Still, my bias that counseling students may benefit from instruction on spirituality in order to best help their future clients persists. As stated, the ethical standards of the American Counseling Association (1995) and accreditation standards for the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (1994) recognize diversity. I see spirituality as a part of this diversity.

I think some of the hesitation to include spirituality in counselor education is due to the fear that with its inclusion of counseling students might think it is okay to impose their spiritual beliefs onto clients. However, I believe the case is just the opposite. The inclusion of spirituality could allow for open discussion of what is and is not acceptable behavior with clients.

I also think some of the hesitation to include spirituality comes from the fear that some students would have a negative experience of spirituality; however, some students have a negative experience with multicultural counseling and counselor educators would not



think of excusing students from considering the multicultural aspects of counseling.

The participants' words have helped me to consider the multiple facets of spirituality. Several participants mentioned the importance of connection. I think the connections I have with other people and with God are beneficial to my physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Connection can also be thought of as a client's support system. The support system is comprised of people the client connects with. Counseling students could learn to assist clients in building this support system or these connections.

Participants appeared to find it important that counselors and counselor educators refrain from imposing their beliefs upon clients and students. Counselor educators might assist students in distinguishing between sharing one's beliefs and imposing these beliefs. It is important for counseling students to be non-evaluative and non-judgmental in working with spirituality because evaluating and judging a client's spiritual beliefs create an atmosphere unsuitable for the counseling relationship.

Counseling students might be encouraged to consider their preference on discussing spiritual issues with clients. Does the student feel it is appropriate to ask the client what sustains her/him? Does the student prefer to discuss spiritual issues only when raised

by the client? I think it would be important for the counselor educator to be clear on her/his own opinion regarding this discussion.

Three participants appeared to see spirituality as taboo within the field of counselor education. This is important because how students perceive spirituality influences how they approach clients' spiritual issues. Clients may be best served if spirituality were studied openly within counselor training and viewed as potentially positive coping mechanisms for clients.

Holden, Watts, and Brookshire (1995) found secular counselors were less confident than clergy in their ability to challenge her religious ideation. They stated, "...the reported absence of formal religious training among some secular counselors may not be just a case of benign omission, but rather one of active avoidance" (p. 165). Counselor educators might help to increase the confidence of secular counselors in dealing with spiritual and religious issues by removing the taboo from these issues and talking about them openly. In doing so, it is possible that more clients will be helped.

I recall Gabe and Helen mentioned that spirituality encompassed religion and for Gabe in particular it encompassed most aspects of life. Just how broad is spirituality? If we create too large of a circle for what is spiritual, the spiritual may lose its

meaning. Yet a broad meaning of spirituality allows for multiple interpretations.

Abby and Beth appeared to find it difficult to articulate their meaning for spirituality. Clients might also experience this difficulty of describing spirituality. It is a potentially rich area of exploration for many clients and especially the client who presents with existential concerns. Counselor training could address the difficulty of defining spirituality by presenting the variety of definitions in a non-dogmatic stance. This might be done through assigning a variety of articles addressing the definitions of spirituality or possibly through an edited book that presents numerous authors' ideas. I think it may be helpful to explain there is no one right way to define spirituality. Examining the variety of definitions of spirituality might promote appreciation of the diversity of spiritual experience.

Spiritual experiences are as diverse as the definitions for spirituality. Likewise, what is considered a spiritual experience is individually defined. I have spiritual experiences during my meditations. I feel very much at peace and see colors including purple, green, and red. Sometimes I think of people I care about and have visions of what they are doing. I remember thinking of my friend Joey during a meditation and seeing him getting into a white maverick on a dirt road in the desert. When I told Joey about this, he

confirmed that this occurred. Experiences such as this make me feel as though there is some sort of energy larger than myself at work in my life.

Meditation might be used when one has an important decision to make and she/he feels uncertain about what to do. It is a tool counselor educators might consider teaching students. The students may then teach this skill to clients if they thought it could be helpful. To meditate, I create the conditions I need to become quiet and peaceful. I clear my mind and ask myself the question I want answered. I have found an answer will usually come to me. Of course this doesn't always happen on the first try; I must have patience.

Counselor educators might share their own spiritual experience if they feel they have had one. They could encourage counseling students to discuss the spiritual experiences they have had, if any. The counselor educator could ask the students what they think makes an experience spiritual. This subject would be better discussed towards the middle or end of a quarter or semester course. Students need to feel safe to reveal these sorts of experiences. Safety creates the confidence that they will be respected and no one will laugh at what they thought was a special and personal experience.

Participants seemed to attend to safety issues as they brought up ethical concerns over a counselor or professor imposing beliefs upon clients. As a postmodern feminist researcher and future counselor educator, I believe it is harmful to impose our spiritual beliefs on clients and students. I prefer to facilitate clients' and students' discovery of their own beliefs. Participants also brought up what I interpreted as concern over a counselor's disclosure of beliefs. I think each counselor makes one's own decision regarding disclosure of her/his beliefs. The counselor may weigh the risks and benefits of disclosing her/his beliefs.

Three of the participants in the current study thought it was better to allow clients to raise spiritual issues rather than bringing these up themselves. This debate also occurred between participants in my preliminary study on spirituality in counseling with masters students. In this previous study, participants disagreed regarding whether the client or counselor ought to bring up the topic of spirituality in a counseling session. One participant thought the client should be the one to bring up spiritual issues that are concerning the client during a session. She thought that some clients might not be at the point of including spirituality in their lives.

Another participant felt that it was part of a counselor's job in working in a holistic framework to bring up spiritual issues with the client (Souza, in press).

I prefer to bring up spiritual issues with clients. In my professional disclosure statement I mention that I find the spiritual issues of one's meaning and purpose to be primary concerns for numerous people. I also state that I attend to the spiritual dimension as a part of holistic health. Usually clients mention these statements during a session and this leads to a discussion of their spiritual values. When clients do not bring these statements up, I usually ask them what they find most meaningful in their lives and what gives them purpose.

I have not had an experience where a client appeared uncomfortable discussing these concerns. However, if a client were to appear uncomfortable I would probably mention that I notice their discomfort and ask she/he what that discomfort is about. I encourage counselor educators to broach this topic with counseling students. It is another area of counseling that is rather ambiguous. It is up to each counselor to determine her/his approach to spiritual concerns.

Counselor educators can now turn to a definition of spirituality agreed upon by many in the profession, if they wish. At a summit on

spirituality attended by counselor educators, the following definition of spirituality was determined, "The animating force in life...experienced as an active and passive process...a capacity and tendency that is innate and unique to all persons" (Miller, 1999, p. 499).

I think spirituality is best defined individually. Yet it is important for counseling to determine how spirituality affects our profession. I am curious as I think Beth was about how open those in counseling are to differing definitions of spirituality and the concept of a spiritual aspect of life. I think it is beneficial for counseling professionals to be open to a variety of definitions and recognize that some clients see spirituality as an important aspect of their lives. As a counselor, I am ready to provide my client(s) with resources for spiritual support and encourage her/him/them to find their meaning and purpose.

I was somewhat surprised to find that while numerous individual themes emerged, there were only two themes common across participants. This indicates a wide diversity of thought regarding spirituality in counseling. With such diversity found among five, counselor educators are likely to find even more diversity within a class of counseling students.

I appreciate this diversity of thought when I think of my own spirituality. When I try to define spirituality for myself, it seems to slip through my fingers. It is an abstract and complex concept. Even though it pervades my life I cannot describe it with precision. It is the perfect topic for postmodern feminism because of its evasiveness. I have presented my personal definition for spirituality, however I do not pretend to have come up with a definition for others; that was not my intention. The words the participants chose are diverse. What I hope to have accomplished regarding this description of spirituality is to prompt you to consider your own thoughts on spirituality. What does it mean to you? How will counselor educators speak about spirituality to students? The descriptions used by the participants in this study may be an excellent place to start.

### **Future Research**

There are several avenues for future research on spirituality in counselor education. Publication of case studies on how counselors assist clients with spiritual issues would be helpful since I have found that counseling students enjoy learning from cases presentations. What are the best methods for educating counseling students on spirituality? Are workshops, courses, and the infusion of spirituality throughout the curriculum equally effective? Counselor educators



might report how they have introduced spirituality to counseling students. This would help other educators teach students the importance of spirituality.

What counseling theories are most effective when working with spiritual issues? I am interested in how we can use the existential and transpersonal theories in investigating spiritual issues. In what ways can supervisors integrate spirituality? What are some of the boundaries a supervisor should set up for students working with clients on spirituality? When is it beneficial for the counselor or professor to disclose her/his spiritual beliefs? How can school counselors creatively introduce spirituality to students? In what ways do spirituality and career counseling interact? What developmental and situational concerns are most likely to trigger the consideration of spiritual issues for clients?

It would be helpful to hear from counselor educators and counselors who are against integrating spirituality into counselor education. This would invite much needed dialogue in regard to the topic. Further, such writing might not only generate specific appropriate ways to incorporate spirituality into counselor education, but also surface the hesitations about the integration of spirituality into counselor education that I imagine exist. Spirituality is a broad

and complex topic likely to require thorough consideration from counselor educators.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A

## Guiding questions

1. Please briefly describe yourself as you would for someone who doesn't know you.
2. How do you define spirituality?
3. Describe a specific situation, personal and/or professional that was influenced by your spirituality.
4. Do you differentiate between spirituality and religion? If so, how? If not, why not?
5. What do you think of including spirituality as an area of education of counselors? If you think spirituality should be included in the education of counselors, how should it be included?
6. What are some of the ethical issues that come to mind as you consider spirituality in counseling?

## Appendix B



May 9, 2000

Principal Investigator:

The following project has been approved for exemption under the guidelines of Oregon State University's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Principal Investigator(s): Judith Osborne

Student's Name (if any): Katherine Zimmer Souza

Department: Counselor Education

Source of Funding:

Project Title: Exploring Counseling Students' Perspectives on Spirituality Using a Postmodern Feminist Paradigm

Comments:

This approval is valid for one year from the date of this letter. A copy of this information will be provided to the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects. If questions arise, you may be contacted further.

Sincerely,

Laura K. Lincoln  
IRB Coordinator

cc: CPHS Chair

## Appendix C

May 12, 2000

To: Doctoral counseling students  
From: Katherine Zimmer Souza  
Re: Dissertation research

I am writing to request your participation in my dissertation research which is exploring counseling students' perspectives on spirituality in counseling using postmodern feminist epistemology and methodology.

The purpose of this research is to explore the ideas of counseling students on spirituality. I hope that the results will give a better picture of how to approach spirituality in counselor education and provide rich information on how counseling students see spirituality functioning in their personal lives and professional work. This research is the first study examining the ideas of counseling students on spirituality.

If you choose to participate, I will interview you individually for one hour. You will choose where the individual interview takes place. Up to three additional individual interviews may be scheduled to expand or clarify what you said previously. You will also participate in one group interview. The participants of this study and Katherine Zimmer Souza will be present at this interview. All individual interviews and the group interview will be audiotaped. You may withdraw at any time. All information will remain confidential. No faculty at Oregon State University will be performed if requested by the committee by Dr. Cynthia Baldwin, a former counselor educator at the University of Nevada, Reno. You will be informed before this verification would take place and have the option to withdraw. Pseudonyms will be used in any resulting publications.

Thank you for considering participating in this research. If you are interested in participating, please call me at 758-6715, email me at [tedkath@home.com](mailto:tedkath@home.com), or place a note in my box at Education Hall room 110. Please tell me how to best contact you.

## Appendix D

## Informed Consent

### A. Title of the research project.

Exploring counseling students' perspectives on spirituality through a postmodern feminist paradigm.

### B. Investigators.

Judith Osborne, Ed.D.  
Katherine Zimmer Souza, M.A.

### C. Purpose of the research project.

The purpose of this research project is to gain an understanding of counseling students' perspectives on spirituality in counseling. Exploring the ideas of counseling students will give a better picture of how to approach spirituality in counselor education.

### D. Procedures.

#### **I understand that as a participant in this study I will:**

#### 1. What I will do during the study.

I will participate in one, one hour individual interview. Up to three additional interviews may be scheduled to clarify or expand on what I have said previously. The interview will occur at a time and place that is mutually agreed upon by Katherine Zimmer Souza and me. I will also participate in one group interview. Participants of the study and Katherine Zimmer Souza will be present at this group interview.

#### 2. Benefits and foreseeable risks or discomforts.

Increasing my awareness of spirituality may result in some discomfort if I choose to reevaluate my belief system. An increased awareness of my own belief system may benefit me in the counseling and supervision process.

E. Confidentiality.

Any information I provide will be kept confidential to the extent the law permits. Only Katherine Zimmer Souza or a professional transcriptionist will have access to any tape-recorded information. Tapes will be destroyed upon completion of the dissertation. Pseudonyms will be used in transcripts and in any data summaries or publications. Dr. Cynthia Baldwin, a former counselor education faculty member at the University of Nevada, Reno, may review transcripts if Katherine Zimmer Souza's doctoral committee asks her to do so. I will be informed before this review and may withdraw my data at that time. A file linking my name and how I may be contacted will be kept in a locked filing cabinet that is separate from the data. The link will be destroyed when the study has been completed.

F. Voluntary participation statement.

I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I may either refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. If I refuse to participate or withdraw, none of my responses, comments, or questions will be used in the research.

G. If you have questions.

I understand that any questions I have about the research study and/or specific procedures should be directed to:

Judith Osborne, Ed.D.  
Education Hall 318A  
(541) 737-5996  
[osbornej@orst.edu](mailto:osbornej@orst.edu)

Katherine Zimmer Souza, M.A.  
Education Hall 315D  
(541) 758-6715  
[tedkath@home.com](mailto:tedkath@home.com)

I should direct any questions that I may have about my rights as a participant to:

IRB Coordinator  
OSU Research Office  
(541) 737-8008

**My signature below indicates that I have read and that I understand the procedures described above and give my informed and voluntary consent to participate in this study. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant    Name of participant    Date signed