

FINDING A HOME FOR SPIRITUALITY IN COUPLE AND FAMILY
THERAPY TRAINING: AN ANALYSIS OF CFT EDUCATORS' STRATEGIES AND
METHODS FOR INTEGRATING SPIRITUALITY INTO THE CFT CURRICULUM

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
North Dakota State University
of Agriculture and Applied Science

By

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major Department:
Human Development and Family Science

October 2010

Fargo, North Dakota

North Dakota State University
Graduate School

Title

_____ Finding a home for spirituality in couple and family therapy training: _____

An examination of CFT educators' strategies for integrating spirituality into training

By

_____ Jana Kekic Holland _____

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ABSTRACT

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Finding a Home for Spirituality in Couple and Family Therapy Training: An Analysis of CFT Educators' Strategies and Methods For Integrating Spirituality Into the CFT Curriculum. Major Professor: Dr. Thomas Carlson.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the specific ways that couple and family therapy (CFT) faculty members integrate content on spirituality into the courses they teach. The study used an existing data set consisting of 93 CFT faculty members who taught in accredited master's and/or doctoral level CFT programs of which 47 were male and 46 were female. The participants completed an electronic survey for this study. The predominant religious or spiritual affiliation within the sample was Christian. The results of this study suggested that many participants were following recommendations from the literature on ways to integrate topics of spirituality into the teaching and supervision of CFT students. However, the results of this study also indicated that infusion of spirituality into the curricula is an idea worthy of further exploration in the research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Tom Carlson for providing me with the opportunity to work on a research project pertaining to a topic I am very passionate about. I have felt extremely supported throughout this process by Dr. Carlson and am appreciative of all the input and help he has provided me over the last two years. This experience has allowed me to grow as a person as well as a therapist in my professional work. Dr. Carlson has taught me not only to feel confident in my abilities to produce a professional paper, but also to become a great writer, which I am very thankful for.

I would also like to thank my family for supporting me over the past two years as I have continued to work hard toward completing my thesis and my class requirements. I have felt extremely supported by my family to continue to work hard and never to give up on my goals. Even when I lack strength and belief in myself and my capabilities, they have never doubted me and have always expressed how proud they are of me, and for that I am forever thankful. Additionally, I would like to thank my husband, Todd, who supports me in everything that I do and who has taken the time to look over my work and edit it every time I asked him to do so. He has been there for me and has provided me with the support I needed to believe in myself and my abilities to complete my thesis and feel proud of my accomplishments.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation toward Dr. Rebecca Woods, with whom I have worked during my years of graduate school. She has been an incredible mentor and role model, and she never failed to remind me that I need to take care of myself. I could not have accomplished all that I have without these incredible people in my life.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

While the majority of Americans consider religion to be an important aspect of their lives (Gallup, 2009), the topic of spirituality and religion has, until the last decade, received little attention within the field of couple and family therapy (CFT) (Carlson & Erickson, 2000; Carlson, Kirkpatrick, Hecker, & Killmer, 2002; Haug, 1998; Prest, Russel, & D'Souza, 1999). Although the writings and research conducted on spirituality and CFT are still fairly new within the field, the topic is increasing in importance, as is witnessed in the growing body of literature pertaining to it (Carlson, et al., 2002, Grams, Carlson, & McGeorge, 2007; Haug, 1998; Prest et al., 1999). Current literature exploring the role of spirituality in CFT suggests that most family therapists and CFT students self-identify as spiritual persons and most of these individuals believe that there is a relationship between spiritual health and mental health (Carlson et al., 2002; Grams et al., 2007; Prest et al., 1999).

An important theme found throughout literature on spirituality is the need for training programs to better prepare students to integrate spirituality into their clinical work and, in particular, develop the skills necessary to be able to do so (Anderson & Worthen, 1997; Carlson et al., 2002; Grams et al., 2007; Haug, 1998; Prest et al., 1999; Stander et al., 1994). Studies of American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) clinical members, CFT students, and CFT faculty support the need to integrate content on spirituality into CFT training (Carlson et al., 2002; Grams et al., 2007; Prest et al., 1999). For example, Carlson et al. (2002) found that 63% of the AAMFT clinical members surveyed in their study supported the idea that students should receive specific training

related to integrating spirituality into clinical work. Additionally, Prest et al. (1999) found that two thirds of CFT students in their study believed that the inclusion of spiritual topics is important in CFT training and supervision. Finally, Grams et al. (2007) found that 86.4% of CFT faculty members in their study also believe that it is important to integrate spirituality into training. Interestingly, however, Prest et al. (1999) found that the majority (92.2%) of students in their study reported that they had not received training in their clinical programs on integrating religious issues into their practice.

The Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) also recognizes the importance of spirituality as an aspect of CFT training. The Educational Guidelines (10.01) in the COAMFTE Standards of Accreditation Version 11.0 read:

Programs are expected to infuse their curriculum with content that addresses issues related to diversity, power and privilege as they relate to age, culture, environment, ethnicity, gender, health/ability, nationality, race, *religion*, sexual orientation, *spirituality*, and socioeconomic status [emphasis added] (COAMFTE, 2005).

These guidelines represent an overall value by the COAMFTE that topics of religion and spirituality are important in the training of CFT students.

While there appears to be agreement among CFT faculty, students, scholars, and the COAMFTE as to the importance of better preparing CFT students to address spiritual issues in therapy, and, while two-thirds of CFT faculty report that they include content on spirituality into their courses, there appears to be little information as to how topics related to spirituality are integrated into CFT training (Grams et al., 2007; Prest et al., 1999). The purpose of this study, therefore, is to identify the specific ways that CFT faculty members

incorporate content on the role of spirituality and therapy into their coursework and clinical training.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature on spirituality in the CFT field can be summarized into three main themes: the importance of spirituality in clinical practice, strategies for including spirituality in clinical practice, and the importance of preparing students to address spiritual issues in therapy. The following review will highlight the major ideas and findings in each of the three areas listed above.

Importance of Spirituality in Clinical Practice

The vast majority of articles that address spirituality in the field of CFT can be categorized as position papers that argue for the inclusion of spirituality in therapy and training (Haug, 1998; Stander et al., 1994). These articles tend to argue that since spirituality plays such an important role in the lives of many clients, therapists then have a responsibility to invite conversations about spirituality into therapy (Carlson et al., 2002; Haug, 1998; Rivett & Street, 2001; Stander et al., 1994). For example, individuals tend to rely on their spiritual belief systems to make sense of their life experiences and thus, therapy can be a place where clients' relationships with spirituality can be invited into discussion and the therapeutic process (Haug, 1998). Stander et al. (1994) argue that family therapy is a likely place where conversations about spirituality can take place since both spirituality and family therapy have similar goals of helping families form their beliefs, values, and morals.

Another argument that is made in the literature is that a client's spirituality should be considered as a part of his or her cultural identity (Eck, 2002; Prest & Keller, 1993; Rivett & Street, 2001; Stander et al, 1994). For example, religion and spirituality work as

lenses through which individuals interpret their life experiences. Rivett and Street (2001) and Prest and Keller (1993) also make the argument that a person's spiritual beliefs are part of a person's cultural foundation and may have a more powerful impact in determining a person's identity than his or her culture.

While research in the area of spirituality and family therapy is still in its infancy, as discussed previously, the literature does indicate that a majority of CFTs believe that spirituality is important to the practice of therapy (Carlson et al., 2002; Grams et al., 2007). According to their findings, Carlson et al. (2002) reported that 96% of the clinical members in their study believed that there is a relationship between mental health and spiritual health. Additionally, 62% of the members surveyed agreed with the idea that every person has a spiritual dimension that should be considered in clinical practice (Carlson et al., 2002).

Strategies for Including Spirituality in Clinical Practice

Another primary theme in the spirituality literature is strategies for addressing topics of spirituality within the scope of clinical practice, which includes the importance of therapists initiating conversations regarding spirituality in an ethical manner. For example, Wolf and Stephens (2001) suggest that therapists should raise the topic of spirituality during the intake process. They suggest that spirituality could be included in the assessment of the clients' backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, race, gender identity, etc. Strategies that could be used as assessment methods in therapy when inviting conversations about spirituality have also been identified, such as the spiritual genogram (Frame, 2000). The spiritual genogram enables clients to discover ways in which religious or spiritual beliefs, experiences, rituals, and practices are related to their presenting problem/issue

(Frame, 2002). Using the spiritual genogram involves four steps: creating the spiritual genogram, asking questions for further reflection, connecting with one's family of origin, and integration into the global therapeutic endeavor (Frame, 2000). Similarly, Hodge (2000) introduces the spiritual ecomap, which provides a valuable supplement by depicting a family's current relationship to critical ecological systems in space, such as spirituality and religion. The ecomap is a "pen and paper depiction of the family's existential relationship to environmental systems." (Hodge, 2000, p. 219).

Ethical Consideration

When integrating spirituality into clinical practice, it is important for the therapist to adhere to the appropriate ethical standards. Several articles address the ethical responsibility of therapists as it relates to the potential dilemmas that are faced when therapists address spiritual issues with their clients (Haug, 1998; Helmeke & Bischof, 2002; Rivett & Street, 2001; Stander et al., 1994). For example, Rivett and Street (2001) argue that therapists need to explore their own spiritual beliefs in order to meaningfully work with families who present clear spiritual beliefs. Additionally, Haug (1998) argues that therapists have an obligation to clarify and explore their own beliefs before they can be helpful to clients, students, and supervisees in a similar endeavor. When therapists are able to assess their personal spiritual beliefs and practices and the impact these beliefs have on their lives, they are better prepared to conduct similar assessments with clients and utilize spiritual resources in therapy (Haug, 1998). Haug (1998) also argues that engaging therapists in a process of exploring their personal spiritual beliefs will decrease the likelihood of imposing their spiritual beliefs onto clients.

Helmeke and Bischof (2002) provide a helpful conceptual framework for therapists to utilize, recognize, and raise issues that have spiritual or religious significance for clients. The framework presents a four quadrant grid that can be used to guide therapy when integrating spirituality. Helmeke and Bischof (2002) argue that the ethics associated with raising spiritual issues in therapy differ depending on (1) who initiates discussion (e.g., the therapist or the client) and (2) whether the issue being discussed is of a religious or spiritual nature. They suggest that this framework can be useful for therapists because there are different guidelines for clinical work associated with each quadrant. For example, if the client were to raise the issue, the therapist can feel safe to make the assumption that the client is willing to discuss religious and/or spiritual issues and the therapist can be less concerned about imposing his/her own beliefs. On the other hand, it may be appropriate for a therapist to raise the issue of spirituality with clients under certain conditions. For example, Helmeke and Bischof (2002) argue that therapists can initiate conversations about spirituality by simply asking a client, "Is your spirituality a possible resource for you?" (p. 205). However, while therapists can initiate conversations about spirituality it is important for the therapist to not pursue these conversations if they appear unimportant to the client. This framework is also helpful because the therapist can feel confident in proceeding with therapy when the client is the one who raises the issue of spirituality (Helmeke & Bischof, 2002).

The issue of whether or not it is appropriate for the therapist to raise issues of spirituality with clients is also discussed by Carlson et al. (2002). In their study of CFT's beliefs about the role of integrating spirituality in therapy, a common belief expressed by participants was that conversations about spirituality should only take place if raised by the

client. Carlson et al. (2002), however, argue that if therapists never raise the issue with clients it may send the message that it is not okay or appropriate to talk about spirituality in the context of therapy.

Several authors discuss ways that spirituality can be addressed from a particular theoretical framework (Carlson & Erickson, 2000; Walsh, 2009). For example, Walsh (2009) suggests two major areas of which particular attention should be focused: ways that religious/spiritual beliefs or experiences might contribute to current distress and ways that past, current, or potential spiritual resources might be drawn upon to ease distress, resolve problems, and strengthen resilience in dealing with adversity. Additionally, Carlson and Erickson (2000) explain that spirituality can also be integrated into therapy when working from a narrative approach. When working with individuals who self-identify as spiritual or religious, questions exploring the meaning given to their spirituality can be incorporated into the narrative therapy process (Carlson & Erickson, 2000).

Importance of Preparing Students to Address Spiritual Issues in Therapy

Another important theme in the spirituality literature is the importance of preparing students to address spiritual issues in therapy (Carlson et al., 2002; Grams et al., 2007; Haug, 1998; Prest et al., 1999; Stander et al., 1994). For example, Haug (1998) makes the argument that training programs have a responsibility to prepare students to work with a client's spirituality in therapy since the topic of spirituality is a complicated issue and raises both personal and ethical dilemmas for therapists. Furthermore, Haug (1998) suggests three stages that CFT students and faculty should go through to explore ideas about spirituality and religion. In the first stage, educators and supervisors are encouraged to become comfortable with religious and spiritual topics in order to provide trainees with a

convincing model for integrating spirituality in therapy. In the second stage, students are encouraged to construct a spiritual genogram to explore their own family history of spirituality. This genogram can be useful in increasing self-awareness of the spiritual/religious contexts of students' lives and help them consider its influence on the therapeutic relationships they form with clients. In the final stage, students are encouraged to reflect with the faculty during supervision on how beliefs about spirituality are impacting their cases. For example, therapists can discuss in supervision how much self-disclosure they might want to engage in during therapy in relation to their own spirituality (Haug, 1998).

Another way to prepare students to address spiritual issues in therapy is through a course dedicated to the topic. For example, Patterson et al. (2000) presented a model of a graduate-level course on spiritual issues for CFT students. The goals of the course include training students how to have beginning conversations with individuals and families about spirituality and identifying many of the spiritual issues which may arise in a clinical setting (Patterson et al., 2000). Additionally, Patterson et al. (2000) suggest such a course examines the relationship between spirituality and family therapy and addresses issues such as questions of meaning and purpose, explanations for human suffering, the role of values and religious beliefs in therapy, the use of stories and rituals, and the impact of spiritual beliefs on family functioning. It is interesting to note that some students felt that since taking the course, their clients have responded positively and appreciatively to the students bringing up spiritual questions in session (Patterson et al., 2000).

As previously mentioned, most of the literature related to spirituality and CFT training represent position papers arguing for the importance of including spiritual topics in

standard curriculum of CFT programs. However, there are two research studies that show that both students and faculty believe that spirituality is an important component of CFT training (Grams, et al., 2007; Prest et al., 1999). For example, Prest et al. (1999) found that 72.6% of students in their study reported that it is desirable for a clinician to receive supervision and training in working with topics of spirituality in therapy. They also found that 75% of students agreed or strongly agreed that every person has a spiritual dimension that should be considered in clinical practice. Additionally, two-thirds of the participants (66.6%) expressed an interest in learning ways to integrate spirituality in their clinical work (Prest et al., 1999). Finally, as was previously mentioned, the majority of the students in this study reported that they had not received training in their clinical programs to help them integrate religious and spiritual topics into therapy (Prest et al., 1999).

Grams et al. (2007) found that CFT faculty members also believe that it is important to integrate spiritual topics into training. For example, 86.4% of participants reported that it is important for students to learn about integrating spirituality into assessment. Additionally, 81.3% of the participants reported that it is desirable for students to receive supervision and training on spiritual issues (Grams et al., 2007). Finally, 66.7% of CFT faculty reported that they regularly teach about spiritual topics in their courses.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to identify the specific ways that CFT faculty members incorporate content on the role of spirituality and therapy into their coursework and clinical training. Therefore, the research questions for this study are: (1) In what courses do CFT faculty address spirituality topics?, (2) What are specific strategies related to spirituality

that CFT faculty utilize in their courses?, and (3) What are the specific ways that CFT faculty address spirituality in their supervision of CFT students?

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

This study used a secondary data set analysis to explore the specific ways that CFT faculty members integrate content on spirituality into the courses they teach. The data used for this study is part of a larger project that explored the beliefs of CFT faculty regarding the role of spirituality in their personal and professional lives.

Participant Recruitment

In order to qualify for participation in this study, participants needed to be faculty members at a COAMFTE accredited masters and/or doctoral program. A total of 272 faculty members from 81 COAMFTE accredited programs were invited to participate in the study. Initial e-mail invitations were sent to the faculty members along with two e-mail reminders sent in one week increments. In addition, e-mails were also sent on the official AAMFT program director listserv.

Sample Description

It should be noted that this participant sample comes from the same data set as the Grams et al. (2007) study. A total of 93 CFT faculty members participated in the study. They ranged in age from 25 to 85 with a mean age of 47.24 (SD = 10.95) years, translating into a response rate of 34.2%. The sample was predominately White and included 46 women and 47 men. The majority of the participants reported being Christian (i.e., 76.3%) and 44% worked for a religious institution. Additionally, the participants had 17.75 (SD = 9.73) years of post-master's clinical experience on average. Their post-master's clinical experience ranged from 2 to 45 years. Finally, the participants reported having spent

approximately 11.83 (SD = 8.82) years in a faculty position, with a range of 0 to 39 years.

See Table 1 for complete demographic characteristics.

Table 1: *Characteristics of the Sample*

Characteristics	n	%
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	4	4.4
Asian	3	3.3
Latina/Latino	2	2.2
Native American	2	2.2
White	80	87.9
Religious Affiliation		
Atheist	1	1.1
Buddhist	6	6.6
Christian	71	78.0
Hindu	1	1.1
Jewish	3	3.3
No Religious Affiliation	3	3.3
Other	2	2.2
Spiritual, Not Religious	4	4.4
Highest Degree Received		
Ed.D.	3	3.2
Master's Degree	13	14.0
Master's of Divinity	1	1.1

Table 1: (Continued)

M.D.	1	1.1
Ph.D.	73	78.5
Psy.D.	2	2.2

Table 1: (Continued)

Institutional Affiliation

Non-secular	40	44.0
Secular	51	56.0

Degrees Offered in MFT

Master's Only	54	60.7
Ph.D. Only	7	7.5
Both Master's and Ph.D.	28	30.1

Accredited Programs

Master's	55	63.2
Ph.D.	11	12.6
Both Master's and Ph.D.	21	22.6

Note. N=93

Instruments

The instrument used for this particular study included two open ended questions designed to identify where and how CFT faculty members address spiritual topics in their course work and supervision. These questions were: (1) In what courses do you as a faculty member include specific content related to spirituality? and (2) In what ways do you specifically prepare students to address spiritual issues in your clinical training and

supervision? Participants received an e-mail inviting them to participate in an online survey about their personal and professional beliefs regarding spirituality. The survey also included the qualitative questions asking participants to identify the ways in which they integrate spirituality into training.

Data Analysis

The three research questions were explored through the use of qualitative thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involves the analysis of text in such a way as to reveal particular categories and themes that are recurrent in the data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Researchers using thematic analysis typically adhere to the following strategies when determining the themes and sub-themes of a particular text: (1) familiarizing oneself with the data by reading through the transcripts or text several times before making any notes or markings, (2) reading through the transcripts again while highlighting key phrases that are relevant to the research question that is being asked, (3) reading through the transcripts once again, while making notes in the margins that seek to make a connection between, or give meaning to, the highlighted phrases and (4) reading through the highlighted phrases and notes to identify specific themes and sub-themes within the text (Creswell, 1998).

While quantitative research uses internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity as a basis for judging the rigor of a research project, qualitative research uses extrinsic criteria such as credibility to determine the trustworthiness of the findings (Morrow, 2005). Rolfe (2006) refers to trustworthiness as the steps taken by a researcher in order to “track or verify the research process” (p. 305). For example, in qualitative research, credibility tends to correspond to internal validity. Credibility deals with the issue of ensuring rigor in the research process and ways researchers can communicate to others

that it has been done (Morrow, 2005). Some strategies used to achieve credibility are to: (1) use peer debriefers or peer researchers, (2) conduct negative case analysis, and (3) complete participant checks, validation, or co-analysis (Morrow, 2005). Since this study is based on secondary data analysis, peer debriefing was used as a method to ensure credibility of the findings. Peer debriefing involved carefully reading through the data and making notes and highlights three times in order to determine the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data. After identifying primary categories and themes, my advisor reviewed my findings to see if they are consistent with his own findings following the same steps discussed above.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The research questions this study sought to address were: (1) In what courses do CFT faculty address spirituality topics?, (2) What are the specific ways that CFT faculty prepare students to address spirituality through their teaching and coursework? and (3) What are the specific ways that CFT faculty address spirituality in their supervision of CFT students? This chapter presents the specific categories and themes that were identified through the thematic analysis for each of the research questions.

Research Question One: Courses

This research question sought to uncover the specific courses in which CFT faculty address topics of spirituality. Participants in this study identified that they address spirituality in a variety of CFT courses. The courses reported were tallied to identify the frequency. The most common courses in which spirituality was addressed were courses addressing couples and sex therapy, ethics and professional issues, family therapy theories, and cultural issues. Additionally, eleven participants reported teaching a course related to spirituality and therapy. For instance, some of the courses which participants reported teaching include “Spirituality and Family Therapy,” “courses on grief work and spirituality,” “Spirituality and Health,” “Psychology in Relation to Theology,” and “Existential and Spiritual Issues in Marriage and Family Therapy.” Interestingly, of these eleven participants, only five belong to a non-secular institution. Furthermore, six of the participants indicated that they infuse content on spirituality into all of their courses. For a detailed listing of all of the courses that were identified by the participants see Table 2.

Research Question Two: Integration of Spirituality into Coursework

Research question two sought to find out what, if any, specific content related to spirituality CFT faculty include in their coursework. The thematic analysis for this research questions resulted in the emergence of three themes. Theme one, teaching approaches, represents the specific methods that participants utilize to teach about spirituality in their classes. Theme two, frameworks, represents the particular perspectives or lenses that CFT faculty use to present spiritual issues in their courses. Theme three, skill development, represents specific ways participants encourage their students to invite topics of spirituality into the therapy room.

Theme One: Teaching Approaches

The first theme, teaching approaches, represents the specific methods participants used to integrate topics related to spirituality into their courses. The sub-themes that were identified within this theme were lectures, discussion, interactive strategies, and readings.

Sub-Theme One: Lectures. One strategy that was identified within the theme of teaching approaches was class lectures. Some participants reported using lectures in class as a way of preparing students to integrate topics related to spirituality into their work with clients in therapy. For example, one participant stated, “Students are prepared because of lectures and/or class discussions in which they have participated.” This quote suggests that some participants believe that integrating spirituality topics into class lectures is an important strategy for preparing students to work with spiritual clients in therapy.

Sub-Theme Two: Discussion. One of the most common strategies that participants reported using to present topics of spirituality in their coursework appears to be class discussion. For example, one participant stated, “I make direct statements about the

Table 2: *Courses Integrating Spirituality*

Course	n
Family Therapy Theory	31
Practicum	16
Couples and Sex Therapy	15
Culture/Diversity	14
Ethics	13
Spirituality	11
Assessment/Psychopathology	10
Supervision	10
None	6
Infused Throughout Curriculum	6
Developmental	4
Addictions	3
Research	3

Note. N=142

importance of asking clients about their spiritual beliefs/resources/meaning system” while another participant reported having “regular conversations about the subject in classes, seminars, and informal groups.” Both of the above comments highlight the belief among some of the participants that the topic of spirituality should be brought up regularly in class and that CFT faculty should be direct in their inclusion of spiritual content in CFT training. A slightly different perspective on the role of spirituality can be found in the following participant’s quote: “I discuss spirituality at various times in various ways, depending on

the student groups and their interests.” This quote illustrates a less direct approach to discussion of spiritual topics that is influenced by the level of student interest in the topic. Finally, while some participants appear to engage in open conversations about spirituality in their courses one participant highlighted the need to keep conversations about spirituality hidden. This participant stated that conversations about spirituality took place in “covert discussions.” This statement appears to convey a belief that spiritual conversations are not accepted in certain academic settings.

Sub-Theme Three: Interactive Strategies. The participants also highlighted the use of various interactive strategies in their teaching of spiritual issues in their classes. For example, strategies such as role play, panels, case examples, and spiritual practice were also indicated by the participants as some of the ways that they introduce content on spirituality to their students. For instance, one participant reported, “I bring in religious leaders from various faiths to talk to the class.” Another participant reported incorporating content related to spirituality through “case examples” that are offered in different courses. Another participant discussed incorporating spiritual topics into classes “through the use of role play.” These participants appear to believe that directly engaging the students in class activities around the topic of spirituality is important in the development of spiritual competencies among students. Finally, another participant reported how his or her program invites student to directly engage in spiritual practices as part of their training experience. This participant reported “practicing spirituality as part of the community – for example, through prayer, worship, meditation, and study of sacred scripture.”

Sub-Theme Four: Readings. Another important strategy for preparing students to address spiritual topics in therapy is through assigning specific readings related to

spirituality and therapy in their classes. One participant stated, “In my course, I require a textbook regarding spirituality in family therapy, which the students gratefully embrace.” Another participant reported, “We have specific readings and opportunities for students to conduct further research on spirituality in relationship to theory, clinical practice, ethics, and research.” While it would seem that reading literature on the role of spirituality in therapy would be an important in preparing students to address spiritual issues in therapy, it is interesting to note that only two participants mentioned that they assign any readings on this topic.

Theme Two: Frameworks

The second theme, frameworks, represents the belief among the CFT faculty in this study that it is important to situate conversations about spirituality within an overall perspective that encompasses the contexts of culture and meaning systems. Two sub-themes were identified within the theme of frameworks: diversity/culture and value/belief system. This theme offers strategies used to incorporate values and culture into the therapy process.

Sub-theme one: Diversity/Culture. The thematic analysis revealed that many participants reported introducing spirituality as part of the client’s larger cultural context. For instance, one participant stated, “I provide readings that focus on multiculturalism and pluralism as concepts in class which opens door to discussions of spirituality/religion/faith in professional role practice.” Another participant reported, “We discuss faith-based groups as part of the client’s context and spirituality as part of the client’s self.” Another participant described having “differential discussions about religion as a spiritual/emotional/social resource and cultural issues related to religion and treatment.”

Some participants even reflected on the diversity within the particular program and how that exposure to different cultures and religious backgrounds helps in the teaching of spirituality. For example, one participant stated teaching spirituality “through diversity – we have Muslim, Jewish, Christian, and Buddhist students throughout the curriculum.”

Sub-theme Two: Value/Belief System. The thematic analysis found that participants also integrated conversations about spirituality as part of their reading/discussions about the role of values and beliefs in therapy. For instance, one participant reported, “We talk about values and discuss values with clients. This includes their spirituality and religious values.” Another participant stated, “We discuss ways to help clients identify and support any aspects of their lives that are consistent with their beliefs, values, aspirations, etc.” Another participant discussed how he “asks students questions that encourage them to consider clients’ spiritual needs, worldview, etc.” These results seem to show that participants find the lens of values as helpful in opening up conversations about spirituality in their work with students.

Theme Three: Skill Development

This theme represents specific strategies participants encourage their students to utilize when inviting topics of spirituality into the therapy room. The thematic analysis for this theme resulted in three sub-themes: assessment, non-expert/curious stance, and timing. The following section will present a summary of findings for each theme.

Sub-theme One: Assessment. Sub-theme one represents ways in which students explore their clients’ spirituality in therapy by using specific techniques and assessment methods. The thematic analysis showed a range of techniques which students are encouraged to utilize. For example, one participant stated using “specific techniques for

exploring spiritual/religious content, including genograms, timelines. . .” Another participant reported “teaching students to assess and explore client spiritual issues in assessment as they relate to therapy goals.” One participant found it beneficial to “assess what, if any, level of spirituality the client finds meaningful.” These findings appear to highlight the importance of including questions about spirituality as part of the assessment process in therapy among these participants.

Sub-theme two: Non-Expert/Curious Stance. Sub-theme two represents ways in which participants teach and train CFT students to inquire about clients’ spiritual lives by letting the clients be the experts and by being open to the clients’ stories without imposing own beliefs or values on them. For example, one participant reported, “I present questions inquiring about clients’ spiritual lives to give students ideas about how they can appropriately inquire about clients’ religious or spiritual beliefs without imposing their own values on clients.” Another participant stated,

I try to help students be open to, listen for, and inquire about these things from the position of the client’s expertise, and to do so without the therapist having a position on what ways clients should or should not live their lives, or what aspect of life must or must not be present in order to be considered a full and meaningful life. Also, I help students be comfortable asking about these aspects from a position of curiosity, respect, and interest.

Both of the above quotes highlight the importance of taking a non-expert or collaborative stance when addressing spiritual issues in therapy. The participants in this study appear to believe taking such a position reduces the likelihood that students will impose their own values in therapy. Furthermore, the participants also seemed to believe that teaching their

students to explore their own spiritual beliefs plays an important role in helping students take a more collaborative stance in their work with clients when addressing spiritual issues.

Sub-theme three: Timing. Sub-theme three represents the participants' beliefs that knowing when and how to introduce spiritual conversations into the therapy is a key element to competent practice in regard to integrating spirituality into therapy. For instance, one participant reported, "We talk about the appropriateness and timing of conversation that includes religion or spirituality." Another participant stated, "We talk about when and how to address spirituality." Each of these quotes represents the important element that timing plays when introducing topics of spirituality in therapy.

In addition to timing, the participants' also highlighted the importance of knowing how to introduce spiritual topics in therapy. For example, one participant said, "We discuss how clients bring religion into session and how to interact in a respectful manner." Another participant discussed the importance of considering "under what circumstances clients might consider it helpful to introduce it or follow a client's lead in that direction." Clearly, the timing of introducing spiritual topics is an important element of competent practice related to integrating spirituality into therapy. Additionally, an important aspect of timing involves paying attention to cues that clients give that indicate that they are open to inviting spirituality into the therapy process.

Research Question Three: Supervision

This question sought to find out the specific ways that participant address spirituality in the supervision of CFT students. The thematic analysis for this research question resulted in two themes: therapist-focused and client-focused. The following section presents a summary of the findings under each of the two themes.

Theme One: Therapist-Focused

One of the primary ways that the participants addressed spirituality in their supervisory practices was through self-of-the-therapist work. This theme has been named therapist-focused because many participants reported organizing supervision around working on the students' own spiritual identities and the impacts they can have on their work with clients. Two sub-themes were found within this theme: helping students become aware of their own spirituality and helping them better understand the influence their own spirituality may have on their clients.

Sub-Theme One: Awareness of Own Spirituality. One purpose for self-of-the-therapist work was to help students become aware of their own spirituality. The participants indicated that discussing students' own spirituality was an important aspect of preparing students to address spiritual issues in therapy with their clients. For example, one participant stated, "I encourage them to explore their own spirituality and how it relates to clients' spirituality." Another participant reported, "I am focused on how they know their spiritual views, while being curious and open about others' views." Another participant said, "I encourage students to develop their own spirituality and encourage them to consider how their spirituality and their clients' spirituality can be valuable in the therapeutic process." Another participant stated, "Students are invited to consider their own perception of their own spirituality." These quotes illustrate the importance that the participants place on students' own explorations of their spiritual beliefs and how their own beliefs might influence their work with clients in therapy. Additionally, the responses indicate that participants viewed this exploration process as being a key element to helping

students be more open to clients' views and beliefs, even when they might be unfamiliar or different from the students' beliefs.

Sub-theme two: Understanding the Influence of Own Beliefs on Clients.

Another purpose for using self-of-the-therapist work with students, as identified by the participants, was to help them better understand the potential influence of their own spiritual beliefs on their work with clients. For example, one participant stated, "We talk about self of the therapist and how their own beliefs and spiritual experiences influence their therapy." Another participant stated, "I ask trainees to consider how their own spirituality or religiosity influences their interactions with clients." Additionally, another participant noted, "We talk about their religion and faith and how that affects their work with clients." These quotes highlight the belief among some of the participants in this study in the reciprocal process that is involved in student self-exploration. As students become more aware of their own spiritual beliefs, it will have a positive influence in their work with clients.

Participants within this sample also identified specific strategies they utilize to help students become aware of their own spirituality. For example, some of the strategies presented by the participants include: having students (1) complete a "spiritual questioning/self-assessment," (2) "complete a spiritual genogram," and (3) give a "presentation of personal spiritual family history to the class." These findings indicate becoming aware of one's own spiritual position is a helpful method to integrating spirituality in therapy with clients who also self-identify as spiritual individuals.

Theme Two: Client-Focused

While the majority of suggestions for preparing students to address spiritual topics in therapy are student-focused, the following examples represents the ways in which the participants use client-focused strategies to encourage students to become more spiritually competent in their work. For example, participants identified how they introduce the importance of exploring spirituality through “case consultation in supervision,” “through oral and written case reports,” “talking about spiritual issues regarding the cases students are seeing in practicum,” and “asking about the clients’ goals and if there are any specific cultural issues that may be directly or indirectly influencing the presenting problem or goal attainment.” Each of the above strategies represent ways that faculty can introduce spiritual topics into existing supervision practices such as case consultation, case reports, and goal development and exploration.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The following chapter includes a discussion of the results broken into five sections: (1) discussion of the research findings, (2) recommendations for CFT training, (3) limitations of the study, (4) directions for future research, and (5) conclusion.

Research Question One: Courses

Research question one sought to find in what particular courses CFT faculty members address issues of spirituality. The findings regarding this question indicate that topics of spirituality are integrated in a variety of courses, including courses related to diversity, couples and sex therapy, theories, and family systems. Courses in which spirituality was addressed the most included family systems, couples and sex therapy, courses with a focus on culture and diversity, and practicum/supervision. Additionally, eleven courses were identified which focus specifically on teaching topics related to spirituality. This is important to note because the literature has identified a need for training programs to incorporate spirituality into the preparation of CFT students (Carlson et al., 2002; Grams et al., 2007; Patterson et al., 2000; Prest et al., 1999). Specifically, Patterson et al. (2000) suggested that a course dedicated to spirituality at a graduate level would help prepare students to work with spiritual clients. Additionally, in Patterson et al.'s study, it was reported that some students felt that since taking the course, their clients have responded positively and appreciatively to the students bringing up spiritual questions in session (2000). While having a specific course on spirituality was important to some of the participants, the literature also encourages CFT faculty to infuse content on spirituality throughout the curriculum (COAMFTE, 2005; Grams et al., 2007; Prest et al., 1999). The

practices of many of the participants in this study seem to indicate that content on spirituality is indeed being infused throughout several of the different courses that faculty in this study teach.

Research Question Two: Integration of Spirituality into Coursework

Research question two sought to determine the specific methods participants utilized to integrate topics on spirituality into their course work. The findings pertaining to this question suggest that content related to spirituality is integrated into courses through use of a variety of different strategies, which are contingent on participants' teaching approaches, the utilization of frameworks, and focus on skill development. Lectures and discussions were frequently cited as teaching strategies that the faculty in this study use when integrating topics of spirituality into training. Participants also described specific interactive strategies that they utilized in their courses, such as the idea of role play and bringing speakers to their classes to discuss different topics related to religion and spirituality. Readings used in classes also appeared in some of the participants' responses. It seems important to note, however, that only two participants indicated that they assign any readings on the role of spirituality and therapy in their courses. Considering that the assignment of readings is such an integral part of the training process in most graduate training programs, the lack of inclusion of specific readings on spirituality by these participants appears to be an omission that is worthy of attention. Since the assignment of specific reading material of spiritual topics is a common recommendation in the literature (Carlson et al., 2002; Grams et al., 2007; Prest et al., 1999), this appears to be an area that needs greater attention.

There are, however, several ways that the CFT faculty members in this study seem to be following the recommendations of the existing literature on spirituality and therapy. For example, the participants clearly encourage CFT students to view spirituality as part of a broader lens that includes the client's ethnicity and culture. The idea that religion and spirituality work as lenses through which individuals interpret their life experiences and is part of a person's cultural context has been repeated throughout the existing literature on spirituality and therapy (Eck, 2002; Prest & Keller, 1993; Rivett & Street, 2001; Stander et al, 1994). Additionally, by utilizing teaching methods focused on skill development, the participants seem to be following the literature in regard to providing students with clinical tools such as spiritual assessments and spiritual genograms (Frame, 2000). Participants also use role plays and clinical case examples as ways to increase participants practice skills related to integrating spirituality in therapy.

Other ways CFT faculty members in this study appear to be using suggestions from the literature include teaching and training CFT students to take the non-expert/curious stance when inquiring about clients' spirituality. The participants in this study described taking such a stance as important since it would help therapists to avoid imposing their own spiritual beliefs and/or values on clients. The importance of taking a non-expert stance when addressing spiritual issues in therapy has been highlighted by several scholars (Carlson et al., 2002; Grams et al., 2007; Haug, 1998; Prest et al., 1999; Stander et al., 1994). In particular, Haug (1998) suggested that engaging therapists in a process of self-exploration when it comes to spirituality decreases the likelihood of their spiritual beliefs being imposed onto their clients and encourages them to take less directive approach in their work with clients.

Research Question Three: Supervision

Question three sought to explore the specific ways that CFT faculty address spirituality in their supervision of CFT students. The findings related to this question indicate that self-of-the-therapist work tends to be a predominant approach used in supervision to help CFT students develop spiritual competency in therapy. This is an area in which CFT faculty appear to be following the recommendations outlined in the literature related to spirituality and supervision. Specifically, Haug (1998) noted that therapists have an obligation to explore their own beliefs regarding spirituality before they can be helpful to their clients. Also, Haug (1998) suggested that when therapists are able to assess their personal spiritual beliefs and practices and the impact these beliefs have on their lives, they are better prepared to conduct similar assessments with clients and utilize spiritual resources in therapy. While CFT faculty in this study appear to be following the main recommendations in the area of supervision and spirituality, this practice may represent a belief on the part of these participants that one's own spiritual awareness is sufficient in preparing them to be open to or work with spiritual issues in therapy. Clearly, self awareness is an important aspect of preparedness, however, it would appear that competency in this area also needs to include providing students with the necessary clinical skills to directly address spiritual issues in therapy.

Recommendations for CFT Training

Based on the results of this study there are several recommendations for CFT faculty to improve the overall quality of their training regarding spiritual issues in therapy. The results of this study indicated that many participants discussed using methods of teaching and training which focused on raising CFT students' own spiritual self-awareness.

Although this is important, efforts should move beyond just raising awareness and toward direct skill development that would increase students' overall feelings of competency when working with spiritual issues with clients in therapy. Additionally, a more systematic integration of spiritual competencies in training appears to be needed. For example, it seems important that CFT faculty move beyond the use of discussion and self-exploration and assign specific readings related to the integration of spirituality and therapy that introduce students to: (1) the importance of addressing spiritual topics in therapy, (2) useful frameworks for making sense of spirituality in clients' lives, and (3) specific clinical skills associated with addressing spiritual topics in therapy. For a list of recommended readings on integrating spiritual topics in CFT training, please see Table 3. Additionally, it also seems important that faculty begin to identify specific practices that are associated with competency in addressing spiritual issues in therapy and provide opportunities for students to develop and practice those skills.

Limitations

While this study yielded important findings regarding preparation of CFT students to address spirituality in their work with clients, there are limitations that need to be highlighted. One possible limitation that is important to consider is the potential role that selection bias played within the sample. It is possible that participants who have a particular interest in this topic were more likely to self-select for this study. Another limitation to the present study is that it was part of a written survey and not conducted in the form of an interview. This limited the development of further explorations of the participants' ideas that may have led to further information regarding their teaching and supervision strategies. Additionally, the sample for this study consisted of 14 participants

Table 3: *Readings on Integrating Spirituality into Therapy and Training*

- Carlson, T. D., & Erickson, M. J. (2000). Re-authoring spiritual narratives: God in persons' relational identity stories. *Journal of Systemic Therapies, 19*, 65-83.
- Carlson, T. D., & Erickson, M. J. (Eds.). (2002). *Spirituality and family therapy*. New York: The Haworth Press, Inc.
- Frame, M. W. (2000). The spiritual genogram in family therapy. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 26*, 211-216.
- Haug, I. E. (1998). Spirituality as a dimension of family therapist's clinical training. *Contemporary Family Therapy, 20*, 471-483.
- Helmeke, K. B., & Bischof, G. H. (2002). Recognizing and raising spiritual and religious issues in therapy: Guidelines for the timid. In T. D. Carlson & M. J. Erickson (Eds.), *Spirituality and family therapy* (pp.195-214). New York: The Haworth Press, Inc.
- Prest, L. A., Russel, R., & D'Souza, H. (1999). Spirituality and religion in training, practice, and personal development. *Journal of Family Therapy, 21*, 60-77.
- Stander, V., Piercy, F. P., Mackinnon, D., & Helmeke, K. (1994). Spirituality, religion, and family therapy: Competing or complementary worlds? *The American Journal of Family Therapy, 22*, 27-41.
- Walsh, F. (2009). *Spiritual resources in family therapy* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.
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who indicated that their highest degree was a master's degree. This might limit the findings of this study, as this is a high number when compared to the total sample and may not represent a typical makeup of a faculty team.

Suggestions for Future Research

It would be important for future research to begin to identify specific core competencies that are associated with integrating spiritual topics into effective clinical practice. This could be accomplished through the use of a Delphi study methodology, where a group of experts in the field of spirituality and therapy could be interviewed regarding their ideas about the essential clinical skills that are relevant to addressing spirituality in therapy. Such a study could be used as the basis for creating a competency measure that assesses students' abilities to effectively integrate spirituality in their work with clients. Furthermore, it might be important to conduct a study focusing on analyzing syllabi for specific and intentional integration of spirituality into coursework. Specifically, the syllabi could be examined for any readings that might be assigned to help infuse content on spirituality and religion into the training of CFT students.

Conclusion

This study sought to address the specific ways that CFT faculty address spirituality in their training and supervision of CFT students. Previous studies have indicated that the majority of CFT faculty members believe that integrating spirituality into training of CFT students is important. The results of this study suggest that participants appear to be incorporating spirituality into their teaching and training of CFT students in a number of ways. For example, eleven courses focusing solely on spirituality were identified among the participants in this study. When asked about specific strategies they use to incorporate

spirituality into their coursework, the participants in this study identified a variety of methods they utilize, such as organizing class discussion around the topic of spirituality and providing students with readings on the topic of integrating spirituality into their work with clients. Furthermore, the participants of this study appear to be following many of the recommendations suggested in the literature. Specifically, participants discussed how they use a broader lens, such as culture and belief systems, when teaching students about spirituality. Additionally, the participants highlighted the importance of training their CFT students to take the non-expert/curious stance in therapy with clients. Finally, the participants provided students with particular spiritual assessments, such as the spiritual genogram as a way to better prepare them to address spiritual topics in their work with clients.

Although these findings suggest that CFT faculty appear to be focusing attention on integrating spirituality into their teaching and training of CFT students, there appear to be areas that need greater attention. For example, very little mention was made regarding the assignment of specific readings on spirituality by the participants of this study. While the participants appear to be dedicated to helping students engage in a process of spiritual self exploration, an overall focus on skill development appeared to be missing from the training practices of these participants.

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