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Transpersonal In Counselor Education: A Phenomenological Inquiry

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by

Unity Nova Walker

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all beings in service to the One Infinite Creator.

Dr. Holden, in many ways, has been the other source of my transpersonal counselor education. She is, like Dr. Gressard, renowned in the field of transpersonal counselor education, and her efforts to grow the field have also led me to this point in my journey. I am incredibly grateful to have known her on this journey—her wisdom has guided my career in wonderful and unforeseen ways.

Dr. St. Germain-Sehr has been a wonderful companion on my journey through my doctoral program. She has served as an incredible role model throughout my time in my program. In many ways, I admire her. She has facilitated my exploration of the transpersonal in counselor education for several years, supporting me every step of the way. I am incredibly grateful to have her in my life.

Though he did not serve on my dissertation committee, I would be remiss if I did not thank Dr. Mullen for his support throughout my counselor education program. He is among the kindest individuals I have ever had the privilege to meet in a professional capacity. I am beyond grateful to have had him as a mentor as I've taken my beginning steps into my career.

I would also like to thank my family, friends, and peers who have stood beside me throughout this experience. Your emotional support and cheerings-on have made a world of difference to me. If I had not had you all throughout this journey, I am unsure as to whether I would have made it.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this qualitative study was to capture the experiences of master's level counselors-in-training who take transpersonal counseling courses. Instructors of such courses aim both to help students develop competence in counseling clients who have had transpersonal experiences--those that, despite their occurrence beyond the usual limits of reality, are believed by experiencers to be real (Holden, 1999), and to promote counselor development (Walker, 2022). Participants were four students who had completed such a course, two each from two U.S. universities, one located in the Southwest and the other in the East. I conducted a transcendental phenomenological analysis by interviewing participants, collecting their follow-up journals, transcribing the interviews, coding the transcriptions, categorizing the codes, and thematized the categories to identify some major underlying facets of counselors'-in-training experiences in their courses.

Participants reported increased belief in the importance of transpersonal topics in counseling, willingness to address transpersonal topics in counseling, and competence in addressing multicultural transpersonal clinical issues, as well as experiences of holistic development and shifts in clinical focus as a result of involvement with their courses. The outcomes of this study will be used to advance the literature on spiritual counseling competence, counselor development, and the inclusion of transpersonal phenomena in counselor education.

Index Words: transpersonal counseling, counselor education, transcendental phenomenology, spiritual counseling competence, multicultural orientation

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COUNSELOR EDUCATION

THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY IN VIRGINIA

TRANSPERSONAL IN COUNSELOR EDUCATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

Chapter 1

Introduction

Researchers studying the phenomenon of spiritual counseling competence report that, across the board, counselors fail to meet minimum standards of competence (Lu et al., 2019; Robertson, 2010; Selby, 2020). Counselor educators posit many potential factors contributing to a lack of spiritual counseling competence as well as potential avenues for addressing such an issue (Davis et al., 2015; Fukuyama et al., 2003; Gutierrez et al., 2020; Robertson). I will begin this chapter by overviewing the construct of spiritual counseling competence, factors which may contribute to the construct, and current theories on promoting spiritual counseling competence. I will then examine the gaps in current approaches to addressing spiritual counseling competence and discuss a proposed study intended to examine the degree to which counselors' experiences align or fail to align with the extant literature on the phenomenon.

Spiritual Counseling Competence: An Overview

The construct of spiritual counseling competence consists of a counselor's combined knowledge, attitudes, and skills for addressing religious and spiritual topics in counseling, spanning six major domains and fourteen content areas contained within those domains (Cashwell & Watts, 2010; Robertson, 2010). Spiritual counseling competence was derived from the original Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) competencies and has been used to shape the current ASERVIC competencies (Robertson). The ASERVIC competencies function synergistically alongside the American Counseling

Association (ACA) Code of Ethics to ensure appropriate, spiritually- and religiously-inclusive client care (Robertson).

Researchers studying the phenomenon of spiritual counseling competence have produced a measure of spiritual counseling competence called the Spiritual Competency Scale (SCS; Robertson, 2010) designed to assess a counselor's competence across the six domains of spiritual counseling competence (Robertson). Researchers have produced the full SCS, a factored version of the SCS which revealed six factors, a revised version of the SCS (SCS-R-II; Dailey et al., 2015) which also revealed six factors, and a confirmatory factor analysis of the SCS-R-II which also revealed six factors (Dailey et al.; Lu et al., 2018; Robertson). For a detailed description of the domains and content areas of the ASERVIC competencies, see the Definitions section below. For a detailed overview of the SCS and SCS-R-II, see Robertson (2010) and Dailey et al. (2015) respectively.

Design Flaws

Researchers originally suggested that the ASERVIC competencies include transpersonal competence in addition to religious and spiritual competence (J. M. Holden, personal communication, 26 May 2021). Transpersonal experiences are experiences that extend beyond the usual limits of reality (e.g., near-death experiences) that, despite their occurrence beyond the usual limits of reality, are believed to be real to those who experience them (Holden, 1999). Transpersonal experiences may be intuitive, paranormal, or mystical in nature (Fall et al., 2017). Transpersonal experiences necessarily include spiritual experiences, and many individuals consider transpersonal experiences to be spiritual experiences (Braud, 2006). Countless studies documenting the relationship between transpersonal experiences and mental health exist, documenting etiology, symptomatology, interventions, and outcomes affecting both counselors

and clients alike (Grof, 2008). Despite an undeniable connection to religion, spirituality, and mental health, the original ASERVIC competencies, the SCS, and the current ASERVIC competencies all fail to incorporate transpersonal content into their descriptions and measures of competency (Cashwell & Watts, 2010; Miller, 1999; Robertson, 2010).

Besides failing to address transpersonal content in its design, the SCS also had several statistical flaws in its construction (Robertson, 2010). The exploratory and confirmatory factor-analytic procedures which produced the SCS and SCS-R-II revealed inconsistencies in the factor structure of the SCS, largely influenced by the samples used to validate the measures (Dailey et al., 2015; Lu et al., 2018; Robertson). Robertson, the designer of the SCS, reported that the factored version of the SCS failed to capture meaningful information related to spiritual counseling competence, as the factored versions contained anywhere from 21 to 22 items, while the full version contained 90 items.

Concerning Results

In terms of findings, researchers studying the phenomenon of spiritual counseling competence report that counselors across the board fail to score above minimally-acceptable cutoffs, regardless of age, race, gender, religion, counseling experience, counseling track, CACREP status, supervisory status, or feelings of preparedness (Bloomquist, 2017; Dailey et al., 2015; Robertson, 2010; Selby, 2020). Dailey and colleagues reported that, on the full SCS, even members of ASERVIC failed to score above minimally-acceptable cutoffs, despite scoring significantly higher than counselors in general. Researchers report conflicting findings on what factors actually increase a counselor's spiritual competence (Dailey et al.; Lu et al., 2019; Reech, 2019; Robertson). Dailey and colleagues report no differences in spiritual counseling competence across levels of counselor education, but Lu and colleagues report a positive

relationship between the two variables. Similarly, Dailey and colleagues and Robertson report that counselors' spiritual counseling competence doesn't change over the course of their programs, but Selby reports an increase over time. Some researchers report that counselors who attend religious institutions have higher spiritual counseling competency scores, but others report no difference, small differences, or differences mostly within a single domain of spiritual counseling competence (Lu et al.; Park et al., 2018; Reech; Robertson). Researchers also report conflicting findings on whether counselors who are aware of the ASERVIC competencies have higher spiritual counseling competence (Dailey et al.; Robertson; Selby).

Of the six domains of spiritual counseling competence, counselors only display competence with respect to the domain of culture and worldview (Lu et al., 2019; Robertson, 2010). The field of counseling focuses heavily on multicultural issues in counseling, enabling counselors to score more highly on the portion of the SCS which measures the culture and worldview domain (Lu et al., Robertson). Despite their competence with respect to culture and worldview, counselors still lack a more comprehensive understanding of spiritual counseling competence, failing to display their own religious and spiritual self-awareness, a religiously- and spiritually-inclusive understanding of human development, the skills to communicate about religion and spirituality with clients, the skills to include religion and spirituality in clinical assessments, and an understanding of the role of religion and spirituality in the diagnostic and treatment process (Lu et al., Robertson).

Potential Interventions

Despite conflicting findings regarding the variables which affect spiritual counseling competence, counselor educators have reported some counselor characteristics and potential interventions which may promote spiritual counseling competence with some consistency. Many

researchers have reported that strength of religious or spiritual faith predicted spiritual counseling competence, as did interest in spirituality and religion (Bloomquist, 2017; Dailey et al., 2015; Haasz, 2013; Robertson, 2010; Selby, 2020). Dailey and colleagues also reported that time spent in ASERVIC predicted higher spiritual counseling competence scores. Blalock and Holden (2018), recognizing a need to address spirituality in counselor education, suggested education specifically intended to promote spiritual counseling competence. Selby reported that counselors who took entire courses on religion and spirituality in counseling scored significantly higher than their peers who covered the material as part of another course or received training by some other method. Lu and Woo (2017) highlighted the importance of a co-constructed, accepting learning environment with a curriculum that focused on specific areas of competence, and Haasz found that counselors who received supervision around religious and spiritual topics in clinical practice increased their spiritual counseling competence. One researcher reported that lesbian, gay, and bisexual counselors displayed higher spiritual counseling competence than their straight counterparts, though no other researchers have examined such a variable (Selby). Last, Lu and colleagues (2019) reported that multicultural counseling competence predicted spiritual counseling competence.

In order to further explore the relationship between multiculturalism and spirituality in counseling, counselor educators have begun to apply multicultural counseling literature specifically to spirituality. Multicultural counseling theorists posit a shift from multicultural competence to multicultural orientation, explaining that competence may not actually produce meaningful clinical outcomes (Gutierrez et al., 2020; Owen, 2013; Robertson, 2010). Owen (p. 25) states that multicultural competence is a "way of doing therapy" whereas multicultural orientation is a "way of being with a client". Researchers studying the construct of multicultural

orientation state that it consists of three components: cultural humility, cultural comfort, and cultural opportunity (Hook et al., 2016; Kivlighan et al., 2019; Owen et al., 2016; Slone & Owen, 2015). Some theorists studying spiritual counseling competence have begun to apply the multicultural orientation literature to the construct, postulating that such a competence is contained within a *spiritually-competent orientation* (Gutierrez et al). In this context, a counselor who displays a spiritually-competent orientation displays a willingness to engage in discussions of religion and spirituality with clients in a way that does not privilege the counselor's religious and spiritual worldview, conveys their comfort within those discussions, and illustrates a willingness to capitalize on opportunities to have such discussions (Gutierrez et al.; Kivlighan et al.; Owen, 2013, p. 25). Counselor educators seeking to promote a spiritually-competent orientation in the counselors whom they serve have called for their fellow educators to infuse such an orientation into their pedagogy, course content, and clinical supervision (Bloomquist, 2017; Fukuyama et al., 2003; Lu et al., 2017; Gutierrez et al.). When discussing how a counselor educator may incorporate a spiritually-competent orientation into their work, theorists highlight the importance of a focus that addresses both spiritual counseling competence and counselor development from a holistic perspective (Fukuyama et al.; Gutierrez et al.).

Counselor educators exploring religion, spirituality, and the transpersonal as areas of competence share a similar consensus to their peers proposing a spiritually-competent orientation to address spiritual counseling competence, reporting targeting the areas of spiritual competence, holistic development, and client care in the counselors whom they serve (Fukuyama et al., 2003; Walker, 2022). Seeking to create a more comprehensive scope of competency, some counselor educators have incorporated work from the field of transpersonal psychology into their professional practice, resulting in what appears to be a *transpersonally-informed orientation* with

respect to counselor education (Fukuyama et al.; Marquis, 2012; Walker). In this context, a counselor educator utilizing a transpersonally-informed orientation infuses transpersonal theories and frameworks into their pedagogical theory, course content, advocacy, clinical practice, research, and/or clinical supervision, both addressing religion and spirituality and expanding beyond them to incorporate that which is considered transpersonal in nature (Walker). A transpersonally-informed orientation with respect to counselor education may not only address issues related to spiritual counseling competence, but also bridge theoretical gaps present in the construct itself (Walker). Despite the efficacy of such an orientation, transpersonally-informed approaches to counselor education remain understudied, with only one study examining the experiences of counselor educators utilizing such a framework (Walker).

Current Study

In order to explore questions surrounding the efficacy of utilizing a transpersonally-informed approach to counselor education to address the issues surrounding spiritual counseling competence, I conducted a transpersonally-informed transcendental phenomenological analysis of counselors' experiences of transpersonal counseling courses. Transpersonal counseling courses contain both transpersonally-informed pedagogical theory and course content specifically tailored to the counseling environment, thus providing an excellent opportunity to study how such a course addresses the current shortcomings surrounding religion, spirituality, and the transpersonal in counselor education.

A Transpersonal Framework

Descriptively, a researcher utilizing a transpersonal framework includes transpersonal levels of development and states of experience as an element of the research process (Braud, 2006). One transpersonal researcher offers the following definition:

The *transpersonal* might be described succinctly as ways in which individuals,

societies, and disciplines might increase their ambit and become more inclusive and

expansive in areas of sense of identity (including ways of being and ways of

functioning beyond the typical egocentric mode), development and transformation,

conditions of consciousness, ways of knowing, values, and service. The transpersonal

also involves recognizing and honoring the spiritual aspects of our being,

actions, and ways of thinking (Braud, 2006, p. 135).

A researcher utilizing a transpersonal framework goes beyond a simple inclusion of the

transpersonal into their research practice, also honoring the human capacity to experience a

wider range of experience than is privileged in modern Western culture on an individual,

cultural, and systemic level (Braud; Fukuyama et al., 2003; Marquis, 2012; Wilber, 2000).

Researchers utilizing a transpersonal framework acknowledge the value of both

quantitative and qualitative research designs in exploring phenomena of interest, selecting the

tradition which best addresses their research question (Braud, 2006; Fadiman, 2018).

Quantitative research traditions provide robust, widely-accepted methods of data collection and

analysis necessary for the acceptance of transpersonal research, while qualitative research

traditions incorporate approaches that capture experiences that are otherwise overlooked,

rejected, or marginalized, a frequent occurrence with transpersonal phenomena (Braud, 2006;

Grof, 2008; Marquis, 2012).

What Arises From the Research?

Counselors across the board fail to meet minimally-acceptable standards on measures of

spiritual counseling competence (Lu et al., 2019; Robertson, 2010; Selby, 2020). More

comprehensive approaches to promoting spiritual counseling competence may include shifts in

pedagogical theory, course content, clinical supervision, classroom environment, and developmental approaches, but no studies exist examining how each of these variables influences spiritual counseling competence (Fukuyama et al., 2003; Lu & Woo, 2017; Gutierrez et al., 2020; Walker, 2022). Transpersonally-informed approaches to counselor education may effectively address issues related to spiritual counseling competence, but the perceptions of counselors encountering such approaches remain unknown (Fukuyama et al.; Walker). Furthermore, the construct of spiritual counseling competence fails to assess competence surrounding transpersonal experiences in the clinical setting (Dailey et al., 2015; Robertson). What, then, are the perceptions of students who experience a transpersonal counseling course? To what extent does such an orientation address issues related to achieving spiritual counseling competence? To what degree do such counselors feel competent to address not only spiritual and religious topics in a clinical environment, but also the transpersonal?

Transcendental Phenomenological Analysis

Given the theoretical nature of the current literature and limitations of existing measures related to spiritual counseling competence, questions regarding the essence of the experience of a transpersonally-informed approach to counselor education arise. Transcendental phenomenology is a qualitative research tradition pioneered by Clark Moustakas in which a researcher aims to capture the essence of a phenomenon by functioning as a transparent mechanism through which participants can explain their experience of a phenomenon in great detail (Haskins et al., 2021). Transcendental phenomenology involves in-depth interviews, highly-structured coding of data, careful analysis, and vigilant efforts to ensure trustworthiness (Haskins et al.). Trustworthiness in qualitative research is a complex phenomenon, functioning similarly to reliability and validity in quantitative research (Hays & Singh, 2011). A comprehensive explanation of transcendental

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phenomenology and its methodological rigor can be found in chapter three of this paper, but the following sections cover a brief overview of the current study and a description of the research process.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the current study was to understand the perceptions of counselors who experience transpersonal counseling courses. In particular, I intended to examine the degree to which the current theories of how to address religion and spirituality in counselor education aligned with the experiences of counselors who take transpersonal counseling courses. Transpersonal counseling courses are courses specifically designed to address transpersonal issues in counseling (Walker, 2022). Transpersonal counseling courses share common themes which reflect the transpersonally-informed orientations of the instructors who teach them (Walker). While transpersonal counseling courses do focus on transpersonal issues in counseling, the courses specifically incorporate information pertaining to the intersecting roles of religion, spirituality, and culture in counseling (Walker).

Significance of Study

Current research indicates three gaps with respect to addressing religion and spirituality in counseling. First, counselors fail to meet minimum standards of spiritual counseling competence (Lu et al., 2019; Robertson, 2010; Selby, 2020). Second, achieving spiritual counseling competence might not actually produce successful clinical outcomes (Gutierrez et al., 2020; Robertson). Third, transpersonal phenomena remain separate from religion and spirituality despite significant overlap (Fukuyama et al., 2003; Walker, 2022). By studying the experiences of students who take transpersonal counseling courses, I aimed to provide insight into the degree to which current counselor education research and practice aligned with the experiences of those

students such that future directions for spiritual counseling competence, counselor development, and clinical practice in counselor education would be revealed.

Methodology and Sampling

Transcendental phenomenology entails conducting participant interviews as a method of data collection. Before participant interviews, I obtained approval from the College of William and Mary's Institutional Review Board to conduct research on human subjects. Following approval, I purposively sampled participants from CACREP-accredited programs who completed a course in transpersonal counseling during the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters. Purposive sampling is appropriate both in qualitative research in general and when seeking to examine a phenomenon which relatively few people have experienced (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Hays & Singh, 2011). To date, only two CACREP-accredited counseling programs offer courses in transpersonal counseling, so the available pool of participants was small (Walker, 2022). I informed participants of the voluntary nature of the study, the IRB approval process, and any possible risk associated with the study.

During the interviews, which I recorded over Zoom, I asked questions designed to collect data regarding the research questions. Qualitative research often employs the practice of member checking (Hays & Singh, 2011). In order to perform member checking, I asked for clarification throughout the interviews. I also asked participants to complete a journal reflecting on the interview two weeks after the interview as a source of secondary data collection, a form of triangulation in qualitative research (Hays & Singh). After conducting the interviews, I transcribed the interviews. I began data analysis after completing the process of transcription.

In transcendental phenomenology, the data analysis process consists of assigning each datum (e.g., a sentence fragment) a code, sorting those codes into categories, and condensing

those categories into themes (Haskins et al., 2021). The themes revealed through the data analysis process should collectively reflect counselors' experiences of transpersonal counseling courses, each theme highlighting a particular facet of the experience (Hays & Singh). Following the transcription process, I coded the interviews, categorized the codes, and thematized the categories. After thematization, I wrote the research report (covered in chapters 4 and 5) and will send the written research to the participants after finalizing it, again engaging in the act of member checking (Hays & Singh).

Throughout the research process, I engaged in practice of epoché, a method of suspension of judgment in which I bracketed my biases about counselors' experiences of transpersonal counseling courses (Haskins et al.; Hays & Singh). I kept a reflexive journal, an audit trail, and engaged in peer debriefing throughout the research process so as to increase trustworthiness in my findings (Hays & Singh). A detailed explanation of epoché, reflexive journaling, audit trails, peer debriefing, member checking, triangulation, and the process of data analysis can be found in chapter three.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. I conducted this study on participants who took a transpersonal counseling course during Covid-19. A cohort effect likely influenced the data. Additionally, only two CACREP-accredited institutions offer transpersonal counseling courses. The population of counselors who have taken a transpersonal counseling course in the past year was small. Furthermore, because my sample consisted of counselors from two separate programs, possible discrepancies may have existed between counselors at each institution, between counselors who took the course voluntarily and counselors who took the course compulsorily, the experiences of the courses themselves, and the programs offered at each

institution. Participants may also have self-selected for the study based on their experiences in their courses, their affinities for religion, spirituality, and the transpersonal in counseling, and many other potential factors.

Conclusion

A transcendental phenomenological analysis of counselors' experiences of transpersonal counseling courses provided evidence for addressing gaps related to spiritual counseling competence, counselor development, and transpersonal issues in counseling. Such a study provided justification for future lines of research pertaining to religion and spirituality in counseling, holistic counselor development, and transpersonally-informed counselor education. The following chapter highlights the state of counselor education with respect to these subjects, detailing the ways in which this study meaningfully advanced the field.

Definitions of Unique Terms

1. Spiritual counseling competence is a counselor's combined knowledge, attitudes, and skills for addressing religious and spiritual topics in counseling, spanning six major domains and fourteen content areas contained within those domains (Cashwell & Watts, 2010; Robertson, 2010). The first domain of spiritual counseling competence, titled 'culture and worldview', consists of two content areas (Cashwell & Watts, 2010). The first content area covers a counselor's ability to describe religion, spirituality, the functions of major spiritual systems, and the beliefs and practices of major world religions; the second content area involves a counselor's recognition that a client's religious and spiritual beliefs and practices are central to their worldview and may influence their psychological functioning (Cashwell & Watts). The second domain, 'counselor self-awareness', consists of three content areas: A counselor's active effort to

explore their beliefs about religion and spirituality, evaluate the influence of their beliefs on their clients and clinical practice, and identify their limitations with respect to religion in spirituality in counseling such that they can refer a client when necessary (Cashwell & Watts). The third domain, 'human and spiritual development', consists of a single content area involving a counselor's ability to describe various models of religious and spiritual development and apply them to their understanding of human development in general (Cashwell & Watts). The fourth domain, 'communication', consists of three content areas: a counselor's acceptance of a client's discussions of religion and spirituality, a counselor's usage of language surrounding religion and spirituality that aligns with a client's belief systems, and a counselor's communication of recognized religious and spiritual themes when therapeutically relevant (Cashwell & Watts). The fifth domain, 'assessment', consists of a single content area that covers a counselor's inclusion of religion and spirituality in intake and assessment procedures. The final domain, 'diagnosis and treatment', consists of four content areas (Cashwell & Watts). The first content area involves a counselor's ability to incorporate their understanding of how a client's beliefs may influence their functioning and symptomatology into diagnostic procedures, whereas the second content area involves the consistency of a counselor's goal-setting practice with a client's beliefs (Cashwell & Watts). The third content area involves a counselor's ability to incorporate religious and spiritual interventions into client care when relevant; the fourth, an ability to incorporate current theory and research regarding religion and spirituality in counseling into client care (Cashwell & Watts).

2. Religion is defined as "a social context within which a set of beliefs, practices, and experiences occur (Cashwell & Young, p. 20)".

3. Spirituality is defined as "the universal human capacity to experience self-transcendence and awareness of sacred immanence, with resulting increases in greater self–other compassion and love (Cashwell & Young, 2014, p. 19)".

4. The transpersonal is defined as "ways in which individuals, societies, and disciplines might increase their ambit and become more inclusive and expansive in areas of sense of identity (including ways of being and ways of functioning beyond the typical egocentric mode), development and transformation, conditions of consciousness, ways of knowing, values, and service. The transpersonal also involves recognizing and honoring the spiritual aspects of our being, actions, and ways of thinking (Braud, 2006, p. 135)".

5. Transpersonally-informed is an adjective used to describe a person who infuses transpersonal theories and frameworks into their professional practice. In the context of counselor education, a transpersonally-informed counselor educator infuses transpersonal theories and frameworks into their pedagogical theory, course content, advocacy, clinical practice, research, and/or clinical supervision.

6. Transpersonal phenomena are phenomena that extend beyond the usual limits of reality (e.g., near-death experiences) that, despite their occurrence beyond the usual limits of reality, are believed to be real by those who experience them (Holden, 1999). Transpersonal phenomena may be intuitive, paranormal, or mystical in nature (Fall et al., 2017).

7. Counselor development is traditionally defined as the development of one's cognitive complexity with respect to counseling theory and practice (Welfare & Borders, 2010). However, in this paper, holistic counselor development includes many other lines of

development beyond cognition, including (but not limited to) emotional, ethical, moral, cultural, and identity-based development.

8. CACREP is the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2015). CACREP is the accrediting body responsible for ensuring that counselors receive a standard of education which allows them to uphold the standards of the profession (CACREP, 2015).

9. ASERVIC is the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (Cashwell & Young, 2014). ASERVIC is the branch of the American Counseling Association (ACA) in which members may publish research related to and advocate for spirituality, ethics, and religion in counseling.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

A researcher who wishes to meaningfully contribute to the literature surrounding their topic of interest should choose a research design consistent with both their research question and the limitations of the existing research concerning the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In this chapter, I will provide a comprehensive overview of the literature concerning spiritual counseling competence, the factors affecting spiritual counseling competence, and the role of counselor educators in increasing spiritual counseling competence. I will begin by examining the current issues related to spiritual competency in counselor education. I will then overview the strategies counselor educators currently utilize for addressing spiritual counseling competence. Last, I will examine the gaps in such approaches, highlighting the ways in which the current study addressed those gaps.

Nature of the Problem: Spiritual Competence

The American Counseling Association's (ACA, 2014) Code of Ethics states that counselors are ethically obligated to be as competent in as many domains of care as possible, specifically listing spirituality as a domain of competence. The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2015) also explicitly mentions spirituality in its assessment of professional standards. Despite the requirements of ACA and CACREP, counselors score below minimal competence on measures designed to assess spiritual counseling competency (Bloomquist, 2017; Knight, 2010; Lu et al., 2019; Park et al., 2018; Reech, 2019; Robertson, 2010; Selby, 2020). Cashwell and Watts (2010), when reporting the

Association of Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) competencies, state that spiritual counseling competence consists of six domains: culture and worldview, counselor self-awareness, human and spiritual development, communication, assessment, and diagnosis and treatment. According to the ASERVIC competencies, a counselor must both understand and incorporate into practice the following concepts: how a client's culture influences their religious and/or spiritual beliefs and how those beliefs shape their worldview; how the counselor's beliefs shape their clinical practice, their competence, and their perception of their clients; how religious and/or spiritual beliefs develop in humans and how those beliefs pertain to human development in general; how to welcome, accept, and begin conversations about a client's religious and/or spiritual beliefs; how to incorporate a client's religious and/or spiritual beliefs into intake procedures; and how to incorporate a client's religious and/or spiritual beliefs, culture, and worldview into therapeutic techniques, goal setting, and diagnosis. Though counselor educators term competence surrounding religion and spirituality *spiritual counseling competence*, the phenomenon by definition includes both religious and spiritual beliefs (Cashwell & Watts, 2010). In relation to spiritual counseling competence, counselor educators have defined *spirituality* as "the universal human capacity to experience self-transcendence and awareness of sacred immanence, with resulting increases in greater self–other compassion and love (Cashwell & Young, 2014, p. 19)" and *religion* as "a social context within which a set of beliefs, practices, and experiences occur (Cashwell & Young, p. 20)". Religion and spirituality are interrelated concepts, but the degree to which an individual experiences either phenomenon varies (Cashwell & Young). For a comprehensive explanation of the definitions of and relationships between religion and spirituality, see Cashwell & Young, 2014.

Counselors, regardless of age, race, gender, religion, counseling experience, counseling track, CACREP status, supervisory status, or feelings of preparedness fail to display minimum counseling competence (Bloomquist, 2017; Dailey et al., 2015; Robertson, 2010; Selby, 2020). Even members of ASERVIC score below minimal competence thresholds on full measures of spiritual counseling competence (Dailey et al.). Researchers also report conflicting findings on what factors actually increase a counselor's spiritual competence (Dailey et al.,; Lu et al., 2019; Reech, 2019; Robertson). Lu and colleagues, for example, report that one's level of counselor education affects their spiritual competence, while Dailey and colleagues report no difference. Similarly, Selby reports that spiritual counseling competence increases from the beginning to the end of one's counseling program, but Dailey and colleagues and Robertson report otherwise. Researchers also generally report informal education (e.g., education as part of a class) around religion and spirituality to not be efficacious, though there exist conflicting findings and theories on the subject (Blalock & Holden, 2018; Dailey et al.; Reech; Robertson; Selby). Some researchers report that attending religious institutions increases spiritual counseling competency scores, but others report no difference, small differences, or differences mostly on a single factor of spiritual counseling competence (Lu et al.; Park et al., 2018; Reech; Robertson). Researchers also report conflicting findings on whether awareness of the ASERVIC competencies affects counselors' spiritual counseling competence (Dailey et al.; Robertson; Selby).

Of the six domains of spiritual counseling competence, counselors only display competence with respect to one domain: culture and worldview (Lu et al., 2019; Robertson, 2010). The field of counseling has greatly increased its focus on multicultural issues in counseling, but counselors still lack their own religious and spiritual self-awareness, a religiously- and spiritually-inclusive understanding of human development, the skills to

communicate about religion and spirituality with clients, the skills to include religion and

spirituality in clinical assessments, and an understanding of the role of religion and spirituality in

the diagnostic and treatment process (Lu et al., Robertson).

Nature of the Problem: Faith in the Field

The ways in which the field of counseling overlooks spirituality as a domain of

competence contributes to counselors' lack of such competence (Lee et al., 2013). Less than 1%

of all counseling articles discuss spirituality as a clinical concern, and only 2.5% of multicultural

counseling articles address spirituality (Lee et al.). Furthermore, only 31% of multicultural

counseling courses actually mention spiritual issues in their syllabi (Pieterse et al., 2009).

Despite multicultural counseling competence increasing with the number of multicultural

counseling courses taken, most programs only offer one multicultural counseling course in their

programs, often not mentioning spirituality at all (Abreu et al., 2000; Ponterotto, 1997;

Wilkerson, 2019). With respect to spirituality, counselors who complete entire courses on

religious and spiritual topics in counseling display more spiritual counseling competence than

their counterparts, but many institutions do not offer such courses (Robertson, 2010; Selby, 2020;

Wilkerson).

The field of counseling's lack of focus on spirituality reflects prevailing attitudes towards

the study of religion and spirituality in the field of modern Western medicine: Such a practice is

unscientific and has no place in client care (Grof, 2008). Indeed, educators seeking to address

religion and spirituality in the mental health field report a categorical rejection of pedagogical

theory and course content which promotes spiritual counseling competence and the development

which facilitates such competence (Braud, 2006; Fadiman, 2018; Fukuyama et al., 2003;

Scotton, 1985; Walker, 2022). With modern mental health deriving from the work of Freud

(1955, 2016), who stated that spiritual belief was a sign of psychopathology, the rejection of spirituality by the field is unsurprising. The same model of mental health which carries negative attitudes towards the study of religion spirituality in the field also creates clinical practices which directly contradict with domains of spiritual counseling competence (Grof & Grof, 1991; Sedláková & Řiháček, 2016). Without proper training, counselors can pathologize spiritual experiences in the clients whom they serve, mistakenly diagnosing clients with psychopathology and choosing treatment approaches which suppress such experiences (Frame & Braun, 1996; Grof & Grof; Sedláková & Řiháček). Furthermore, counselors who lack necessary spiritual competence misdiagnose clients from marginalized populations and Black clients in particular with greater frequency, clients whose experiences intersect with issues of privilege and oppression (Anglin & Malaspina, 2007; Escobar, 2012; Frame & Braun).

In the United States, counselors' lack of spiritual competence renders them ill-equipped to serve their communities, 89% of whom believe in a higher power and 70% who state that their faith is at least somewhat important to them (Pew Research Center, 2015; 2021). Around 80% of individuals believe their health to be affected by their faith, and in the US, those who do actively practice their faith are both happier and healthier (Hilbers et al., 2010; Pew Research Center, 2019). Unsurprisingly, the majority of clients wish to discuss religious and spiritual topics in counseling (Diallo, 2013; Harris et al., 2015; Snider & McPhedran, 2014). Clients report the importance of both the incorporation of religion and spirituality into counseling and their faith as a mechanism of healing, desiring counselors who are spiritually competent to engage with such material (Diallo; Harris et al.; Hilbers et al.). Clients who wish to discuss spirituality show positive clinical outcomes when discussing such topics in counseling, but many counselors are

unprepared to engage in such discussions (Harris et al.; Lu et al., 2019; Reech, 2019; Robertson, 2010).

Nature of the Problem: Power and Privilege

Counselor educators calling for increased attention to religion and spirituality in counseling have also identified issues of power and privilege affecting spiritual counseling competence (Mintert et al., 2020). Though the field of counseling remains largely secular, fails to address topics related to religion and spirituality in counseling, and fails to promote spiritual counseling competence overall, the field also mostly consists of counselors who identify as Christian (Dailey et al., 2015; Frame & Braun, 1996; Lee et al., 2013; Lu et al., 2019; Myers & Truluck, 1998; Reech, 2019; Robertson, 2010). With more than 70% of Americans identifying as Christian, Christianity is the dominant religion in the United States. (Pew Research Center, 2015). Counselors identify as Christian at rates similar to the general population and around 22% of CACREP-accredited programs are housed within private religious institutions (Myers & Truluck; CACREP, 2019). Because of Christianity's cultural dominance, its followers benefit from *Christian privilege*, or the benefits one receives from being a member of the Christian faith in the United States (e.g., the prioritization of Christian holidays; Mintert et al; Schlosser, 2003). Counselors with Christian privilege may struggle to recognize how their religious and spiritual beliefs affect their client care, operating from a position of power to the detriment of their marginalized clients (Mintert et al.; Robertson & Avent, 2016). For example, counselors who are Christian who work with Muslim clients report a lack of client trust, struggles with conflicting beliefs, early client termination, and personal discomfort (Arshad & Falconier, 2019). Counselors who are Christian may also perpetuate the oppressive history of their faith towards members of the LGBT+ community, scoring significantly lower on measures of LGBT+ counseling

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competence than those who are not (Farmer, 2017). Indeed, the greater the counselors'

religiosity, the lower their scores on measures of LGBT+ counseling competence (Farmer).

Counselors who are Christian often struggle with spiritual counseling competence in

ways that derive from internal conflict based in fears of loss of privilege and ostracization from

their spiritual and religious communities (Griffin, 2000; Harris-Perry, 2011). The core principles

of the counseling profession can conflict with the values of counselors who are Christian,

creating scenarios in which counselors must work to resolve conflicts between personal and

professional identities (Mintert et al., 2020; Robertson & Avent, 2016). The conflict between

professional standards and personal religious and beliefs can be particularly nuanced for African

American counselors who are Christian, as involvement with the Black Church was historically a

matter of survival (Frame & Braun, 1996; Nobles, 1972; Robertson & Avent). Modern Native

Americans report a similar experience, struggling with a once-necessary White heterosexual

Christian ideal that continues to influence beliefs, values, and identities in the present day

(Balestrery, 2012).

Current Approach: Spiritual Competence

Despite the individual and systemic barriers that stand between mental health

professionals and spiritual counseling competence, educators have worked to find pedagogical,

clinical, supervisory, and advocacy-based solutions to the problem. One of the most recognizable

steps forward toward spiritual counseling competence has been the establishment of the

ASERVIC (Cashwell & Watts, 2010) competencies. Though the ACA (2014) Code of Ethics and

CACREP (2015) standards only make brief mentions of spirituality, The ASERVIC

competencies detail the knowledge, awareness, and skills required for counselors to effectively

meet the needs of their clients with respect to religion and spirituality. Counselor educators

utilized the original ASERVIC competencies to create the Spiritual Competency Scale (SCS; Robertson, 2010), which then led to both an updated version of the ASERVIC competencies and a measure by which counselor educators could assess the degree to which counselors were spiritually competent. The SCS has three versions: A full 90-item version, a factored 22-item version with six factors, and a re-factored 21-item version with six factors known as the SCS-R-II (Dailey et al. 2015; Robertson). Every counselor educator who has used the scale thus far reports that, with the exception of ASERVIC members completing the SCS-R-II, counselors score below minimal competence for religiously- and religiously-informed client care (Dailey et al., 2015; Lu et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2018; Reech, 2019; Robertson; Selby, 2018).

That said, counselor educators have reported counselor characteristics and potential interventions which may promote spiritual competency. Many researchers have reported that strength of religious or spiritual faith predicts spiritual counseling competence (Bloomquist, 2017; Dailey et al., 2015; Haasz, 2013; Robertson, 2010; Selby, 2020). Selby also reports that lesbian, gay, and bisexual counselors display higher spiritual counseling competence than their straight counterparts. Blalock and Holden (2018) suggested trainings specifically intended to promote spiritual counseling competence, and though Reech (2019) reported no significant difference in groups who received such trainings, Reech also acknowledged limitations of sampling size and statistical analysis, as Reech's findings did approach statistical significance. Expanding from specific trainings, Robertson (2010) reported that on the factored version of the SCS, among counselors who reported feeling competent to work with religious and spiritual topics in counseling, those who had taken a full course on religion and spirituality in counseling scored higher than those who covered the content as part of another course. Selby (2020) also reported that counselors who took entire courses on religion and spirituality in counseling scored

significantly higher than their peers who covered the material as part of another course or received training by some other method. Relatedly, Lu and Woo (2017) reported that a classroom environment that supported education around religion and spirituality as well as a focus on specific spiritual counseling competencies predicted successful outcomes related to those competencies, and Haasz found that receiving supervision around religious and spiritual topics in clinical practice increased spiritual counseling competence. Dailey et al. (2015), who studied the spiritual competence of ASERVIC members, reported that although ASERVIC members also scored below minimum competence on the full SCS, they did score significantly higher than their non-ASERVIC counterparts, even managing to score above minimum competence on the SCS-R-II. Dailey et al. also reported that the more time a counselor spent as a member of ASERVIC, the greater their spiritual competence. Similarly, Dailey et al. reported that interest in the role of religion and spirituality in counseling increased spiritual counseling competence, as did the belief that religion and spirituality affected one's well-being. Lu et al. also reported an important finding: multicultural counseling competence predicted spiritual counseling competence.

Recently, counselor educators interested in multicultural competence have begun to apply multicultural counseling literature specifically to spirituality. Multicultural counseling theorists, noting that competence may not actually produce meaningful clinical outcomes, postulate a shift from competence to orientation, explaining that multicultural competence is a "way of doing therapy" whereas multicultural orientation is a "way of being with a client" (Gutierrez et al., 2020; Owen, 2013, p. 25; Robertson, 2010). Researchers have specified that multicultural orientation consists of cultural humility, cultural comfort, and cultural opportunity and have created instruments to measure each construct (Hook et al., 2016; Kivlighan et al., 2019; Owen

et al., 2016; Slone & Owen, 2015). Adapting the multicultural orientation framework, researchers have theorized that spiritual competence is contained within a *spiritually-competent orientation*, or a "way of being" with a client that encapsulates a willingness to engage in discussions of religion and spirituality with clients in a way that does not privilege the counselor's religious and spiritual worldview, conveys counselor comfort within those discussions, and illustrates a willingness to capitalize on opportunities to have such discussions (Gutierrez et al.; Kivlighan et al.; Owen, 2013, p. 25). In order to promote a spiritually-competent orientation in counselors, theorists have highlighted the necessity for counselor educators to use such an orientation in pedagogy, course content, and clinical supervision (Bloomquist, 2017; Fukuyama et al., 2003; Lu et al., 2017; Gutierrez et al.). When discussing how a counselor educator can use a spiritually-competent orientation in counselor education, theorists highlight the importance of a focus that targets both spiritual counseling competence and holistic counselor development such that counselors-in-training develop an intersectional understanding of both themselves and how their culture influences their professional practice (Fukuyama et al.; Gutierrez et al.).

Researchers have explored what factors contribute to a spiritually-competent orientation with respect to counselor education and reported that remaining humble about the religious and spiritual beliefs of the learners whom one serves is key (Gutierrez et al.; Watkins et al., 2016). Humility challenges the power dynamic present between counselor educators and counselors-in-training, allowing the religious and spiritual beliefs of counselors-in-training to be both present and salient during the developmental process (Gutierrez et al.). A counselor educator utilizing a spiritually-competent orientation also displays comfort with discussing religious and spiritual topics in their courses and supervision and capitalizes on opportunities to

have such discussions if their learners express a desire to do so (Gutierrez et al.; Lu et al., 2017; Watkins et al., 2019). Displaying comfort discussing religious and spiritual topics in counselor education helps to create a safe space and build rapport with the counselors-in-training with whom one works (Lu et al.; Gutierrez et al.). Furthermore, capitalizing on opportunities to discuss religion and spirituality in counseling (as well as revisiting missed opportunities) both models openness about the subject matter and further challenges the power dynamic, empowering counselors-in-training to share and explore their own beliefs, experiences, and development (Gutierrez et al.). By being humble, open, and comfortable, counselor educators create environments that provide a safe space for both developing and utilizing spiritual competency in counseling (Lu et al.; Gutierrez et al.).

Current Approach: Transpersonally-informed Education

The theoretical basis for spiritual orientation aligns with both research and theory surrounding religion and spirituality as topics in counselor education. Reech (2019) analyzed the factor structure of the SCS (Robertson, 2010) and reported both intervention-based and development-based factors. Similarly, educators seeking to address religion and spirituality in counseling have reported targeting the areas of spiritual competence, holistic development, and client care in the learners whom they serve (Braud, 2006; Fukuyama et al., 2003; Walker, 2022). Seeking to more fully promote spiritual counseling competence, some counselor educators have incorporated work from the field of transpersonal psychology into their pedagogy, course content, and supervision, utilizing what appears to be a *transpersonally-informed orientation* with respect to counselor education (Fukuyama et al.; Marquis, 2012; Walker, 2022). Transpersonal theorists have approximated many definitions of the transpersonal perspective over the years, but most seem to align with the following definition:

The *transpersonal* might be described succinctly as ways in which individuals,

societies, and disciplines might increase their ambit and become more inclusive and

expansive in areas of sense of identity (including ways of being and ways of

functioning beyond the typical egocentric mode), development and transformation,

conditions of consciousness, ways of knowing, values, and service. The transpersonal

also involves recognizing and honoring the spiritual aspects of our being,

actions, and ways of thinking (Braud, 2006, p. 135).

Using Braud's definition, a transpersonally-informed orientation toward counselor

education would closely resemble Gutierrez's and colleagues' (2020) spiritually-competent

orientation. Counselor educators utilizing a transpersonally-informed orientation have researched

transpersonal counseling interventions, designed transpersonally-informed intake procedures,

advocated for transpersonally-informed clinical supervision, utilized transpersonally-informed

pedagogical approaches, infused transpersonal content into their courses, and even constructed

courses on transpersonal topics in counseling (Fall et al., 2017; Fukuyama et al, 2003; Marquis,

2012; Walker, 2022).

Educators utilizing a transpersonally-informed orientation emphasize the importance of

acknowledging global perspectives on human development and spirituality (Braud, 2006;

Fukuyama et al., 2003; Marquis, 2012; Walker, 2022; Wilber, 2000). Such educators report

success in promoting spiritual competence and holistic development in their learners by utilizing

both transpersonally-informed pedagogy and course content (Braud; Fukuyama et al.). They also

emphasize the importance of multiple ways of knowing, education, and development that both

incorporate and expand beyond the modernist Western approaches that emphasize cognition,

quantitative research, and the personal level of development (Braud; Fukuyama et al.).

Central to a transpersonally-informed orientation in counselor education is a developmental focus that, similarly to a spiritually-competent orientation, incorporates an intersectional, culturally-inclusive approach (Braud, 2006; Fukuyama et al., 2003; Marquis, 2012; Walker, 2022; Wilber, 2000). Educators utilizing a transpersonally-informed orientation in their work honor transpersonal levels of development and transpersonal states of consciousness (Braud; Fukuyama; Marquis; Walker; Wilber). Transpersonal levels of development, typically beyond the focus of counselor education, involve an enduring state of being in which one's consciousness expands beyond their individual sense of self and develops into a sense of a greater, unified interconnectedness, typically resulting in increased prosocial behavior, empathy, and kindness (Foster & McAdams, 1998; Marquis; Wilber). Transpersonal levels of development occur worldwide and their existence has been formulated by countless cultures following premodern, modern, and postmodern schools of thought (Marquis; Wilber). Similarly, transpersonal states of consciousness are temporary experiences of the transpersonal, occurring cross-culturally and with great regularity (Marquis; Wilber). Transpersonal experiences can be mystical, paranormal, intuitive, and/or spiritual and can include peak human experiences, spiritual visions and visitations, near-death experiences, precognition, after-death communication, and many other experiences beyond the realm of typical human experience (Fall et al., 2017; Storm & Goretzki, 2016). Educators utilizing a transpersonally-informed orientation approach student and client experiences of the transpersonal with humility, comfort, and opportunity, creating a safe space in which these experiences can be discussed and normalized (Fukuyama et al.; Gutierrez et al., 2020; Sedláková & Řiháček, 2019; Walker). Synthesizing the transpersonal can create personal growth and transformation for those who have such

experiences, while suppressing the transpersonal can deny opportunities for growth (Grof &
Grof, 1985, 1991; Sedláková & Řiháček).

Educators utilizing a transpersonally-informed orientation also incorporate cultural
influences affecting student perception and experiences, personal identities shaping one's
worldview, and structural factors which affect student and client experiences into their
frameworks (Fukuyama et al., 2003; Marquis, 2012; Walker, 2022; Wilber, 2000). In addition to
cognitive development, educators utilizing such an orientation acknowledge the emotional
development required for personal and professional growth (Braud, 2006; Fukuyama et al.;
Walker). Indeed, transpersonal theorists postulate many lines across which an individual
develops, as well as the importance of cultural, identity-based, and structural factors affecting
one's experience of the world (Marquis; Wilber).

Emotional processing is a key component of experiential learning, which is one method
by which educators utilizing a transpersonally-informed orientation promote spiritual
competence, clinical efficacy, and holistic development (Braud, 2006; Fukuyama et al., 2003;
Walker, 2022). Such educators report that experiential components in coursework, when
balanced with intellectual components, allow for course material to be "fully and deeply lived,
immediate, and embodied" (Braud, 2006, p. 137). Educators utilizing experiential learning in
transpersonally-based courses report that some learners experience positive changes in
development, competence, and/or consciousness during or after such activities (Braud;
Fukuyama et al.; Walker). Scholars who study experiences of the transpersonal categorize such
phenomena as *quantum change* or *potentially spiritually transformative experiences* (Blalock &
Holden, 2018; Miller, 2004). Though transpersonal experiences are not always transformative for
those who experience them, those who integrate them can display increased prosocial behavior,

rapid identity development, increased empathy (Blalock & Holden; Miller; Sedláková & Řiháček, 2019).

In order to honor the importance of cultural, transpersonal, and identity-based factors shaping one's experience of the world, educators utilizing a transpersonally-informed orientation in their work emphasize the importance of qualitative research (Braud, 2006; Fadiman, 2018; Fukuyama et al., 2003; Grof, 2008). Such educators also emphasize the importance of evidence-based quantitative research, especially since transpersonal phenomena often involve non-ordinary states of consciousness (Grof; Marquis, 2012; Walker, 2022). That said, educators utilizing a transpersonally-informed orientation honor the power of qualitative research to capture the essence of an individual experience that can be difficult to otherwise measure, providing evidence of phenomena outside the realm of ordinary experience (Braud; Fadiman; Hays & Singh, 2011; Grof). Some educators report incorporating qualitative assessments of clinical competence and development, particularly surrounding experiential learning that may include transpersonal elements (Braud; Fadiman).

Current Approach: Counselor Development

Reports of changes from integrated transpersonal experiences align with reports of higher levels of counselor development, with many counselors reporting critical incidents in their development to be heavily grounded in emotion- and belief-based changes (Furr & Carroll, 2003). Counselors report incidents ranging from perceptual shifts that cause interpersonal changes to transpersonal phenomena like near-death experiences (Furr & Carroll). Counselors report such incidents leading to changes in perceptions of clients, theoretical frameworks, increased prosociality, and detachment from unhealthy behaviors (Furr & Carroll). Counselor educators who have studied the phenomenon of critical incidents offer the following: "The

interaction between the nature of an event and the readiness of the individual to accept the challenge to be 'educated' results in counselor development" (Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988, p. 69).

Reports of changes from integrated transpersonal experiences also align with cognitive perspectives of counselor development, in which more developed counselors display greater empathy, less bias, greater flexibility, and better ability to uphold the ethical standards of the profession (Castillo, 2018; Granello, 2010). With respect to cognition, counselor educators have constructed measures to assess counselor development and designed programs to specifically promote counselor development, reporting successful outcomes (Foster & McAdams, 1998; Welfare & Borders, 2010). Both in and out of transpersonal contexts, counselor educators utilizing developmentally-focused pedagogy report positive outcomes (Castillo; Fukuyama et al., 2003; Granello; Walker, 2022). Some educators have also reported success in promoting other developmental lines in their students, such as racial identity or morality (Evans & Foster, 2000; Bebeau & Thoma, 2013).

Counselor educators seeking to promote spiritual counseling competence, clinical efficacy, and holistic development in their students have utilized many of the components of a transpersonally-informed orientation to counselor education in their course construction (Fukuyama et al., 2003; Walker, 2022). In courses specifically constructed to address transpersonal topics in counseling, counselor educators report honoring transpersonal levels of development and states of experience, acknowledging the influences of cultural perspectives and individual identity on such experiences, incorporating evidence-based research, facilitating experiential learning activities, and creating safe spaces for emotional and belief-based processing (Walker). Counselor educators constructing such courses in this way report achieving

their pedagogical goals, stating that their students display increases in spiritual counseling competence, clinical efficacy, and professional development (Walker). Such reports align with what other counselor educators seeking to address similar issues report: Pedagogy, course content, and clinical supervision intentionally designed to promote counselor development leading to better developmental outcomes in counselors-in-training, and multicultural competence increasing with course content intentionally designed to target such competence (Borders, 1989; Castillo, 2018; Foster & McAdams, 1998; Granello, 2010; Robertson, 2010; Selby, 2020; Welfare & Borders, 2010; Wilkerson, 2019).

Gaps: Transpersonally-informed Education

Despite the benefits of utilizing a transpersonally-informed orientation with respect to education, the fields from which such an approach draws are not without their criticisms. Educators incorporating a transpersonally-informed orientation into their work draw heavily from the field of transpersonal psychology (Braud, 2006; Fadiman, 2018; Fukuyama et al., 2003; Walker, 2022). Transpersonal psychology emphasizes the importance of Eastern, Western, and indigenous perspectives in its work, but despite such emphases, it (and by extension transpersonally-informed approaches to education) remains rooted in Western perspectives (Friedman et al., 2010; Fukuyama et al.,; Scotton et al., 1996; Wilber, 2000). Transpersonal psychology originated in Western society, deriving much of its basis from the field of psychology in general (Soudková, 2002). Despite its efforts, transpersonal psychology not only was founded upon Western, cognitive approaches to human development and experience, but also continues to privilege such perspectives in its frameworks (Friedman et al; Fukuyama et al; Sohmer, 2020). A consistent criticism of transpersonal psychology is its lack of equitable focus on multicultural perspectives, a criticism which transpersonally-informed counselor educators stress addressing

from a pedagogical perspective (Fukuyama et al., Sohmer). Regardless, transpersonal psychology struggles to separate itself from its origin in Western psychology, which emphasizes modernist perspectives that pathologize non-normative, marginalized, or otherwise diverse experiences (Dumaresque et al., 2018; Fukuyama et al.). Though transpersonal researchers have advocated for the depathologization of transpersonal phenomena, development, and other related experiences, transpersonal psychology's attempts to separate itself from traditional Western psychology creates another layer of criticism: a lack of empirical support (Friedman et al.; Grof & Grof, 1985, 1991; Marquis, 2012; Sedláková & Řiháček, 2019).

Because of its subject matter, research methods, and attempts to establish itself as a legitimate field of study outside of the dogma of traditional Western psychology, researchers have criticized transpersonal psychology, labeling it illogical pseudoscience (Grof, 2008). Because traditional Western psychology dismisses transpersonal psychology as pseudoscience, researchers who study transpersonal phenomena emphasize the importance of empirical , quantitative research (Marquis, 2012). Quantitative research in the field of transpersonal psychology has been growing steadily since its founding (Friedman et al., 2010; Grof). However, because transpersonal psychology also incorporates constructivist, qualitative research alongside traditional quantitative practices, it draws further criticism from traditional Western psychology, which remains grounded in a modernist paradigm (Braud, 2006; Dumaresque et al., 2018; Friedman et al.; Fukuyama et al., 2003). Transpersonal psychology uses qualitative research to capture the essence of transpersonal phenomena and honor non-normative experiences, experiences which mental health professionals who lack the competence to understand them can pathologize (Braud; Fukuyama et al.; Grof & Grof, 1985, 1991). Regardless of the efficacy of such research traditions and the populations whom they empower, many researchers remain

categorically opposed to such research traditions on principle (Braud; Dumaresque et al.; Hays & Singh, 2011; Grof).

Transpersonal psychology's simultaneous struggle with separating itself from and being accepted by traditional Western psychology creates many challenges for counselor educators wishing to draw upon its work. Though several peer-reviewed journals exist for the publication of peer-reviewed transpersonal research, very few articles manage to make their way into counselor education, and to date, no modern, well-constructed text exists for transpersonal topics in counseling (Lee et al., 2013; Walker, 2022). Counselor educators wishing to utilize a transpersonally-informed orientation in their work must be intimately familiar with the topic such that they can incorporate cohesive, clinically-relevant, high-quality transpersonal media into their practice, supervision, pedagogical theory, and course content (Walker). Counselor educators incorporating such an orientation into their work also strongly suggest that others wishing to do the same have some direct understanding of transpersonal levels of development or states of experience (Walker). Because of the metaphysical nature of many transpersonal phenomena, educators utilizing a transpersonally-informed orientation report direct experience with such phenomena as beneficial in both understanding such phenomena and conveying that understanding to one's students (Braud, 2006; Fukuyama et al., 2003; Walker). Counselor educators without an understanding of both transpersonal phenomena and the literature relevant to such phenomena in counselor education may struggle to adopt a transpersonally-informed orientation into their work (Walker).

The roots of modern counseling in the field of traditional Western psychology may also help to explain some of the challenges counselor educators face when attempting to incorporate a transpersonally-informed orientation into their work. Counselor educators report that their field

also rejects transpersonally-inclusive approaches to counselor development and education (Fukuyama et al. 2003; Walker, 2022). Scant literature exists on a transpersonally-informed approach to counselor education, but reports by transpersonal educators in the fields of both of counseling and psychology share a common narrative: Their fields dismiss their research, devalue their expertise, and attempt to separate such content from their discipline (Braud, 2006; Fadiman, 2018; Fukuyama et al; Scotton, 1985; Walker). One counselor educator who both utilized a transpersonally-informed approach in her work and once opposed the incorporation of transpersonal topics into counselor education offered the following:

> It is painful for me to admit my prejudice, but I was operating under some negative
> stereotypes of transpersonal psychology. . . I believe the forces of ethnocentrism have
> kept me from being open to knowing and interacting with transpersonalists. To this error
> I sincerely say, "I'm sorry!" (Fukuyama et al., 2003, p. 186).

Counselor educators utilizing a transpersonally-informed orientation in their work also report that such attitudes may contribute to the overall invisibility of the transpersonal in counselor education (Walker, 2022). No organization or accrediting body in the field of counseling mentions transpersonal phenomena, and very few CACREP-accredited institutions currently offer any sort of education directly related to such topics (Walker). The collective difficulty for the incorporation of a transpersonally-informed orientation in counselor education remains high, but with its inclusion of transpersonal levels of development, transpersonal states of experience, cultural influences affecting student perception and experiences, personal identities shaping one's worldview, structural factors which affect student and client experiences, experiential learning, qualitative research traditions, and spiritual counseling competence, such an approach may help to address current gaps which otherwise exist in the field of counselor

education (Braud, 2006; Fadiman, 2018; Fall et al., 2017; Fukuyama et al., 2003; Marquis, 2012; Walker).

Gaps: Counselor Development

Researchers report that one area of gaps in current approaches to counselor education is the line of counselor development which traditional counselor education targets in its pedagogy, course content, and clinical supervision (Bloomquist, 2017; Castillo, 2018; Foster & McAdams, 2010; Fukuyama et al., 2003; Furr & Carroll, 2003; Gutierrez et al., 2020; Marquis, 2012; Walker, 2022). Many relevant lines of development contribute to overall counselor development, but most developmental approaches in counselor education focus specifically on cognitive development (Castillo, 2018; Foster & McAdams; Fukuyama et al.; Furr & Carroll; Marquis, Walker). Deriving from cognitive developmental theory, modern counselor developmental theory defines counselor development as a combination of cognitive complexity related to the counseling process and clinical skills which accompany such complexity (Borders, 1989; Foster & McAdams, 1998; Welfare & Borders, 2010). The focus of counselor education on cognitive development has produced positive outcomes with respect to counselor empathy, clinical flexibility, and ability to uphold professional ethical standards, though it has also called into question the limitations of such an approach (Castillo; Foster & McAdams; Furr & Carroll; Granello, 2010; Welfare & Borders).

Though professional educators have produced positive developmental outcomes through a focus on cognitive development, others have critiqued such a focus on the "primacy of cognition", arguing that both cognition and perception deserve equal attention in the field of education (Braud, 2006; Dahlin, 2001, p. 1). Some educators have highlighted the prioritization of cognition at the expense of emotion despite the basis of developmental education

incorporating both cognitive and affective components, components which counselors report as critical in their development (Bloom, 1956; Furr & Carroll, 2003; Wellington, 2010). Though counselor educators have defined counselor development as a combination of cognitive and counseling skill development, counselors report critical incidents in their development to be heavily grounded in emotion- and belief-based changes (Furr & Carroll). Counselors rarely report critical incidents in their development to be based in cognition and skill acquisition, instead reporting incidents ranging from perceptual shifts that cause interpersonal changes to transpersonal phenomena like near-death experiences (Furr & Carroll). Few studies of critical incidents in counselor development exist, but counselor educators who have studied the phenomenon report that counselor development occurs when counselors both experience a challenge and have the cognition, emotion, beliefs, and skills necessary to process such a challenge (Furr & Carroll; Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988).

Educators have also emphasized the importance of culturally-responsive approaches to education, highlighting the focus on the cognitive aspects of learning as a culturally-specific phenomenon which fails to consider the developmental needs of learners from diverse cultural backgrounds (Braud; Green, 2013). The needs of diverse learners remains a point of contention in professional development: Educators must uphold the standards of their professions, and specific emphases like cognitive development produce effective clinical outcomes (Castillo, 2018; Frost & Regehr, 2013). A focus on heavily standardized practices, however, runs the risk of alienating developing professionals from their prospective professions, particularly when professional identity development fails to include relevant cultural identities (Frost & Regehr). In any case, the gap between the diverse needs of counselors-in-training and what they actually receive reflects the gap between holistic and cognitive approaches to counselor education.

Gaps: Spiritual Competence

Transpersonally-informed counselor educators posit the need for not only a more comprehensive developmental approach to education but also a focus on counselor competence in the domains of religion, spirituality, and transpersonal phenomena (Fukuyama et al., 2003; Walker, 2022). In order to reach these pedagogical goals, transpersonally-informed educators emphasize the importance of remaining humble, comfortable, and open to student experiences such that the students feel safe to process their challenges with development and competence (Braud, 2006; Fukuyama et al.; Walker). Similarly, counselor educators highlighting the potential limitations of the construct of spiritual counseling competence postulate a "way of being" that extends beyond a "way of doing therapy", arguing that competence is necessary but not sufficient for successful clinical outcomes (Gutierrez et al., 2020; Owen, 2013, p. 25). Even the researcher who created measures for the construct of spiritual counseling competence cautioned against utilizing such a construct to argue in favor of clinical efficacy surrounding religious and spiritual topics in counseling (Robertson, 2010). Though counselors categorically fail to score above minimum competence with respect to spiritual counseling competence in any case, theorists studying similar constructs posit that a focus on competence fails to actually produce significant clinical outcomes (Bloomquist, 2017; Knight, 2010; Lu et al., 2019; Dailey et al., 2015; Gutierrez et al.; Park et al., 2018; Reech, 2019; Robertson; Selby, 2020). A "way of being," orientation-style approach to multicultural topics in counseling produces significant clinical outcomes, but such a phenomenon remains unstudied with respect to religion, spirituality, and the transpersonal (Gutierrez et al.; Owen et al., 2013, p. 25; Owen et al., 2016).

Regardless, the extant studies of spiritual counseling competence reveal flaws in sampling and instrument design. The existing measure of spiritual counseling competence was

normed on a sample that was primarily White and Christian (Robertson, 2010). Robertson reported a sample that was 82% White and 63% Christian when validating the SCS, and most researchers using the scale have either reported similar demographics or failed to provide the information (Bloomquist; Dailey et al., 2015; Lu et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2018; Park et al., 2018; Reech, 2019). One researcher reported a small, anomalous sample that was 96% Christian (Knight, 2010). Another researcher reported a sample that was 59% White and 92% straight, but no other researchers have reported participant sexual orientation or a sample that was below 72% White (Selby, 2020). No study provided demographic information regarding participant disability status, and no study other than Knight's, Robertson's or Park's and colleagues' delineated the religious or spiritual identity of its participants such that a meaningful understanding of participant demographics could be reached (Bloomquist; Lu et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2018; Reech; Selby).

Additionally, the factor structure of the SCS proved to be somewhat inconsistent both during exploratory factor analysis procedures and across populations (Dailey et al., 2015; Reech, 2019; Robertson, 2010). The full SCS was hypothesized to have nine factors, but the last two factors failed to load appropriately, and after subsequent analyses, a six-factor solution emerged (Robertson). Most items had acceptable loadings and most factors had acceptable alphas, but the sixth factor (communication) had an alpha (.65) and an item communality (.44, item 28) below the desired cutoff. The factor with by far the highest variance (29.4%, culture and worldview) also had several items cross-load. Haasz (2013), utilizing the SCS, reported human and spiritual development (.65) and communication (.61) to have alphas below an acceptable cutoff. Upon revisiting the factor structure with ASERVIC members, Dailey et al. reported similar issues. Their exploratory factor analysis revealed a seven-factor structure, but because of the conceptual

dissimilarity with the rest of the factor structure, the seventh factor was dropped in favor of a six-factor model. In their analysis, only two factors (assessment and human and spiritual development) retained all their items, with some factors replacing more items than they retained. The loading order also changed significantly, and most of the alphas of each factor dropped slightly, two falling below acceptable cutoffs (.60 for culture and worldview and .61 for communication). Lu et al.'s (2018) CFA of the SCS-R-II did confirm a six-factor structure, though they also reported alphas below acceptable cutoffs (.62 for culture and worldview and .69 for communication). Reech, seeking to apply the measure to marriage and family therapists, utilized the SCS-R-II (Dailey et al., 2015) produced from the previous study and again examined its factor structure, which revealed only two factors (spirituality tasks, assessments, and interventions and human and spiritual development). Though Dailey's and colleagues' use of a sample of ASERVIC members to produce a stronger factor structure and Lu's and colleagues' CFA did help to strengthen the validity of the measure, the search for a method of measuring the construct of spiritual counseling competence remains unfinished.

One final flaw of spiritual counseling competence mirrors the field of counselor education at large: A failure to include transpersonal content in its scope of competence (Cashwell & Watts, 2010). Counselor educators originally intended for the ASERVIC competencies to address the transpersonal, but the content area was removed following revisions to the original competencies (J. M. Holden, personal communication, 26 May 2021). In their current form, the ASERVIC competencies fail to address issues that counselors and clients alike may encounter related to the transpersonal, which by definition includes spirituality (Braud, 2006; Cashwell & Watts). No existing measure of spiritual counseling competence assesses for competency in a transpersonally-inclusive manner (Dailey et al., 2015; Robertson, 2010).

Conclusion

With counselor educators now discussing whether spiritual competence is the best direction for addressing clinical outcomes surrounding spirituality and religion, borrowing from the literature on multicultural counseling to propose a shift to promoting a "way of being" with students when discussing such topics, new opportunities to explore transpersonally-informed approaches to counselor education begin to emerge (Gutierrez et al., 2020; Owen, 2013, p. 25). Counselor educators report that a transpersonally-informed approach to counselor education, with its honoring of transpersonal levels of development and states of experience, acknowledgment of the influences of cultural perspectives and individual identity on such experiences, incorporation of evidence-based research, facilitation of experiential learning activities, and creation of safe spaces for emotional and belief-based processing of such material results in successful outcomes in promoting spiritual competence and counselor development (Fukuyama et al.; Walker). Though counselor educators who utilize such approaches have taught courses on transpersonal topics in counseling and reported success in achieving their learning outcomes, the experiences of counselors who take such courses had not been researched prior to this study (Walker).

In order to address gaps in counselor education related to spiritual competence, counselor development, and transpersonally-informed pedagogical approaches, I conducted a qualitative study to examine the experiences of students who take transpersonal counseling courses. Utilizing a qualitative research design allowed for an exploratory study of the topic of transpersonally-informed counselor education, which aligned with best practices as proposed by research theorists (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Haskins et al., 2021; Hays & Singh, 2011). Utilizing a qualitative research design also allowed for the incorporation of research practices

used by transpersonal educators that honor non-normative, marginalized, or otherwise diverse perspectives, emphasizing the "whole person" (Braud, 2006, p. 136; Fukuyama et al., 2003).

In the next chapter, I will provide a comprehensive overview of the research traditions and methodologies which offered strategies for examining counselor experiences of transpersonal counseling courses. Counselors who take transpersonal counseling courses experience a transpersonally-informed approach to counselor education, an approach which addresses the gaps which currently exist in counselor education with respect to spiritual counseling competency (Fukuyama et al., 2003; Walker, 2022).

Chapter 3

Methodology

In this chapter, I will provide an in-depth examination into the proposed research methodology for addressing gaps in the literature related to spiritual counseling competence. I will begin by overviewing the selected research tradition and its associated framework. I will then highlight the question which arises from the gaps in spiritual counseling competency literature and the design of the research process, including sampling, demographics, data collection, and data analysis. I will conclude by providing a detailed explanation of how I will ensure that my findings are of the highest possible quality such that they contribute meaningfully to the field.

Methodological Overview

Our methods of exploring phenomena change based on the degree to which we understand them, how we can study them, the individuals who experience them, and the phenomena themselves (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). At its heart, the study of religion, spirituality, and the transpersonal is an attempt to understand the ineffable (Grof, 2008). As Laozi famously said, "The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao" (Feng & English, 1972, p. 1). Nonetheless, scholars who research religion, spirituality, and the transpersonal still seek to convey the ineffability of the phenomena which they study, utilizing whatever methods best fit their approach (Braud, 2006).

Researchers have explored some phenomena, such as spiritual counseling competence, to the degree that methods of quantitative measurement currently exist (Robertson, 2010).

However, for other phenomena, such as a transpersonal educational orientation, researchers have only begun to explore what constitutes its essence (Walker, 2022). Regardless, counselor experiences of such phenomena in the context of transpersonal counseling courses remained a matter of speculation until this study. Experiences of the transpersonal can also be taboo, particularly within academic and professional settings (Grof, 2008). Some research frameworks seek to honor experiences that would otherwise be dismissed, rejected, or overlooked while other frameworks can inadvertently erase such experiences (Hays & Singh, 2011).

Given the phenomena which contribute to and are shaped by the experiences of counselors who take transpersonal counseling courses, I elected to use a transcendental phenomenological analysis consistent with research traditions present within the transpersonal perspective. A transcendental phenomenological analysis of counselors' experiences of transpersonal counseling courses allowed me to examine the essence of such experiences, enabling me to address current literary gaps surrounding the phenomena which intersected with such courses (Haskins et al., 2021). Such an analysis also allowed me to honor potentially marginalized experiences and study phenomena which would have been difficult to measure otherwise (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Hays & Singh, 2011).

A Transpersonal Theoretical Framework

By name, a transpersonal framework incorporates transpersonal levels of development and states of experience (Marquis, 2012). Many definitions of the transpersonal exist, but the following offers a concise explanation:

The *transpersonal* might be described succinctly as ways in which individuals, societies, and disciplines might increase their ambit and become more inclusive and expansive in areas of sense of identity (including ways of being and ways of

functioning beyond the typical egocentric mode), development and transformation,

conditions of consciousness, ways of knowing, values, and service. The transpersonal

also involves recognizing and honoring the spiritual aspects of our being,

actions, and ways of thinking (Braud, 2006, p. 135).

A transpersonal framework, then, not only incorporates transpersonal levels of development and

states of experience, but also honors the human capacity to experience a wider range of

perspectives than is privileged in modern Western culture (Marquis; Wilber, 2000).

Scholars incorporating a transpersonal framework state that human experience is shaped

by individual, cultural, and systemic factors (Fukuyama et al., 2003; Marquis, 2012; Wilber,

2000). By incorporating such factors into its design, a transpersonal framework allows

intersecting experiences to be more fully explored (Fukuyama et al.). A transpersonal framework

also highlights the many lines through which beings may develop, ranging from cognition and

emotion to race and gender (Marquis; Wilbur). Given the scope and complexity of a

transpersonal perspective of the human experience, scholars utilizing such perspectives honor

both quantitative and qualitative research, acknowledging that some phenomena may lack the

knowledge base or tools to be studied by one particular method (Braud; Fadiman, 2018;

Fukuyama et al.).

Research Question

Researchers suggest that completing entire courses addressing religion and spirituality in

counseling may prepare counselors to address such topics in a clinical environment (Robertson,

2010; Selby, 2020). Theorists studying the phenomenon of spiritual counseling competence also

highlight the role of the counselor educator in promoting both spiritual counseling competence

and counselor development around the topic (Gutierrez et al., 2020). Similarly,

transpersonally-informed educators target both professional competence and development in the learners whom they serve (Braud, 2006; Fukuyama et al., 2003; Walker, 2022). Counselor educators who teach transpersonal counseling courses report targeting spiritual counseling competence and counselor development similarly to their peers, but also report an explicit transpersonal focus, both incorporating religion and spirituality and expanding beyond them (Walker). Given the theoretical nature of the extant research for addressing religion and spirituality in counseling as well as the distinctions between religion, spirituality, and the transpersonal, the following question arose: What are the perceptions of counselors who experience a transpersonal counseling course?

Research Design

In order to research the qualities of the experiences and perceptions of counselors who take transpersonal counseling courses, I conducted a transcendental phenomenological study of such experiences and perceptions. Transcendental phenomenology, a qualitative research method pioneered by Clark Moustakas, draws heavily on the work of Edmund Husserl (Haskins et al., 2021). Transcendental phenomenology centers around epoché, a concept from ancient Greece which entails the suspension of judgment during conceptual reflection (Haskins et al.). During a transcendental phenomenological analysis, researchers consistently engage in practices designed to suspend judgment throughout the research process (Haskins et al.). The goal of a transcendental phenomenological analysis is to capture the essence of a particular phenomenon by obtaining a thick description of the phenomenon from the individuals who experience it (Haskins et al.). The process of conducting a transcendental phenomenological analysis is described in detail below.

Sampling Method

Before beginning this study, I obtained approval from the College of William and Mary's Institutional Review Board to conduct research on human subjects. Creswell and Creswell (2017) state that purposive sampling may be used when random sampling methods may not sufficiently collect the appropriate participants for the study, such as when working with a small population or specific phenomena. Furthermore, qualitative research traditions often utilize purposive sampling as a tool to access research samples which may otherwise fail to be meaningfully captured (Hays & Singh, 2011).

Currently, only two CACREP-accredited institutions offer a course in transpersonal counseling: The University of North Texas and the College of William and Mary. Because of the small number of counselors who have taken a transpersonal counseling course in the past year, I used purposive sampling to obtain my sample. Furthermore, because of FERPA, I required the assistance of faculty members who taught a transpersonal counseling course in the past year to contact participants regarding the study.

Qualitative research theorists suggest a sample of around ten participants to ensure adequate data collection for a phenomenological analysis, though the sample may be larger or smaller depending on the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). However, because of the small pool of available participants, I recruited six participants in this study. I informed participants of the voluntary nature of the study, the IRB approval process, and any possible risk associated with the study. In order to ensure participant confidentiality within a small population, I gave each participant a pseudonym in the event that they are quoted within the study.

Population Demographics

One common criticism of transpersonal research is its lack of inclusion of diverse perspectives despite being informed by premodern, modern, and postmodern frameworks from around the world (Fukuyama et al., 2003; Marquis, 2012). Additionally, one of the primary functions of a phenomenological analysis is to capture perspectives of a phenomenon of interest which would otherwise be overlooked (Hays & Singh, 2011).

Based on the research design and subject of this study, I offer the following information as approximate population data:

- The admitted class profile of The College of William and Mary School of Education 2020–2021 had a mean age of 31. The class was 79% female and 21% male. The class was 79% White, 12% Black, 9% Hispanic, 2% Asian, 2% multi-ethnic, < 1% Native American, and < 1% Native Hawaiian. The class had students from the continental United States, Jamaica, Germany, and Japan.

- The admitted class profile of the University of North Texas Graduate School 2020–2021 was 57% women and 43% men. The class was 42% White, 29% international, 12% Hispanic, 7% Black, 5% Asian, and 4% multi-ethnic, and 1% other.

Neither the College of William and Mary nor the University of North Texas offer specific demographic information for their counseling programs, and neither offer information regarding gender identity, sexual orientation, ability status, religious or spiritual affiliation, or any other demographic identifier. However, I contacted each institution requesting information regarding more specific demographic information so that the population from which the sample came could be better approximated. Upon contacting the instructors of the transpersonal counseling courses that the participants of this study completed, I received the following information: One

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class contained five women, one non-binary person, and one man; the other class contained eight women and one man. No other demographic information was available. In total, sixteen potential participants were available for this study. The extant participant pool demographics aid in transferability, discussed in greater detail in the Trustworthiness section below. In any case, I sought to address the multicultural criticism of transpersonal research and the empowerment potential of a transcendental phenomenological analysis by understanding how participants' identities, cultures, and beliefs shape their experiences in transpersonal counseling courses and perceptions of the transpersonal in general.

Data Collection

Similar to other phenomenological methodologies, a researcher performing a transcendental phenomenological analysis conducts participant interviews as the primary method of data collection, often triangulating participant interviews with additional forms of data (Haskins et al, 2021). A transcendental phenomenological interview, much like other phenomenological interviews, involves a semi-structured interview consisting of open-ended questions designed to elicit a description of a phenomenon of interest in great detail (Hays & Singh, 2011). Researchers conducting transcendental phenomenological interviews will often paraphrase what participants say in real time to ensure accuracy, ask for any relevant information that may not have been sufficiently explored though pre-planned interview questions, and ask follow-up questions (e.g., "Can you tell me more about that?") in order to ensure sufficiently thick descriptions of the phenomena of interest (Hays & Singh).

Researchers also often utilize triangulation during a transcendental phenomenological analysis, collecting data from the same participants by some other method such as expressive arts (e.g., poetry about the phenomenon of interest) or secondhand documentation (e.g., journaling

about the phenomenon of interest; Hays & Singh). The role of triangulation in enhancing trustworthiness is described in the Trustworthiness section below.

In order to collect data regarding the experiences and perceptions of counselors who take transpersonal counseling courses, I conducted participant interviews and requested a one-week follow-up journal documenting the participants' reflections on the topics discussed in the interviews. I recorded the interviews using Zoom, digitally encrypted the recordings, stored the recordings in a secure location, and deleted them after the completion of this study.

Interview Questions

Based on the literature surrounding spiritual counseling competence, holistic counselor development, and transpersonally-informed pedagogy, I examined the following content areas as sources of interview questions:

- How counselors who have taken transpersonal counseling courses define religion, spirituality, and the transpersonal

- In what ways cultural, identity-based, or systemic factors affect counselors' understanding of religion, spirituality, and the transpersonal

- The degree to which taking transpersonal counseling courses affects counselors' preparedness to address religion, spirituality, and the transpersonal in counseling

- How taking transpersonal counseling courses affects counselors' personal or professional development

- How counselors who have taken transpersonal counseling courses perceive the profession's relationship with religion, spirituality, and the transpersonal

- The components of instructors' pedagogical approaches that affect counselors in transpersonal counseling courses

Additionally, because of a time-sensitive phenomenon likely to result in a cohort effect, I propose the following content area as a source of interview questions:

- The degree to which the Covid-19 pandemic affected counselors' experiences in transpersonal counseling courses

Follow-up Journal

Based on the content of the participant interview, I examined the following content areas as sources for journal reflections:

- Any information that participants wish to share regarding their involvement in the study

- Any information that participants wish to share regarding the content of the interview

- Any information that participants wish to share regarding their experiences between the interview and the journal that may be related to their involvement in the study

Data Analysis

After collecting data, a researcher conducting a transcendental phenomenological analysis will perform a series of steps to analyze the data (Haskins et al., 2021). A researcher seeking to begin data analysis during a transcendental phenomenological analysis will first transcribe each interview into a discrete document containing the entirety of the interview, transcribed word-for-word (Haskins et al.). A researcher may transcribe each interview by hand or use a transcription service (Hays & Singh, 2011). Qualitative researchers state that transcription by hand may allow a researcher to connect more fully with the data, but concede that transcription by hand also requires significant time and resources which could be used for other parts of the research process (Hays & Singh). Given the amount of data I collected and the solitary nature of this study, I used a transcription service to transcribe participant interviews. After transcribing participant interviews, I sent the transcripts to the participants as a form of

member checking, ensuring that they were satisfied with their experience as conveyed by the transcript. Member checking is discussed in greater detail in the Trustworthiness section below.

After receiving feedback from participants regarding their transcripts, a researcher seeking to analyze their data during a transcendental phenomenological analysis will code their data (Haskins et al.). The process of coding qualitative data varies from researcher to researcher and from tradition to tradition (Hays & Singh). In general, a researcher will assign a descriptor to a discrete chunk of information and that descriptor will serve as a codified datum, or code (Hays & Singh). A code may be a phrase, a sentence, or several sentences depending on the researcher and tradition (Hays & Singh). After coding a datum, a researcher conducting a transcendental phenomenological analysis will place the code and its associated datum into a horizontalization chart, which a researcher can construct using specific qualitative coding software or Microsoft Excel (Hays & Singh). A horizontalization chart is a document which allows a researcher conducting a qualitative data analysis to quickly view their data in an organized manner (Hays & Singh). Qualitative researchers suggest that one code per sentence is appropriate for a phenomenological analysis (Hays & Singh). I coded each sentence during the data analysis process of this study, varying as necessary based on the content of each sentence. I also used Microsoft Excel to construct my horizontalization chart. In qualitative research, researchers often code in pairs or groups to ensure the accuracy of the codes (Hays & Singh). Because of the solitary nature of this study, I consulted with my dissertation committee throughout the coding process as a form of peer debriefing. Peer debriefing is discussed in greater detail in the Trustworthiness section below.

After coding each interview and secondary source of data, a researcher conducting a transcendental phenomenological analysis will then categorize the codes based on commonalities

which exist between the codes (Haskins et al., 2021). Some codes may overlap or cluster together to represent a particular aspect of the phenomenon of interest (Hays & Singh, 2011). The process of combining codes to form categories is known as categorization and often takes place in pairs or groups to ensure the accuracy of the categories (Hays & Singh). Because of the solitary nature of this study, I consulted with my dissertation committee throughout the categorization process as a form of peer debriefing.

After categorizing their codes, a researcher conducting a transcendental phenomenological analysis then condenses their categories into themes, which are broad, discrete-yet-interconnected components which collectively represent the phenomenon of interest (Haskins et al., 2021). In a transcendental phenomenological analysis, the themes which arise from the condensation of one's categories should reflect the collective experiences of the participants regarding the phenomenon of interest (Haskins et al). The process of condensing categories to form themes is known as thematization and often takes place in pairs or groups to ensure the accuracy of the themes (Hays & Singh). Because of the solitary nature of this study, I consulted with my dissertation committee throughout the thematization process as a form of peer debriefing. Upon completion of the written portion of the research, I sent it to participants in order to ensure their words match their intent, again engaging in the process of member checking.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness plays a similar role to reliability and validity in quantitative research (Hays & Singh, 2011). Many components of trustworthiness exist, and a researcher seeking to produce meritorious qualitative research should maximize trustworthiness within the study (Hays & Singh).

Credibility. Credibility is a form of trustworthiness that is similar to internal validity, or the overall "believability" of the research (Hays & Singh, 2011, p. 200). In the context of this study, I increased credibility by obtaining a thick description of participant experiences during interviews, triangulating their experiences with secondary data, and maintaining an audit trail.

Transferability. Transferability is a form of trustworthiness that is similar to external validity that enables a reader to discern the degree to which the study's findings are applicable elsewhere (Hays & Singh). In the context of this study, I increased transferability by obtaining a thick description of participant experiences during interviews and triangulating the participants, their experiences, and the theoretical underpinnings of the study.

Dependability. Dependability is a form of trustworthiness that is similar to reliability that demonstrates the degree to which the results of a study are similar to findings in other studies (Hays & Singh). In the context of this study, I increased dependability by both conducting a thorough literature review and reporting the degree to which the findings of this study align with the extant literature.

Confirmability. Confirmability is a form of trustworthiness established by reducing researcher interference as much as possible throughout the research process in an effort to increase objectivity through methodology (Hays & Singh). In the context of this study, I increased confirmability by obtaining a thick description of participant experiences during interviews, triangulating their experiences with secondary data, engaging in member checking, maintaining an audit trail, and engaging in peer debriefing.

Authenticity. Authenticity is a form of trustworthiness established by reducing researcher interference as much as possible throughout the research process in an effort to increase objectivity through the use of appropriate guiding theories (Hays & Singh). In the

context of this study, I increased authenticity by utilizing a transpersonally-informed transcendental phenomenological perspective that enabled me to capture the essence of the experiences of the participants regarding the phenomena of interest.

Coherence. Coherence is a form of trustworthiness defined as the degree to which a study's research design is consistent with its purpose and epistemological perspective (Hays & Singh). In the context of this study, I increased coherence by ensuring that the structure of the participant interviews matches the purpose of a transpersonally-informed transcendental phenomenological analysis. I also increased coherence by maintaining thorough documentation of the research process with an audit trail.

Sampling Adequacy. Sampling adequacy is a form of trustworthiness intended to ensure that the research sample and sampling methods match the research design (Hays & Singh). In the context of this study, I ensured sampling adequacy by following standards for research samples and sampling methods set by qualitative research theorists for transcendental phenomenological analyses. Specifically, I purposively sampled as many participants as possible from the available participant population, in line with best practices for a transcendental phenomenological analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Hays & Singh). I also utilized member checking to ensure that the study's participants were appropriate for the study.

Ethical Validation. Ethical validation is a form of trustworthiness that results from a researcher adhering to ethical and moral best practices while conducting their research (Hays & Singh). In the context of this study, I ensured ethical validation through reflexive journaling, member checking, and peer debriefing. Specifically, I ensured that I obtained approval from the College of William and Mary's Institutional Review Board before beginning my research, disclosed any potential risk to participants, allowed for participant withdrawal at any time, and

reduced threats to confidentiality through appropriate data collection, encryption, storage, and disposal. I ensured that participants' experiences were accurately represented, documented my own perspective throughout the research process, and consulted with peer debriefers throughout the research process.

Substantive Validation. Substantive validation is a form of trustworthiness that ensures that research findings are relevant and appropriate (Hays & Singh). In the context of this study, I increased substantive validation by obtaining a thick description of participant experiences during interviews, triangulating the participants and their experiences, engaging in member checking, ensuring appropriate theory development by conducting a thorough literature review, and maintaining an audit trail. I also followed best practices for data analysis during a transcendental phenomenological analysis.

Creativity. Creativity is a form of trustworthiness that indicates novelty and flexibility in a study's research design (Hays & Singh). In the context of this study, I ensured creativity by documenting my decision-making process in an audit trail, allowing for adjustments as the research process unfolds. I also utilized interview protocols and methods of triangulation which allowed for participants to express their experiences surrounding the phenomena of interest in multiple, open-ended ways. Furthermore, I used an interdisciplinary research framework consistent with both transpersonal and transcendental phenomenological perspectives.

Trustworthy Strategies in Transcendental Phenomenology

In qualitative research, the entirety of the research process should increase the trustworthiness of the study in some way (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Haskins et al., 2021; Hays & Singh, 2011). However, specific strategies for increasing trustworthiness exist for both transcendental phenomenology and qualitative research in general (Creswell & Creswell,

Haskins et al.; Hays & Singh). I describe the practices consistent with a transcendental phenomenological analysis intended to increase trustworthiness in this study below.

Epoché. Epoché is a hallmark practice of transcendental phenomenological research (Haskins et al., 2021; Hays & Singh, 2011). Edmund Husserl modernized epoché, which was originally an ancient Greek tradition of suspending judgment during conceptual reflection, as an epistemological basis for conducting scientific inquiry, giving rise to the philosophy of phenomenology (Haskins et al). Clark Moustakas utilized Husserl's philosophy by creating a method by which a researcher could engage in epoché, capturing the essence of a phenomenon from the perspectives of one's research participants (Haskins et al). Epoché is similar to bracketing, a process in which a researcher attempts to set aside their biases in order to more objectively capture the perspective of one's participants regarding a phenomenon of interest (Hays & Singh).

In the context of this study, I engaged in epoché by thoroughly researching the literature related to counselors' experiences in transpersonal counseling courses, maintaining a reflexive journal in an effort to document my experiences and perceptions throughout the research process, and debriefing with my dissertation committee as I engage in the research process. For example, I am a counselor who completed a course in transpersonal counseling. I was impacted by the content area to the degree that I elected to specialize in transpersonal topics in counselor education. After studying transpersonal topics in counseling and education over the course of my time pursuing a degree in counselor education, I have obtained both knowledge and opinions on transpersonal counseling courses, spiritual counseling competence, counselor development, and clinical practice. My perception of such phenomena invariably shaped the research process, but I did my best to engage in epoché so as to promote trustworthiness in this study.

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Reflexive Journaling. Reflexive journaling is one process by which a qualitative researcher can engage in epoché (Hays & Singh, 2011). A researcher may construct a reflexive journal by documenting their thoughts, feelings, and insights during moments of reflection throughout the research process (Hays & Singh). A reflexive journal helps a researcher to track how their own experience of the research may influence the research process (Hays & Singh). In accordance with a transcendental phenomenological approach, I wrote about my experiences, thoughts, feelings, and perceptions regarding the research process for the duration of the study. By engaging in reflexive journaling, I was better able to track my interactions with the research process, increasing the ethical validation of my findings.

Audit Trail. A reflexive journal is part of a larger set of documents known as an audit trail (Hays & Singh). An audit trail contains participant contact information, transcripts, recordings, meeting notes, reflexive journals, and any other relevant documentation pertaining to the research process (Hays & Singh). An audit trail serves as physical evidence of the research process, increasing credibility, coherence, substantive validation, and creativity (Hays & Singh). Throughout the research process, I thoroughly documented any information pertinent to the study.

Peer Debriefing. Peer debriefing is another method by which a researcher may increase the ethical validation of their research (Hays & Singh, 2011). During peer debriefing, a researcher can consult with their peers about any thoughts, feelings, perceptions, or experiences they have throughout the research process (Hays & Singh). Peer debriefing also allows a researcher to ensure that they are properly coding, categorizing, and thematizing the data they collect (Hays & Singh).

Qualitative research usually involves research teams (Hays & Singh). However, because this study is intended to demonstrate my ability to function as a doctor of my profession, the process is necessarily solitary. In this study, my dissertation committee served as peers for the process of peer debriefing.

Member Checking. Member checking is a process by which a researcher ensures that they accurately represent their participants in the results of the research (Hays & Singh, 2011). Member checking increases the confirmability, authenticity, sampling adequacy, ethical validation, and substantive validation of one's research because the research participants can actively discuss the degree to which the research findings represent their experience of the phenomenon of interest (Hays & Singh).

In this study, I engaged in member checking thrice. I first paraphrased the responses of the study participants during the interview such that I confirmed that I accurately interpreted their responses. I then provided participants with a copy of the interview transcript to ensure that their responses accurately reflect their intent and desired disclosure. Last, I sent each participant a draft of the results of the study to ensure that they perceive their experience to be accurately reflected in the results of the research. Relatedly, I utilized the initial screening process as a preliminary form of member checking, ensuring that I recruited appropriate participants for the study.

Triangulation. Many types of triangulation exist within qualitative research (Hays & Singh, 2011). Triangulation is a method by which a researcher can utilize multiple forms of evidence at various stages of the research process to strengthen their findings (Hays & Singh). A researcher may triangulate data sources, researchers, units of analysis, data methods, and theoretical perspectives, collectively increasing the credibility, transferability, confirmability,

authenticity, sampling adequacy, ethical validation, and substantive validation of their research (Hays & Singh).

In this study, I triangulated data sources by selecting a sample which represents a similar perspective (i.e., counselors) while still capturing the individual variance of each participant's experience. I also triangulated units of analysis by representing multiple experiences of each major research finding. Furthermore, I triangulated my theoretical perspectives by operating from a transpersonally-informed transcendental phenomenological lens. Last, I triangulated my methods of data collection by both conducting an interview with and collecting a follow-up journal from each participant. Because this study is necessarily solitary in nature, I was unable to triangulate the research process with other researchers, though I did engage in peer debriefing throughout the research process.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the transcendental phenomenological analysis I conducted to examine counselors' experiences of transpersonal counseling courses in order to address the gaps in counselor education related to spiritual competence, counselor development, and transpersonally-informed pedagogical approaches. Utilizing such a design both aligned with best practices for exploring phenomena of interest and incorporated research practices used by transpersonal educators that honor non-normative, marginalized, or otherwise diverse perspectives, emphasizing the "whole person" (Braud, 2006, p. 136; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Fukuyama et al., 2003; Hays & Singh, 2011).

Considering the existing limitations of the level of spiritual competence among counselors, the methods by which the spiritual counseling competence is studied, and the arguments of educators advocating for a more holistic approach to promoting such competence,

this transcendental phenomenological analysis of counselors'-in-training experiences in transpersonal counseling courses allowed me to examine several critical areas related to the subject of spiritual counseling competence. For example, researchers often report that the level of religious and/or spiritual belief of a counselor correlates with their spiritual counseling competence, as does their completion of an entire course dedicated to such topics in counseling (Bloomquist, 2017; Dailey et al., 2015; Haasz, 2013; Robertson, 2010; Selby, 2020). A transcendental phenomenological analysis of counselors' experiences in such a course allowed me to examine not only the beliefs of the counselors who take such courses, but also how the course shaped their personal identity, professional trajectory, counseling theory, and clinical practice. It also allowed me to study the components of the transpersonally-informed approaches infused into the course design, how the participants perceived such components, and how they incorporated them into their own professional orientation. Specifically, I examined counselor experiences of transpersonal levels of development and states of consciousness as a result of taking the course, how cultural perspectives and individual identities affected their experience of the course, the roles of evidence-based research and experiential learning activities during the course, and how they perceived the course to be a safe space for emotional and belief-based processing.

By performing a transcendental phenomenological analysis of counselors' experiences in transpersonal counseling courses, I determined the themes of such experiences and how those themes align or fail to align with existing approaches to spiritual counseling competence, counselor development, and pedagogical strategies to promote such competence and development. I can use the findings from this analysis to support future studies of spiritual counseling competence, counselor development, and transpersonally-informed approaches to

counselor education such that counselors will be able to meet the needs of the clients whom they

serve more effectively. I can now justify the formulation, research, and implementation of new

theories with respect to spiritual counseling competence and counselor development.

Chapter 4

Results

"Every person in my master's degree program that has taken it has expressed that it was kind of life-changing. It changed my whole view about what being a counselor can mean."—Felis, counselor-in-training and participant

The purpose of this study was to examine how counselors-in-training experience transpersonal counseling courses using a transcendental phenomenological lens. Specifically, I sought to examine counselors'-in-training experiences of their transpersonal counseling courses as a whole as well as the subcomponents of the course, including the course content, classroom environment, course structure, instructor characteristics, and peer characteristics. I interviewed each participant using a transcendental phenomenological approach, obtaining a thick description of each participant's experience. Numerous factors influenced each participant's experience of their transpersonal counseling course, but after careful analysis, I identified recurring themes across participants' experiences.

I will begin this chapter by describing each of the counselors-in-training who took part in this study. Following their descriptions, I will expound upon each participant's experience of each of the following themes: 1) an increase in importance of transpersonal topics in counseling 2) an increase in willingness to address transpersonal topics in counseling 3) a development of multicultural transpersonal clinical competence 4) an experience holistic development as a result of involvement with the course and 5) a shift in clinical focus as a result of involvement with the

course. I will conclude this chapter by summarizing my findings, which will be discussed in chapter five.

Participant Descriptions

I interviewed six counselors-in-training from two CACREP-accredited counseling programs in the southern United States. Two CACREP-accredited institutions currently offer courses in transpersonal counseling; I interviewed three counselors-in-training from each institution. Each participant I interviewed was a clinical mental health counseling master's student at their respective institutions.

I obtained each participant's description from the participants themselves by asking them to describe any demographic information that they considered personally important or that they deemed relevant to the study. I offer each description below.

Felis was a 59-year-old White cisgender woman who grew up with a Catholic faith background. She was a mother and had recently discovered that she had ADHD. Felis reported a privileged background that allowed her access to transpersonal material at an early age. She reported a cultural background that was a blend of her Irish heritage and her ex-husband's Native American identity. She shared that she had a connection with the transpersonal spanning across her life, finding solace in such a connection. She was friends with Curious, another participant.

Curious was a White non-binary person who grew up in the Evangelical Covenant but reported losing their faith identity for some time before joining the Unitarian Universalist faith. Curious reported their non-binary and queer identities to be important to their experience, as well as their fat and autistic identities. They emphasized the importance of embracing their fat identity in a self-liberatory way and explained that their White identity was directly connected to their

identity as a human rights activist. Curious also reported a strong connection with the transpersonal.

Jain was a White cisgender woman who grew up with a Catholic faith background but reported significant spiritual injury that led to her identifying as an atheist for most of her life. She also reported that her mother followed New Age spiritual practices in a way that furthered her and her children's experiences of spiritual injury. Jain explained that her White, Catholic upbringing carried a privilege that negatively affected her ability to consider other perspectives for some time. Jain was also a yoga instructor and had been practicing yoga for over twenty years.

Rinyan was a White cisgender heterosexual woman who identified as an atheist for most of her life. She reported a nominal Christian upbringing that had little impact on her experience of religion and spirituality. Rinyan shared that she had not had any sort of connection to the transpersonal until having a psychedelic spiritual awakening, an experience which sparked her interest in such phenomena. She explained that she had been curious about the universe for her entire life and that exploring the transpersonal was the next step in her journey. At the time of the interview, she worked in a spiritually-based, non-dogmatic clinical practice.

Shire was a 24-year-old White cisgender woman who identified as an atheist. Shire reported that she grew up with little to no exposure to religious practices. She shared that she wanted to learn about transpersonal counseling because of her lack of exposure to religious and spiritual experiences—She wanted to provide competent care around such topics. Shire shared that she wanted to learn more about the transpersonal now that she had completed her course.

Lumina was a 44-year-old White cisgender woman who grew up with an Episcopalian faith background but joined the Unitarian Universalist faith some time in her adulthood,

reporting a transpersonally-based belief in a higher power. She was married and had three children. Lumina's experience of her counseling program was unique in that she did not belong to a cohort—She instead worked full-time in a related field and was completing her program at a different rate than her peers. Similarly to Felis, Lumina reported that her privileged background had facilitated her access to the transpersonal.

Discussion of Themes

The purpose of a transcendental phenomenological analysis is to produce recurring themes across participants' experiences of a particular phenomenon such that the researcher represents the essence of their experience with as little distortion as possible (Haskins et al., 2021). Upon analyzing the data, I noted numerous patterns of experience, variables influencing an individual's experience of their course, and factors that unilaterally contributed to participants' experiences of their transpersonal counseling courses. Within the following sections, I will discuss the recurring elements contributing to each theme and participants' experiences of those themes.

Increase in Importance of Transpersonal Topics in Counseling

The first theme that emerged as participants described their transpersonal counseling courses was an increase in their perceived importance of transpersonal topics in counseling. Transpersonal topics are underexplored in the field of counseling (Fukuyama et al., 2003; Walker, 2022); participants commonly reported an unfamiliarity with many topics in the course prior to enrollment. Each participant found resonance with a unique part of their transpersonal counseling course, a resonance that came from a mixture of their life experiences, course instructors, course material, and classroom environment. Participants described their courses as "highly impactful", "liberating", "actually important", "perception-shifting", "informative", and

"eye-opening", sharing that their courses "taught me a lot", "exposed me to what different experiences could look like", and "gave me permission to approach these things professionally".

Felis, for example, felt conflicted about the notion of incorporating the transpersonal into her clinical practice before taking her transpersonal counseling course—She highly valued the transpersonal but lacked the empirical data to facilitate its incorporation into clinical practice. The research she read in the class provided a framework by which she could bridge the importance of the transpersonal she already perceived into her work as a professional counselor. She stated,

> The main component was the research, and not because I love research so much, but because these things have been important to me and close to me all my life. Now I have permission as a professional to allow space for other people, to share that with people in a way that's legitimized, so that we can help reframe society and how we operate and what we believe in, and that's really, really existentially important for all of us.

Lumina had a similar experience, finding resonance with one transpersonal content area in particular: psychedelic psychotherapy. Lumina reported that she would have never known about the efficacy of psychedelic transpersonal interventions in counseling had she not been exposed to the research about the topic in her transpersonal counseling class. She said,

> I didn't know that psychedelics weren't addictive until I read Michael Pollan's book. There are things that, as a relatively rule-abiding child growing up in the 80s and 90s in elementary, middle and high school, I did not know. I was so brainwashed by the culture and the messaging I was given that I didn't even realize there were benefits to some of these interventions. There are quite good benefits, better than even a lot of the medication we have now to help treat mental health. That was just so powerful to me, like reading

the research on the impact, the profound impact that psychedelic therapy can have and how it creates a greater sense of understanding of your place in the world, or peace within you, or helps you work through whatever it is that is concerning you. I had just never considered that that would be something that we'd be coming to.

Shire's experience in her transpersonal counseling course revealed another facet of the participants' experiences. Having grown up as an atheist, she stated that she lacked exposure to religious and spiritual practices before she took her transpersonal counseling course. She shared about how the course helped her realize how the transpersonal can impact clients, explaining:

It was the first time that I became aware of how that can be an important part of the counseling experience for clients, like having some aspect of their religious beliefs or spiritual beliefs incorporated in the work that they want to do with their counselor.

Jain, who also identified as an atheist, explained that she began to perceive the importance of the transpersonal because of the authenticity, passion, and expertise of her course instructor, explaining that he consistently highlighted the clinical impact of the transpersonal. She shared,

He introduced us to so many interesting different topics that I never even really considered were aspects of spirituality. He also did such a great job with talking to us about how it can be really helpful to our clients and relating everything back to that. So in a way, it was kind of like, "Okay, this isn't about you, this isn't about me, it's about what people need."

Curious's experience revealed more of the integrative importance that their transpersonal counseling course provided. Their transpersonal counseling course enabled them to intellectually consider the transpersonal in a professional sense, a perspective which they had previously

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regarded as important but unintegrated into their professional perspective. They explained,

Hearing intellectual arguments for why a materialist worldview is intellectually insufficient and ignores plenty of evidence was really convicting for me. I left my faith while I was in my psychology program, so I was particularly vulnerable to this shift from being really interested in consciousness and how consciousness works from a pretty Christian worldview to this very materialist view in the psych classes, and getting this sense because I was vulnerable to the idea that psychology knows everything. . . Having those arguments revisited in this class was this invitation back into those questions and recognizing that those questions are valid, and that there's so much exploration that's worth doing. And so again, coming back to this sense of intellectual permission to explore in ways that I had not felt access to explore previously.

Rinyan shared that her transpersonal counseling course helped her understand the importance of the transpersonal with respect to cultural competence in counseling—for her, the transpersonal needed integration on a clinical level. When explaining how her perspective changed on the transpersonal, she said,

It made me realize that it's not something I want to have as an aside in my practice, that I want it to be something that's more fully integrated. When conceptualizing a client, your belief system is a part of how you walk through your culture and your individual experience—it's not a sideline.

The increase in perceived importance of transpersonal topics in counseling emerged uniquely for each participant, carrying over into many of the other themes revealed through the data analysis. One major theme which aligned with participants' growing sense of importance of the transpersonal in counseling was their increased willingness to address transpersonal topics in

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counseling.

Increase in Willingness to Address Transpersonal Topics in Counseling

A surprising trend in participants' experiences was difficulty with addressing transpersonal topics in counseling prior to taking their transpersonal counseling courses. In some instances, participants were simply unsure of how to appropriately address transpersonal topics in a clinical setting, but in others, participants reported significant spiritual injury and bias toward religious topics because of such injury. A specific component of most participants' experiences was a negative perception of religion on a personal or cultural level before taking their transpersonal counseling courses, a perception which changed over the course of their experiences. Participants described their personal perceptions of religion as "colonizing", "harmful", "damaging", "dogmatic", "institutional", and "socially controlling", sharing that their course "allowed me to feel more comfortable to talk about it with clients", "made me feel less conflicted", "allowed me to step back from my biases", and "was transforming for me in healing religious trauma". Participants shared experiences and attitudes toward different facets of the transpersonal ranging from uninformed to traumatic, nonetheless reporting an openness to addressing such topics after completing their transpersonal counseling course.

Jain explained that, prior to taking her transpersonal counseling course, she had significant bias against religious and spiritual topics in counseling because of significant spiritual injury she had experienced from her religious upbringing. Taking her transpersonal counseling course helped her to process some of the bias she held around the topic. She shared,

> I was raised Catholic, so there's a lot of spiritual injury there. Also, my mother has a very
> New Age, culty type of spirituality that has been extremely damaging to myself and my
> children, and it left me very much atheistic to all sorts of spiritual beliefs for a very long

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time until I took the transpersonal class. It very much gave me a different kind of

perspective on things. I don't really identify with any particular practice, but I've been a

little bit more open to thinking about spirituality in different ways since taking the class.

Curious, having grown up in the Evangelical Covenant, reported similar spiritual injury

to Jain. They described their process of confronting their trauma while taking their transpersonal

counseling course, stating

> The part of me that I associate with religious trauma was really tentative coming into this
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> class and really, really careful about what I was allowing into my own psyche in terms of
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> ideas and vetting every idea in this class. Every week, there was just a small shift in like,
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> "Oh, that makes total logical sense." I was repeatedly given intellectual permission to
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> consider people's experiences in a way that was much more compassionate and much
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> more dignifying. All of these human beings are having these experiences, and part of
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> seeing them with dignity is recognizing that and honoring those experiences as a valid
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> source of potential truth.

Felis's experience, though similar to the other participants', was specifically shaped by

her development of a perception of spiritual processes surrounding religious content. She

provided a clinical example to illustrate the ways in which she had become open to discussing

religious experiences with her clients following her transpersonal counseling course. She shared,

> One of the ways in which it really prepared me well was by teaching me the distinction
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> between religious content and the process of spirituality. I had a client who was very
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> deeply immersed in a spiritual and a religious outlook that's deeply divided from my own
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> and as a counselor, I could authentically be congruent with this individual's religious
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> experience because I had the tool to look at it through the lens of the process and not the

content. Everything this person related to me that they felt like they gained, I could authentically reflect with them about the joy and beauty and expansiveness it brought to their life. Before having taken transpersonal, I would have been put off by the content of their religious process because it's a religious process that was harmful to me personally, and that bias was completely blown away.

Rinyan's personal experiences deviated from Jain's, Felis's, and Curious's experiences to some degree—she didn't report spiritual trauma coming into her transpersonal counseling course. However, she did describe a hesitancy to approach the transpersonal before her course because of a lack of information on how to do so, explaining that her transpersonal counseling course prepared her to be open to transpersonal topics in a culturally-competent manner with respect to clinical practice. She shared,

> Succinctly, it just made me more open and receptive. Because of the vastness of the transpersonal, and I think it goes for counseling in general, I don't think you're ever going to be 100% prepared for everything that comes into the room. But being able to know how to resource yourself, how to get good consultation, and how to start thinking through what your different responses to those scenarios are going to look like makes you better prepared each time.

Shire reported a similar lack of information on the professional integration of the transpersonal into clinical practice—She originally took her transpersonal counseling class to obtain such information. She described the components toward which she became more open in her clinical practice:

> Discussing how religion and spirituality can be incorporated in counseling affected me because it really was just something where before I was like, "Oh, I know there's

Christian counseling and faith-based counseling in general," and it wasn't something I realized was something I could incorporate as well, depending on the client. Learning about how certain psychedelic drugs and medications can be used in counseling affected me as well because that was something I really didn't know much about, and it was really surprising to see how many uses these medications, these drugs can have because it's outside of what we're taught about drug use and what it can be used for. So I thought that was really, really interesting, the therapeutic uses that these things can have as well.

Lumina was also hesitant to discuss transpersonal topics in counseling before taking her transpersonal counseling course, stating that she didn't know how to do so before taking the course. However, after completing her transpersonal counseling course, she was much more willing to address transpersonal topics in counseling. She shared,

The whole multicultural counseling aspect combines with the transpersonal to make it a more comfortable conversation to talk about people's spiritual and religious backgrounds in counseling. Whereas I might be hesitant to talk about that otherwise for fear of, "Well, I didn't know how to talk about it, how to broach it," the transpersonal course allowed me to feel more comfortable and confident in talking with clients about topics of spirituality and something beyond themselves.

Participants' experiences of their increased willingness to address transpersonal topics in counseling ranged from overcoming a hesitancy to talk about the transpersonal in counseling because of a lack of information to processing significant personal wounds around specific facets of the transpersonal. Participants' shared experiences of a greater willingness to address transpersonal topics in counseling after completing their transpersonal counseling course informed their development of a multicultural transpersonal clinical competence.

Development of Multicultural Transpersonal Counseling Competence

Numerous factors shaped each participant's understanding of what it meant to be competent with respect to transpersonal issues in counseling. Some participants shared that transpersonal clinical competence meant incorporating transpersonal topics into clinical intakes or therapeutic interventions. Other participants interpreted transpersonal clinical competence to be a normalization of experiences beyond consensus reality or the ability to distinguish between spiritual emergencies and psychosis. However, regardless of the development of specific transpersonal clinical skills, each participant reported a common characteristic of transpersonal clinical competence with great complexity: An understanding of the relationship between the transpersonal and the multicultural. Such an understanding went well beyond a willingness to incorporate the transpersonal into clinical practice as an area of cultural competence; participants highlighted the powerful ways in which they perceived cultural and systemic factors to shape one's understanding of the transpersonal. Participants stated that traditional Western counseling was "appropriative" of the transpersonal and that the transpersonal was seen as "escapism" by scientists, despite transpersonal approaches being "deeply therapeutic". Participants also shared that the transpersonal often was "not available" and "threatening" to marginalized individuals, stating that Western approaches to the transpersonal were "privileged".

Several participants discussed the role that their privilege played in their relationship to the transpersonal on personal and professional levels. Lumina spoke of the role that privilege played in clients' ability to access the transpersonal, particularly clients who failed to have the resources necessary to engage in such experiences. She said,

> I do remember having a moment or more than one moment in transpersonal class and
> thinking, "Wow, maybe transpersonal psychology and some of these experiences are

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really not available to people who are living at the lower level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, or are just trying to find food or shelter or survive... " Sometimes I think that people have less capacity because they have to worry about more pragmatic things. And so it made me wonder if there is a certain bias in the transpersonal world, like it's more accessible, like many things, to people who are more affluent, who are White, who have such luxuries.

Curious shared a great deal about the ways in which their experiences as a marginalized person conflicted with many of the content areas in the transpersonal counseling literature, highlighting how the course material brought up a significant contrast between how marginalized and privileged individuals might experience such material. They explained,

Speaking in really broad generalities, activism frequently is centered around, "What does my body and the meaning that our culture puts on my body mean for me, and how does that moderate my experience in life?" Whereas a lot of what we were talking about was moving towards this kind of sense of transcending one's body and moving from activist culture, which is very much around, "How do we change the world in really concrete ways? How do we push our own change onto the world?" A lot of the spiritual ideas that have formed around these phenomenological data that we have in transpersonal psychology move towards a sense of surrender and acceptance. There are two very different ethics, at least on the surface.

Shire's perspective, though not as directly centered on privilege and marginalization, did highlight the appropriative role that the dominant American culture played in the relationship between counseling and the transpersonal. When discussing the context in which the transpersonal appeared in traditional American counseling, she shared,

Even with the stuff that we're starting to incorporate specifically in America, there isn't much of an explanation of where these things came from, like the significance they have to other people, to other cultures. It's a very Americanized, appropriative way of doing it, and I'm not saying that it's not helpful to people, but there isn't a lot of emphasis on acknowledging where these practices came from and the ways they were important to the people who first started doing them. In a general sense, there's more taking the things you want out of the practice and not being knowledgeable about where it came from.

Felis's perception of the relationship between privilege and the transpersonal was personal—she shared that her privilege was something that allowed her access to the transpersonal early on in life. Shaped by her experience of the transpersonal, her conceptualization of transpersonal counseling competence was one that contrasted strongly with the foundations of the field of counseling. She saw traditional Western counseling as having practices which were necessary but not sufficient for a large-scale treatment of mental illness, stating,

> When I look at the discipline of psychotherapy and the birthplace of it, it was a low watermark for human satisfaction and relating and community and everything that brings meaning to humans. While I admire the fact that there were great thinkers who noticed that something was amiss, the way they developed the psychotherapeutic theories was born out of a time when, as a whole, Western thinking was maybe the wrongest it's ever been. My own personal belief is that if you want to look at ways that humans have used to feel well, I would say that indigenous ways of promoting and experiencing wellness has tens of thousands of years of evidence over millions of humans experiencing them, and I think that far outweighs the paltry evidence we find for psychotherapeutic theories

because they're so young. I love the science that we've developed to create research around it, but I think if you want to know where to look for what to research, we need to look at and start researching how people used to feel well.

Jain's experience of acquiring transpersonal counseling competence was one of decentralizing the American perspective with respect to religion and spirituality. She talked about how her transpersonal counseling course helped her understand the ways in which clients from non-dominant cultural backgrounds often connected with the transpersonal in a different manner than traditional Western approaches dictated:

We learned about the different ways that different cultural groups are going to be perceiving what is spiritual. Giving us a very broad look at that, like, "You may think religion and spirituality is this, but that's because we're mainly coming from a Western, American kind of worldview. . ." The transpersonal class gave me a more of a view of how clients are going to emotionally connect to these beliefs. Rather than an academic analysis of why this culture practices this way, it was more like how people are actually going to be connecting with these beliefs. It helped me to validate individual perspectives to a greater extent, like, "This may be this person's reality, and who am I to say that it's not?" That's oppressive.

To Rinyan, transpersonal counseling competence involved incorporating both spiritual and scientific perspectives. She shared a similar perspective to her peers, acknowledging the role that Western American culture played in creating taboos around transpersonal topics in counseling by contrasting them against scientific inquiry. She shared,

Oftentimes, spirituality is seen as escapism to scientists, and science is seen as cold to the religious. Most of us are navigating both of those worlds all the time, the reality of our

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internal beliefs which run this spectrum of spiritual or cultural beliefs. Living in this world, especially in our country, that's very material and science-driven, it can be powerful to work at the intersection of the spiritual and material and provide counseling work for people who can be served by it. Obviously, I want to serve a range of a diversity of clients, including those who don't see their lives intersecting there, but richness can be found there. Not creating space within the counseling realm for people to engage in exploring those transpersonal aspects of their world, if they have them, is leaving out a large part of the human experience that can be deeply therapeutic.

Each participant shared a unique perspective on transpersonal counseling competence, framing it as a competency influenced by privilege, marginalization, scientism, Western culture, and non-dominant identities. According to each participant, one's relationship with the transpersonal was inseparable from experiences of privilege and oppression that exist within our modern cultural and systemic framework. The complexity of each participant's perspective was also reflected in another theme: holistic development as a result of involvement with the course.

Experiences of Holistic Development

Conventional approaches to counselor development focus on counseling-specific cognitive complexity (Welfare & Borders, 2010). In this study, participants reported a range of developmental experiences, including cognitive, emotional, ethical, and identity-based development. Participants described their courses as "life-changing", "revolutionary", "mind-blowing", and "perspective-shifting", sharing that "I knew it on a cognitive level, but taking the class made me feel it", "I feel a whole shift, professionally, but also in a personal way", "It brought me to an emotional resting place", and "My life just looks radically different". Many factors contributed to each participant's developmental experience in their transpersonal

counseling course, but several commonalities were shared across experiences. Participants described their instructors as "passionate", "knowledgeable", "genuine", and "warm", their course content as "deeply personal", "theoretical", "empirical", "rigorous", and "balanced", and classroom environment as "supportive", "welcoming", and "vulnerable". Regardless of the specific components that created a meaningful developmental experience, each participant described some sort of developmental process.

Rinyan explained that her experience of her transpersonal counseling course facilitated spiritual identity development on both personal and professional levels. She described an integration of her personal perception of the transpersonal into an appropriate professional identity:

> It's made me feel more confident talking about the transpersonal with people who have a more materialist mindset. It's not more right or more valid and can be still companionable to this other, more cosmic transpersonal. I feel confident about holding both of those and not feeling like I have to present in a way that downplays that transpersonal, less culturally-anchored perspective. It's helped me work more aligned. I know ultimately it will help me build a client base that's gonna be attracted to that perspective. I feel like a whole shift, professionally, but also in a personal way.

Lumina reported several types of development as a result of her transpersonal counseling course. She shared that her spiritual identity developed throughout the course, her growing involvement with her faith background coinciding with her time in her course. She also described a powerful cognitive shift as a result of taking her transpersonal counseling course that resulted in further spiritual identity development, particularly in relation to her exploration of the transpersonal. She shared,

It was very exciting to me that there is this whole other realm of possibility for mental health treatment that doesn't involve our traditional therapies. I'd heard of plant medicines, but I didn't quite understand what it meant until I got deeper into the research and the books we were reading in transpersonal, in the class. So, I'm so grateful that I took the course and that I know this information now. It just changed me profoundly and it's hard to even put it into words why it was so important to me, but it was like an awakening of sorts.

Curious described an incredibly transformative experience in their transpersonal counseling course. They studied transpersonal frameworks in their course that resulted in a cognitive integration of many discrete facets of self, an experience that led to not only holistic identity-based development, but also a profound sense of peace, marking a significant milestone in their emotional development. Uniquely, Curious discussed many facets of marginalized identity development as a result of taking their transpersonal counseling course. Curious described their experience as follows:

If I was gonna put a word or a single idea on what my experience in this class would be, it absolutely would be that sense of integrating these disparate parts of myself that had been living in their own little silos that I had been holding side-by-side for a decade, managing to find a way to honor all of them without integrating them. This class gave me a roadmap for integrating those parts of myself. . . It was this hugely integrating experience.

Felis also reported many different types of developmental experiences in her course. She described a growing awareness of an ethical mandate to become competent in the transpersonal as a component of clinical care, a significant cognitive shift experienced by both her and her

peers, an integrating of personal and professional identities into a single harmonious framework, and a powerful emotional shift from a state of struggle to one of peace. She shared,

It was hard work, but it was different work that brought me more to an emotional resting place. In my personal, professional, and intellectual development, I moved from a place where it was always about intellectual and emotional and sometimes financial or whatever, struggle, and then through this transpersonal course, it moved me into a space of greater acceptance. It moved me from a really directive place to a receptive place that's much simpler in how I relate to myself and the whole world. I always felt like I had to be struggling and managing and working harder, and then after transpersonal, it felt more like I could just notice and receive and trust.

Shire's developmental experience was less intense than her peers, revealing a range of intensities of development as a result of the course. Though she identified as an atheist at the time of the interview, she did report that her transpersonal counseling course created an interest in the transpersonal, something she now explored. She shared,

It was one of those classes where I got to learn a bunch of really interesting things that I didn't know anything about. Now that I've learned about some of the things we talked about, I've seen podcast episodes or articles related to them, and it's stuff that before I wouldn't have read or listened to just because I didn't have the knowledge or interest in them. It opened those pathways for me to more areas in life where I can continue learning and continue exposing myself to the kind of stuff that I probably wouldn't have had much interest in if I hadn't taken the class.

Jain, who also identified as an atheist at the time of the interview, reported spiritual identity development during her transpersonal counseling course. She also talked about

processing her identity as a privileged person and what that meant for client care, particularly around transpersonal topics. With respect to emotional development, Jain described a process of intellectual bypass of personally challenging topics before taking her transpersonal counseling course, explaining how the course helped move her into a place of emotional processing:

> My background had me like, "Oh, I'm an intellectual, I'm in school, I'm not gonna really have to deal with any of that necessarily, that's something completely separate." But then I recognized, "No, no, this is actually important, and not only are you gonna have to address this, but you need to also do your own work to overcome past stuff if you're going to navigate this effectively with clients." There was something transformative in taking the class for me.

Each participant's developmental experience in their transpersonal counseling course made a meaningful impact on their personal and professional development. For some, the impact was subtle; for others, it was intense. Regardless of the intensity, the participants' developmental experiences carried over into another major theme: Shifts in clinical focus after taking their transpersonal counseling course.

Shifts in Clinical Focus

A recurring theme in each participant's experience of their transpersonal counseling course was the long-term impact the course had on their clinical practice. When describing how their transpersonal counseling courses shifted their clinical focus, participants described their development of desires to integrate transpersonal interventions into their clinical practices, their adoption of transpersonal lenses into their clinical frameworks, and their selection of transpersonal topics as areas of their clinical focus. Participants described the transpersonal on a clinical level as "powerful", "resonant with my own thinking", "a lens that enables me to

distinguish content from process", "a re-envisioning of development that doesn't betray social justice", "important and insightful for meaning and purpose", and "important to incorporate". The degree and nature of each participant's shift in clinical focus varied from person to person, but each reported a shift nonetheless.

Shire reported that the experiential activity in her transpersonal counseling course exposed her to mindfulness meditation, something she previously had never explored before taking her course. After meditating during her transpersonal counseling course, she developed a desire to incorporate mindfulness into her clinical practice and acted accordingly. She shared,

I definitely enjoyed experiencing it. It taught me a lot more about meditation and mindfulness, which were things that I just really didn't know a lot about, and for me, those are the things that I would probably incorporate the most from the transpersonal class. Since then, I've done some mindfulness exercises with clients.

Felis shared that her transpersonal counseling course exposed her to transpersonal clinical frameworks that facilitated the incorporation of many different ways of knowing, ultimately leading to the development of a transpersonally-oriented clinical lens. She described her shift from more traditional counseling frameworks to a more transpersonally-oriented perspective:

The idea that it's not only possible but optimal for me to operate out of my own mind-body-spirit continuum, my complete operating system, and bring that into the room with me radically changed what I envisioned the process of counseling to even be. Even the humanistic, gestalt, or person-centered theories didn't give me permission in the same way. I know that those relational theories really talk about congruence in the room, but even in light of what I learned about those theories, it still left me with the belief that I would be operating out of my perceptual mind, looking for cues, gathering information,

and synthesizing that intellectually to understand the client. After transpersonal, I

understood that I could rely on my intuition, my gut feelings, and all my mind, spirit, and

body data.

Curious reported a similar experience to Felis: The clinical frameworks they discovered

in their transpersonal counseling course provided them the necessary perspective to integrate

many different facets of their personal and professional being into their clinical practice. They

shared,

> The introduction to Ken Wilber and integral theory was particularly helpful for me
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> intellectually because I am an integrationist at heart. Being invited into frameworks,
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> being given a way to help resolve the cognitive dissonance that I had between all of these
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> different sources of wisdom, or different sources of knowing, or different perspectives,
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> and being given a framework where they don't have to live in conflict as much as they did
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> in my brain was really exciting. I was being given a map in a way that meant I didn't need
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> to betray any of the different perspectives I had resonated with previously. There was this
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> experience of moving from intellectual pluralism in a way that was really exhausting to
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> this very much more streamlined worldview without sacrificing much.

Lumina reported that her transpersonal counseling course triggered a profound shift toward the

transpersonal in her clinical trajectory. Her discovery of psychedelic therapy in her transpersonal

counseling course was so impactful that she both conducted an entire independent study on how

to incorporate it into her clinical practice and sought to understand the intervention through

personal experience. She shared,

> In addition to actually taking the transpersonal course, I did an independent study the
>
> following semester because I was still interested in the topic. I worked with my instructor

for the transpersonal course and we developed an independent study. What I looked at was how counselors can move into a field of psychedelic therapy, basically, like, "How do counselors move into a role with psychedelic therapy?" It's been talked about with psychologists, psychiatrists, other medical professionals, but there wasn't a lot of talk about counselors. Personally, because I'm interested in the field and wondering if it might be an area that I want to go into, I began researching, part with the independent study and also part on my own, how I, as a 44-year-old, generally law-abiding citizen can access psychedelics for myself so that I would understand. It's one of the few areas that they say, "As counselors, it could be useful to have your own experience in this."

Jain's experience of her transpersonal counseling course revealed another facet of participants' shifts in clinical focus: the incorporation of purpose- and meaning-based exploration with clients, even outside the context of religion and spirituality. When describing how her counseling practice had shifted, she said,

It makes a lot of sense to make sure that we are approaching topics of meaning and purpose and connection with our clients. I've definitely used a lot of elements that I've learned in the class with clients, not so much with religion or spirituality per se, but more in these purpose and meaning-driven topics with my clients. I've gotten more interested in Dharma-based recovery models, for example, for addictions counseling, which gets all into the importance of community.

Rinyan reported that taking her transpersonal counseling course both sparked her interest in specific transpersonal counseling interventions and enabled her to bring transpersonally-based topics to the forefront of her counseling practice. She offered the following description of her incorporation of the transpersonal into her counselor identity and clinical practice:

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I think the class pushed it more central for me in talking about it in intake with clients. It's not something I push as a topic, but something that I definitely bring up in an initial session and let clients know that it's a topic that I'm comfortable talking about. It's something I have in my counselor bio, and I currently work at a practice that's spiritually-based, non-dogmatically spiritually-based. The class also helped me decide on one of the offerings I want to provide as a therapist, induced after death communication, which my instructor had done a study on. As soon as I learned about that, I was like, "Oh, I definitely want to do that as a clinician."

Participants' experiences of their transpersonal counseling courses shaped their clinical lenses, interventions, foci, and area of expertise, illustrating a wide range of ways in which their clinical practice shifted as a result of their course. The transpersonal counseling courses each participant took made personal and professional impacts that went well beyond their time in the course.

Summary of Findings

When asked to describe their experience of their transpersonal counseling courses, participants shared five major themes across their experiences: 1) an increase in importance of transpersonal topics in counseling 2) an increase in willingness to address transpersonal topics in counseling 3) a development of multicultural transpersonal clinical competence 4) an experience holistic development as a result of involvement with the course and 5) a shift in clinical focus as a result of involvement with the course.

Each participant also reported many factors contributing to each theme with commonalities across such factors. Participants most frequently cited their course instructor, the course content, and the classroom environment as contributing to their experience of their

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course. Participants commonly described their course instructors as passionate, knowledgeable, welcoming experts in their field, their course material as challenging, impactful, and balanced between theory and research, and their classroom environment as a safe space to navigate vulnerable discussions.

Each participant reported a different facet of their transpersonal counseling course that increased their perceived importance of the transpersonal in counseling. Some participants strongly resonated with their reading material, some connected strongly with their course instructor, and some found their experiential activity to be the most helpful in shifting their perception. With respect to an increased willingness to address transpersonal topics in counseling, participants reported that their course provided a framework to address such topics. Several participants also reported that their transpersonal counseling course helped them process internal biases surrounding transpersonal topics in counseling. Participants described broad, comprehensive perspectives with respect to transpersonal clinical competence. Considering individual client characteristics was important to each participant, but by and large, understanding the cultural and systemic factors contributing to the relationship between the transpersonal and the field of counseling defined participants' perspectives on clinical competence. With respect to their development, participants described cognitive, emotional, ethical, and identity-based development, particularly in regards to spirituality, marginalized identity, and privilege. Shifts in clinical focus varied for each participant, but common shifts included an integration of transpersonal clinical interventions, a transformation of one's clinical lens, and a shift to a more transpersonally-focused clinical practice.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The results of this study advance the extant counselor education literature by providing insight into counselors'-in-training experiences in their transpersonal counseling courses. Specifically, the results of this study shed light on course and instructor characteristics that contribute to counselor development, how transpersonal counseling courses affect counselors-in-training, and what counselor development looks like from a broader perspective. Several implications exist for the field of counselor education based on the results of this study, including reconsidering how we as counselor educators conceptualize counseling competency with respect to religion and spirituality and what we target in terms of counselor development. The results of this study also reveal future areas of research around this topic, particularly with respect to the role of transpersonal counseling competence and the development of a transpersonal orientation in counselors-in-training.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the results of this study's findings, the implications such findings hold for counselor development, the limitations of this study, and future directions for counselor education. I will begin this chapter by discussing the findings of this study both in terms of consistency with the literature and new findings I discovered through the data analysis process. I will then discuss the implications these findings hold for the field, potential directions for future research, and the limitations of this study. I will conclude with a chapter summary and a closing statement for this dissertation.

Discussion of Results

A transcendental phenomenological analysis involves several layers of data analysis, each of which has the potential to reveal patterns of participant experience. In this study, I sought to answer the question, "How do counselors-in-training experience a transpersonal counseling course?" As I coded my data, I noticed recurring patterns across participants' experiences, a process which continued as I then condensed my data into categories. After careful review of each category to understand the role it might play in each participant's overall experience, I arrived at five overarching themes intended to capture each participant's experience of their transpersonal counseling course. The patterns I observed across codes and categories became factors which contributed to each participant's experience of the themes of the study, but many of those patterns warrant their own discussion. I will begin by discussing each theme, but as I discuss the themes, I will also discuss the common characteristics that contributed to their emergence.

Increase in Perceived Importance of Transpersonal Topics in Counseling

As previously mentioned in chapter four, the first theme I discovered was an increase in perceived importance of transpersonal topics in counseling for each participant. Though this theme alone does not reveal a construct like spiritual counseling competence, this increase in perceived importance does provide evidence in favor of some spiritual counseling competency literature and against other spiritual counseling competency literature. Blalock and Holden (2018), for example, suggested that counselor educators incorporate courses specifically designed to address spirituality in counseling in order to promote competency in the content area, and Selby (2020) reported that such an intervention did increase competence. Dailey and colleagues (2015) and Robertson (2010), however, both reported that such courses did not result

in an increase in such competence. I do acknowledge that counselors-in-training could experience transpersonal counseling courses differently than they experience religious and spiritual counseling courses, but the evidence in favor of overlapping experiences will build throughout this chapter.

When examining how each participant experienced their increase in perceived importance of the transpersonal in counseling, one common factor that emerged was each participant's relationship to the transpersonal. Some participants already perceived the transpersonal as important before taking their course because of their existing relationship with the transpersonal. In such instances, an increase in perceived importance was not necessarily tied to the transpersonal itself but how the transpersonal could be integrated into the field of counseling. Participants in such a position commonly reported that their course "gave permission" to incorporate the transpersonal into their professional identity by showing them the ways in which the transpersonal affects counselors and clients alike. This finding was consistent with the extant literature—counselors struggle to navigate their faith in the field of counseling (Mintert et al., 2020; Robertson & Avent, 2016).

Interestingly, the participants who did not have a relationship with the transpersonal before taking their transpersonal counseling courses still experienced an increase in perceived importance of the transpersonal in counseling. Their increases resembled a developing awareness of the importance of the transpersonal as a whole and in counseling instead rather than on how to integrate one's personal relationship with the transpersonal into counseling. This difference in experience may reveal why counselors who have more interest in religion and spirituality in counseling display higher spiritual counseling competence (Bloomquist, 2017; Dailey et al., 2015; Haasz, 2013; Robertson, 2010; Selby, 2020)—they already perceive it to be important.

One major characteristic of participants' perceived importance was a growing awareness of specific content areas with respect to the transpersonal in counseling. Participants commonly cited their theoretical readings, empirical readings, and their course instructors as the primary mechanisms driving their increased awareness, a finding which both aligned with previous research (Walker, 2022) and elucidated how such a process occurs. Participants specifically identified a balance between theoretical readings about transpersonal topics and empirical studies about how such topics intersected with the field of counseling to be efficacious in their processing of the material. Participants also explicitly identified content areas outside of the scope of traditional spiritual and religious topics as beneficial to their comprehension, such as psychedelic therapy, after-death communication, and identification of spiritual emergencies in clinical populations. Participants discussing content areas outside of the traditional scope of spiritual counseling competence both highlights and exacerbates one criticism of spiritual counseling competence as a content area—it fails to address important topics related to spirituality in counseling (Dailey et al., 2015; Cashwell & Watts, 2010; Robertson, 2010). Robertson (2010) reported that the factored version of the spiritual competency scale, though statistically optimized, left out many specific areas of spiritual counseling competence, a phenomenon that, by participant reports, also occurs with transpersonal topics in counseling.

Increase in Willingness to Address Transpersonal Topics in Counseling

One theme which tied closely to each participant's increased perceived importance of transpersonal topics in counseling was their increased willingness to address such topics, a theme connected closely with several important concepts in the extant literature on religion and spirituality in counseling. Spiritual counseling competence incorporates both a counselor's self-awareness about their beliefs and attitudes toward religion and spirituality and a counselor's

willingness to address religion and spirituality in counseling into its framework (Cashwell & Watts, 2010), both of which emerged as participants discussed their increase in willingness to address transpersonal topics in counseling. Participants also described experiences similar to the development of cultural humility and cultural comfort, components of multicultural counseling competence (Hook et al., 2013; Slone & Owen, 2015).

Upon perceiving the importance of transpersonal topics in counseling, many participants reported a significant hurdle to their willingness to address them—their own biases around such topics. This theme revolved around how participants both made realizations around how to apply such topics clinically and processed emotional difficulties pertaining to such topics. One element of this difficulty that contrasted rather strongly with established literature on the topic was participants' generally negative perception of religion on a personal and cultural level. Most participants had a neutral definition of religion, viewing it as a structured cultural interpretation of spirituality, but inside that definition, participants frequently had negative connotations with religion, describing it as dogmatic, harmful, and personally-damaging. Such a perception is atypical: More than 70% of Americans identify as Christian and 22% of CACREP-accredited programs are housed within private religious institutions (CACREP, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2015), modern approximations of a somewhat dated finding that counselors identify as Christian at rates similar to the general population (Myers & Truluck, 1998).

When I examined contributing factors to participants' negative perception of religion, participants' identities and experiences contrasted the most with the typical religious identity of counselors in the United States. No participant in this study identified as Christian, though half of all participants reported former Christian faith backgrounds that resulted in spiritual injury. Half of all participants identified as atheist currently or in the past and most reported leaving

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Christianity for a more spiritual but less religious identity. Two participants reported joining the Unitarian Universalist faith, but the Unitarian Universalist faith background houses individuals of nearly every belief background, including atheism, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and agnosticism, among others (UUA, 2022).

With no participants identifying as religious and several reporting spiritual injury from religion, bias against religion became a major processing point for many participants. Most participants reported some sort of writing and in-class reflection components that, when combined with literature about the risk of client harm and how to view religion from a transpersonal perspective, facilitated the participants' processing of clinical bias toward religion. Participants whose increased willingness did not involve a processing of biases most commonly cited literature about the risk of client harm and how to view religion from a transpersonal perspective as effective at shifting their perspective. Previous research cited the importance of reflective spaces for cognitive development (Foster & McAdams, 1998), emotional development (Bloom, 1956; Furr & Carroll, 2003; Wellington, 2010), and the processing of transpersonal material in transpersonal counseling courses (Walker, 2022); this particular theme builds upon such information.

Development of Multicultural Transpersonal Counseling Competence

Participants' increased willingness to address transpersonal topics in counseling related closely to their development of multicultural transpersonal counseling competence. One major element of spiritual counseling competence assesses the degree to which a counselor is competent with respect to a client's spiritual culture and worldview (Cashwell & Young, 2010), a topic which participants discussed heavily in this study. Every participant described unique ways in which privilege, appropriation, dismissal, marginalization, and stigmatization intersected with

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the transpersonal in cultural and systemic ways. Robertson (2010) and Lu and colleagues (2019) reported that counselors display disproportionate spiritual counseling competence with respect to multicultural issues in counseling when compared to other domains; participants' heavy discussions of these factors provides evidence in favor of successful education around such a content area. Participants' discussions of the dismissive attitudes that the field of counseling and scientific community as a whole have toward the transpersonal also reflect many claims already postulated by counselor educators and transpersonal researchers alike—The field of counseling has a paltry focus on spirituality, a reflection of a larger cultural belief that spiritual topics are unscientific and unworthy of research (Braud, 2006; Fadiman, 2018; Fukuyama et al., 2003; Lee et al., 2013; Pieterse, 2009; Scotton, 1985; Walker, 2022).

When I examined the factors contributing to participants' development of a multicultural transpersonal counseling competence, participants discussed course material that either highlighted the role of cultural and systemic factors that affect both counselors and clients or course material that encouraged reflections on the subject. Participants cited in-class discussions and cross-cultural transpersonal readings as reflective spaces in which their multicultural competence grew to include the transpersonal, again providing evidence in favor of safe classroom environments (Lu & Woo, 2017) and periods of reflection (Foster & McAdams, 1998) as important components of counselor development. Some participants also discussed the ways in which the transpersonal was less accessible to marginalized individuals, highlighting the long-standing criticism of the transpersonal as continuing to exist within the dominant cultural narrative (Fukuyama et al., 2003).

Experiences of Holistic Development

Participants' descriptions of their developmental experiences in their transpersonal counseling courses strongly aligned with both the counselor self-awareness and human and spiritual development domains of spiritual counseling competence, providing further evidence in support of participants' spiritual counseling competence development within their courses (Cashwell & Watts, 2010). Counselor educators often focus on counselor development as a major goal of the profession (Foster & McAdams, 1998; Welfare & Borders, 2010). Traditional counselor education tends to highlight the importance of cognitive development, particularly with respect to clinical practice (Foster & McAdams, 1998; Welfare & Borders, 2010); however, transpersonally-informed counselor educators report attempting to promote holistic development in their students, focusing not only on cognitive development but also on emotional, ethical, and identity-based development (Fukuyama et al, 2003; Walker, 2022).

In this study, every participant shared a unique perspective on their developmental experiences in their transpersonal counseling course, many of which aligned with the focus of the counselor educators who teach such courses (Walker, 2022). Several participants reported powerful integrative experiences that brought significant emotional development. Participants described their integrative experiences as a shift in cognition toward a more transpersonal perspective that created emotional relief, a relief that came from the resolution of concurrent thought processes that conflicted with one another. Participants describing the ways in which they experienced cognitive and emotional shifts in response to their course material provided evidence in favor of developmental researchers who postulate the importance of emotional development in concurrent cognitive development (Bloom, 1956; Furr & Carroll, 2003; Wellington, 2010).

Some participants also described how their personal identities developed in response to the course. Many participants, for example, reported some sort of spiritual identity development as a result of the course, a finding which could serve to highlight the mechanism behind researchers' findings that counselors' strength of faith correlates with their spiritual counseling competence (Bloomquist, 2017; Dailey et al., 2015; Haasz, 2013; Robertson, 2010; Selby, 2020). Others reported development of their privileged and activist identities, framing them within the context of a holistic perspective. One participant reported significant processing of their marginalized identities from a transpersonal lens, and several participants described ethical development in response to the material, a finding that supports Granello's (2010) report that more developed professionals are better able to uphold the standards of their profession.

One participant's description of transpersonal experiences bore a striking resemblance both to research about critical incidents in counselor development and to participants' developmental experiences in their transpersonal counseling courses. Jain defined a transpersonal experience as

> anything that gives you some sort of cognitive shift, where you realize things are completely different than they are, or you see things in a dramatically different way that make you drastically change for the better, because I think the core of transpersonal is to not just alleviate symptoms for a person but to actually develop greater well-being. So some sort of shift that helps someone change for the better.

Many participants described their developmental experiences exactly how Jain defined transpersonal experiences: powerful cognitive shifts that led to emotional relief, an integration of identities, and an expansion of ethics. Participants' experiences of this type of development aligns with counselor educators' reports of critical incidents in counselor education, which

consist of a combination of cognitive, emotional, belief-based, and skill-based shifts occurring in counselors-in-training such a way that the information is rapidly integrated (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988). In this study, participants reported that these perceptual shifts occurred most commonly in response to transpersonal literature and the processing of information inside and outside of the classroom, a finding consistent with the reports of the instructors who teach transpersonal counseling courses (Walker, 2022).

Another finding in this study consistent with existing literature was that the intensity of holistic development varied from student to student (Walker, 2022). One pattern that emerged in students who reported relatively mild developmental experiences was their lack of spiritual identity prior to course enrollment. Both participants who identified as atheist reported an increase in interest and openness to transpersonally-based topics and practices, but they did not describe powerfully integrative experiences like many of the participants who identified as spiritual prior to their transpersonal counseling courses. Participants' descriptions of their developmental experiences in response to the course material may also provide further context around the report that counselors with higher strength of faith display greater spiritual counseling competence (Bloomquist, 2017; Dailey et al., 2015; Haasz, 2013; Robertson, 2010; Selby, 2020).

Shifts in Clinical Focus

The last major theme of participants' experiences in their transpersonal counseling courses was a shift in their clinical focus toward the transpersonal, a shift which aligned with several facets of spiritual counseling competence and spiritual-religious competence orientations in counseling. Participants discussed both the integration of the transpersonal into clinical intake and assessment procedures and diagnosis and treatment protocols, two domains of spiritual counseling competence highlighted in the literature (Cashwell & Watts, 2010; Dailey et al.,

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2015; Robertson, 2010). Participants also discussed their active integration of the transpersonal into their personal clinical practice, an element of multicultural orientation known as cultural opportunity (Owen et al., 2016), providing further evidence of participants' development of a spiritual-religious competence orientation in counseling.

Participants' reported shifts in their clinical focus, though consistent with the literature, was often of a much greater magnitude than expected. Several participants reported that their transpersonal counseling course was significantly impactful on their clinical trajectory, much more so than a standard counseling course, a finding consistent with instructor reports of their transpersonal counseling courses (Walker, 2022). Felis and Curious, for example, reported discovering their clinical lenses in their transpersonal counseling courses, discoveries that fundamentally shaped how they perceived the practice of counseling. Such a finding provides evidence in favor of Marquis's (2012) report on the efficacy of transpersonal lenses in clinical practice. Other participants reported the transpersonal becoming central in their clinical interests, potentially shaping their future career trajectories. Lumina, for example, was so impacted by her transpersonal counseling course that she elected to spend an entire semester engaged in an independent study of how counselors can integrate psychedelic therapy into their clinical practice. Not all participants reported shifts of such a magnitude, but several students were significantly impacted in terms of their clinical practice.

Participants commonly reported that their course material and course instructor played significant roles in their shifts in clinical focus regardless of intensity, another finding which aligned with instructor reports of important components of transpersonal counseling courses (Walker, 2022). Similar to the intensity of holistic development as a result of the course, the intensity of the shift in clinical focus appeared strongest in participants who reported

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relationships with the transpersonal before taking their transpersonal counseling courses. Both participants who identified as atheist reported clinical integration of and clinical interest in transpersonal counseling interventions as a result of taking their courses, but the pattern did emerge nonetheless. Such a pattern may provide evidence which further explicates the correlation between interest in spirituality, strength of faith, and spiritual counseling competence (Bloomquist, 2017; Dailey et al., 2015; Haasz, 2013; Robertson, 2010; Selby, 2020).

Parallels with Previous Research

Before conducting this study, I conducted a transcendental phenomenological analysis of instructors' experiences of teaching and constructing their transpersonal counseling courses at CACREP-accredited institutions. The results of the current study both overlap heavily with the study I previously conducted and provide clarification on certain aspects of the course experience.

Instructors specifically reported targeting their students' perceived importance of transpersonal topics in counseling, stating that counselors-in-training are generally unaware of transpersonal topics in counseling, the efficacy of transpersonal counseling interventions, and how to integrate the transpersonal into clinical practice. Instructors, like their students, cited the importance of empirical evidence in support of the transpersonal and transpersonal counseling interventions in helping their students increase their perceived importance of transpersonal topics in counseling. Instructors also identified the importance of their expertise in transpersonal topics as instrumental to effective course instruction, a phenomenon that their students also reported.

Instructors also reported the importance of helping students process their misconceptions and difficulties with integrating and addressing transpersonal topics into their clinical practice, something that every participant reported experiencing in the current study. Instructors

specifically described emotional processing alongside traditional course instruction as a tool to aid in their students' processing of personal challenges surrounding the course material, a phenomenon the participants of this study reported experiencing. Participants in this study described how their courses helped increase their willingness to address transpersonal topics in counseling, specifically citing the reflective and safe spaces that the instructors reported cultivating in their classroom environments.

Instructors' descriptions about the larger context in which transpersonal counseling resides also mirrored participants' descriptions in the current study. Instructors, like their students, described how Western culture, the scientific community, and the field of counseling overlooked and dismissed transpersonal perspectives. Instructors also described intentionally incorporating perspectives into their course design that included cultural and systemic factors influencing the transpersonal, factors which participants in the current study reported in their conceptualizations of transpersonal topics in counseling. Both instructors and students highlighted the role of marginalization and privilege in the transpersonal as well, but the current study's participants provided a much more detailed description of how they perceived the intersection of such phenomena.

One area that instructors discussed heavily regarding their pedagogical intentionality was the promotion of holistic, transpersonally-inclusive counselor development in the learners whom they served. Participants in this study thoroughly reported holistic developmental experiences in their transpersonal counseling courses. Instructors specifically discussed the importance of emotional development alongside traditional cognitive development, a mechanism explicated by the participants of the current study. Instructors reported that experiential components were instrumental in their course design in aiding their students having direct experience with the

transpersonal; the current study's participants reported the same. Instructors also reported structuring the course such that students might experience transpersonal development in some capacity, a phenomenon which many participants in the current study reported.

In terms of shifts in clinical focus, instructors explained that they hoped that their students could begin to work from a transpersonally-informed lens in their clinical practice; in this study, participants reported the exact shift for which instructors hoped in their course design. Instructors also reported that some of their students had the transpersonal become a central focus on their lives, another phenomenon that some of the participants in this study reported. Furthermore, instructors intended to promote the incorporation of transpersonally-informed clinical interventions into their practice, something that each participant reported in the current study. Participants in the current study specifically identified empirically-based course material, experiential activities, and their own development as responsible for these shifts, each of which instructors reported targeting in the previous study.

The results of the previous study align closely with the results of the current study, indicating that the intent of the instructors who teach transpersonal counseling courses aligns with the outcomes that the students experience in their transpersonal counseling courses. The overlapping data from both studies provides greater evidence in favor of the findings, increasing their trustworthiness.

Implications

Numerous implications arise when considering the findings of this study, but perhaps the strongest regard the existence of transpersonal constructs that mirror the extant literature on spiritual counseling competence and religious-spiritual competence orientations in counseling. According to spiritual counseling competency literature, six domains of spiritual counseling

competence exist: culture and worldview, counselor self-awareness, human and spiritual development, communication, assessment, and diagnosis and treatment (Cashwell & Watts, 2010). In this study, participants reported a strong awareness of the role of culture and worldview in the transpersonal in counseling, significant moments of reflection on their own biases and beliefs, holistic and spiritually-inclusive developmental experiences, active communication with clients about their beliefs and practices, an incorporation of the transpersonal into clinical assessment and intake procedures, and an incorporation of transpersonal interventions into clinical practice.

Such a finding carries several implications. Transpersonal counseling courses are efficacious at preparing counselors to address religious, spiritual, and transpersonal topics in counseling. Because the transpersonal includes both spirituality and religion, spiritual counseling competence appears contained within the construct of transpersonal counseling competence. Based on this information, spiritual counseling competence as a construct may benefit from revision such that it incorporates the transpersonal in its scope. Counselor educators interested in advancing transpersonal counseling competence should also consider incorporating transpersonal topics into their course content designed to promote spiritual counseling competence. The existing ASERVIC competencies may also benefit from the incorporation of the transpersonal into their scope of clinical competence.

The literature on religious-spiritual competence orientations in counseling, while currently theoretical, also appear to mirror participants' experiences in their transpersonal counseling course. As a construct, religious-spiritual competence orientation draws heavily from multicultural orientations in counseling, which postulate three primary areas of development: cultural humility, cultural comfort, and cultural opportunity (Gutierrez et al., 2020; Hook et al.,

2016; Kivlighan et al., 2019; Owen et al., 2016; Slone & Owen, 2015). In this study, participants reported a growing sense of humility about their clients' spiritual, religious, and transpersonal experiences, a significant increase in comfortability about discussing such topics in a clinical setting, and an active effort to both discuss such topics and proactively incorporate them into clinical practice.

Several implications again arise from such a finding. Transpersonal counseling courses are efficacious at promoting a transpersonal orientation in the counselors who take such courses. Again, because the transpersonal contains both spirituality and religion, religious-spiritual competence orientation appears contained within the construct of transpersonal orientation. Based on this information, religious-spiritual competence orientation as a construct may benefit from revision such that it incorporates the transpersonal in its scope. Counselor educators wishing to create a transpersonal orientation in the counselors whom they serve should also consider incorporating transpersonal topics into their pedagogical, supervisory, and advocacy-based approaches designed to promote religious-spiritual competence orientation.

Beyond significant parallels with the spiritual counseling competence and religious-spiritual competence orientation literature exist other implications. Participants' experiences of their transpersonal counseling courses provide evidence in favor of deliberate psychological counselor education, a phenomenon that occurs through challenging course material, supportive and knowledgeable instructors, and deliberate spaces for reflection about the challenges experienced through course material (Foster & McAdams, 1998; Mosher & Sprinthall, 1971). Participants' experiences of their transpersonal counseling courses also provide evidence in favor of co-constructed andragogical approaches to counselor education, approaches which prioritize the co-creation of a safe environment in which

counselors-in-training may process the challenges of their course material (Lu & Woo, 2017; Walker, 2022). Counselor educators seeking to promote the development of the learners whom they serve should consider providing material which challenges their students to grow, creating a safe space in which students can process such challenges, and focus on their own development such that they are able to sufficiently scaffold the development of their learners.

One area of counselor development which participants frequently discussed in this study were their emotional development as a result of integrating challenging cognitive concepts. Several counselor educators have already postulated a relationship between emotional and cognitive counselor development, but the literature remains mostly theoretical (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988). Some counselor educators discuss the potential emotional distress that can come from struggles with counselors'-in-training cognitive development, but mostly continue to examine the counselor development from a cognitive developmental lens (Foster & McAdams, 1998; Wilkinson & Dewell, 2019). Counselor educators wishing to facilitate cognitive development in the counselors-in-training whom they serve may benefit from a greater incorporation of practices to promote concurrent emotional development into their practice.

Participants in this study also discussed identity-based development as a result of their transpersonal counseling course. Spiritual identity development, marginalized identity development, and privileged identity development all occurred in the context of participants' transpersonal counseling courses, each carrying its own implications. Spiritual identity development, particularly in regards to its relationship to clinical practice, remains unexamined as a content area. Participants' growing awareness of transpersonally-related identities as part of their multicultural experience indicate a need for greater focus on such identities as a component

of counselor education. Privileged identity development appeared to occur hand-in-hand with participants' spiritual identity development in that the ways that they conceptualized their privileged positions grew to incorporate the transpersonal. Such a finding both implies the need for greater focus on transpersonally-related identities as a part of counselor development and the need for transpersonally-informed counselor educators to further incorporate intersectional content into their practice. Participants' discussions of their marginalized identities in relation to the transpersonal carried a similar implication—Participants reported a conflict between marginalized identity development and spiritual identity development, particularly in the context of the transpersonal. As such, transpersonally-informed counselor educators could improve their courses by further incorporating intersectional content into their practice. That said, with participants reporting growth in each of these areas as a result of their course experience, evidence in favor of holistic developmental approaches to counselor education grows. Counselor educators wishing to promote holistic development in the counselors whom they serve should consider incorporating such practices more fully into their practice (Braud, 2006; Fukuyama et al., 2003; Marquis, 2012; Walker, 2022).

Several implications exist specifically in regards to religion, spirituality, and the transpersonal in counseling. Counselors who do not take courses specifically designed to address religious and spiritual issues in counseling may fail to develop the counseling competence necessary to address such issues in clinical settings (Selby, 2020), a finding echoed in this study. Participants reported a growing awareness of harm that might have befallen clients if they had not received appropriate training around religion, spirituality, and the transpersonal in counseling. Counselor educators seeking to mitigate client harm around these topics should consider integrating such topics into their pedagogical approaches, course content, and

supervisory practices such that the counselors-in-training whom they serve are adequately prepared to address such topics in counseling. Participants frequently cited their instructors' expertise as instrumental to their development of clinical competence, a finding which both echoes previous research (Walker, 2022) and suggests the need for counselor educators to do their own research regarding the transpersonal such that they can adequately address the needs of their students.

For counselor educators who address religious and spiritual topics in their work, an inclusion of transpersonal topics may be sufficient for properly preparing counselors to address such topics in counseling. Participants frequently discussed phenomena such as near-death experiences, after-death communication, psychedelic therapy, kundalini awakenings, precognitive dreams, and spiritual emergencies alongside more traditional spiritual and religious topics. Counselor educators may benefit from exploring common topics in the transpersonal counseling literature so as to better prepare themselves for providing education around such topics.

Limitations

This study was not without its limitations. Perhaps the most pertinent limitations I encountered during this study were low recruitment and a lack of responses for secondary data collection. Researchers suggest around ten participants for a phenomenological analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2019). I contacted the participant pool at least three times over the duration of this study, but despite my efforts, I was able to recruit only six participants for this study. The available pool of participants for this study was quite small to begin with—only two small classes of sixteen potential participants in total were available. That said, my interviews were quite thick in terms of the descriptions I was able to gather. Standard interview protocols

typically run around an hour in length, but in this study, interviews averaged an hour and fifteen minutes. Upon review by my dissertation chair and committee, they agreed that my descriptions were sufficiently thick such that I could code and analyze my interviews. For secondary data collection, I elected to ask participants to write a brief reflective journal on their experiences of the interview. Attempting to emulate a reflection journal similar to what participants might have experienced in their transpersonal counseling course, I gave each participant a week to reflect on the topic and return the journal. Only one participant completed the journal prompt, a phenomenon which inhibited my ability to triangulate the data in an effective manner.

With data collection being perhaps the most important component of the research process, I will employ several strategies in the future to correct my mistakes. I will consider choosing a larger participant pool before beginning the study, a pool with which I can more easily establish direct contact. I will also choose an entirely different form of secondary data collection, such as participant journals from their transpersonal counseling courses, photographs that represent their experiences of their transpersonal counseling courses, or music that relates to their experiences in their transpersonal counseling courses.

One limitation related to data collection was the relative lack of diversity of participant demographics. There were no men in this study, nor were there any individuals who claimed a specific religious identity. No participant had a non-Christian religious background, nor did any participant have a racial or ethnic identity background that was not White or American. One participant discussed familial immigration to the United States, one participant discussed being queer, and one participant discussed being fat, but no other participant brought those identities up for discussion. Two participants discussed neurodivergence in some capacity. The participants of this study largely reflected the characteristics they described as typical of individuals who would

have access to the transpersonal from an American perspective; those who discussed their marginalized identities were few in number and discussed how those identities conflicted with American approaches to the transpersonal.

In future studies, I would ideally address a lack of diversity in participant demographics by intentionally selecting participants who share diverse perspectives on transpersonal counselor education. Realistically, this limitation is a reflection of both the American approach to the transpersonal and the field of counseling as a whole. The perspective of each participant was incredibly meaningful and impactful to this study, but the transferability of such findings across demographic characteristics is questionable, particularly when participants with marginalized identities reported conflict between their identities and American transpersonal frameworks. I also did not collect sufficient demographic information such that I am able to make claims about trends in participant socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or ability status. Though some participants did discuss these areas of experience, I will ask more explicitly for demographic information in the future.

Yet another significant limitation of this study was its occurrence during a global pandemic. Participants reported Covid-19 to be a limiting factor for their course experiences across the board. Though some participants reported that their experiences were enhanced by the presence of Covid-19 as a cultural phenomenon, almost all participants reported an attenuation of their experience because of the effect it had on the course structure. Several participants discussed how Covid-19 added a significant stressor to their lives. Ultimately, the findings of this study are framed within the context of Covid-19. Every transpersonal counseling course I included in this study was digital and occurred in the Fall of 2020 or Spring of 2021. I cannot be certain what effect Covid-19 had on this study, but because each participant reported Covid-19

affecting their course experience in a generally negative manner, I can infer that the results of this study were attenuated by it. Even participant interviews, which traditionally occur in-person, all occurred over Zoom.

I am uncertain how I would change future studies in regards to Covid-19. Online interviews aided in the recording, interview, and transcription process, but may have also influenced the interviews in ways that I did not perceive. I cannot currently control for the effects of a global pandemic but will do my best to assess its influence in the future.

Participant feedback informed several limitations of this study. Participants reported wishing that the study had taken place closer to their completion of their course and reported that some of the interview questions were challenging to answer. Though transcendental phenomenology is rooted in participants' interpretation of research questions as an attempt to remove researcher bias, closer proximity to course completion and greater elaboration on specific content areas would improve this study. In the future, I will conduct phenomenological analyses closer to participants' experiences of phenomena of interest and provide greater clarification in my interviews.

Another limitation of this study was its solitary nature. Qualitative research is typically conducted in teams so as to reduce the bias or influence any one person may have over the results of the study. However, because this study is my dissertation, I necessarily conducted the study alone. I worked closely with my advisor and dissertation committee members to ensure that I was conducting the research in as unbiased a manner as possible. I also maintained an audit trail and kept a reflexive journal so as to provide as much transparency to the research process as possible.

Any attempt at remaining as transparent as possible will always be flawed to some degree. I experienced synchronistic transpersonal phenomena while conducting my research, had emotional reactions to participant experiences, and experienced strong emotions about the dissertation process—I undoubtedly influenced the research. In the future, I will work with a research team, strive to remain as transparent as possible, and communicate openly about any experiences I have during the research process.

Topically, this study was limited in that I specifically examined counselors'-in-training experiences of their transpersonal counseling courses. Transpersonal scholars commonly report spirituality being contained within the transpersonal (Braud, 2006; Fall et al., 2017; Walker, 2022), a similar finding reported by the participants in this study. However, despite the significant overlap between the transpersonal and the spiritual, the results of this study may not transfer to courses specifically aiming to address religious and spiritual issues in counseling.

The aforementioned limitations did have some impact on the overwall trustworthiness of the study. Because my triangulation of participant data with a secondary source of data collection was limited, this study did lose some credibility, transferability, confirmability, and creativity. I was also unable to triangulate my participants during participant selection, further reducing the transferability of the study. I conducted this study alone, which did impact the authenticity and substantive validation of this study to some degree. Last, because I did select such a narrow topic of study, the transferability of the information could have been further impacted.

Despite potential threats to credibility, I still obtained a thick description of participant experiences and maintained a thorough audit trail such that credibility was mostly maintained. With respect to transferability, I obtained a thick description of participant experiences and thoroughly analyzed the theoretical underpinnings of the study; threats to transferability mostly

came from issues with triangulation and narrow topic selection. Confirmability remained mostly intact—I obtained thick participant descriptions, maintained an audit trail, kept a reflexive journal, engaged in member checking, and engaged in peer debriefing. The creativity component of trustworthiness was mostly impacted because most participants did not complete the secondary data collection activity, but other components remained intact.

Future Directions

Numerous directions for future research exist based on the findings of this study. The data of this study indicate that counselors-in-training who take transpersonal counseling courses develop spiritual counseling competence and a religious-spiritual competence orientation as a result of taking such a course. Future researchers could advance the transpersonal counselor education literature by assessing the development of spiritual counseling competence and religious-spiritual competence orientations in counselors-in-training who take transpersonal counseling courses by utilizing the Spiritual Competency Scale (SCS-R-II; Dailey et al., 2015), the Cultural Humility Scale (CHS; Hook et al., 2013), the Therapist Comfort Scale (TCS; Slone & Owen, 2015), and Cultural Missed Opportunities (Owen et al., 2016). Among these scales, the SCS-R-II would be easiest to administer in a pretest/posttest assessment with a comparison group of counselors-in-training who did not take a transpersonal counseling course, as it is a self-report measure. Measures of multicultural orientations in counseling rely on client reports and would be less amenable to such a design but could still be performed with a posttest only design with a comparison group of counselors who did not take a transpersonal counseling course.

Another area of future research based on the findings of this study would include the creation of measures to assess for the development of transpersonal counseling competence and

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transpersonal orientations in counselors-in-training. Transpersonal scholars and the results of this study both indicate a significant overlap between religion, spirituality, and the transpersonal (Braud, 2006; Fall et al., 2017; Walker, 2022). Because of the significant overlap between religion, spirituality, and the transpersonal, scales that assess specifically for transpersonal counseling competence and transpersonal orientations may need to show discriminant validity from existing measures like the SCS-R-II (Dailey et al., 2015) and the multicultural orientation scales shaped specifically to assess a religious-spiritual competence orientation (Hook et al., 2013; Owen et al., 2016; Slone & Owen, 2015). Alternatively, researchers could revise existing measures of spiritual counseling competence and religious-spiritual competence orientations such that they are transpersonally-inclusive.

On the topic of revision of existing content areas related to religion and spirituality in counseling, counselor educators wishing to advance the transpersonal as an area of clinical competence could advocate for the inclusion of transpersonal counseling competence within the ASERVIC competencies. Though the transpersonal does include religion and spirituality by definition, some phenomena within the transpersonal fall outside the realm of traditionally-discussed topics related to religion and spirituality in counseling (Walker, 2022). Researchers originally suggested that the ASERVIC competencies include transpersonal competence in addition to religious and spiritual competence, though the current ASERVIC competencies do not explicitly include the transpersonal (J. M. Holden, personal communication, 26 May 2021). Revising the current ASERVIC competencies to include the transpersonal could establish long-term support for the transpersonal as a content area in counseling.

Based on the size of the available participant pool, transpersonal counseling is underrepresented in the field of counseling and would benefit from greater integration into the

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field as a whole. One future area which any counselor educator may explore is the development of their own transpersonal counseling course. With two CACREP-accredited schools in the country currently offering courses in transpersonal counseling, the wider availability of transpersonal counseling courses could promote more counselors' transpersonal counseling competence, transpersonal orientations, and holistic development.

For counselor educators already incorporating transpersonal topics into their practice, additional emphasis on marginalized counselors' and clients' experiences of the transpersonal merit exploration. The data from this study suggest that both transpersonal counseling courses and transpersonal counseling as a whole are most accessible to privileged students and clients. Counselor educators wishing to advance these content areas within counselor education could do so by increasing their intentional integration of topics that facilitate the development of marginalized counselors and clients alike.

In regards to counselor development, researchers interested in advancing the literature on counselor development may benefit from the integration of measures of emotional, ethical, and identity-based development into their current research with counselors-in-training. In this study, participants reported that their cognitive development intertwined with their emotional, ethical, and identity-based development such that the phenomena could not meaningfully be separated. Considering the reduction in bias participants reported when experiencing such development, counselor educators may find holistic developmental approaches to be worth exploring.

Chapter Summary

The findings of this study provided evidence that explicate several major themes in the current literature surrounding spirituality in counseling. Participants' experiences of their transpersonal counseling courses provide evidence in favor of existing models of spiritual

counseling competence, spiritual-religious competence orientation, deliberate psychological education, and co-constructed andragogy. The results of this study specifically highlight the parallels between existing approaches addressing spirituality and the transpersonal in counselor education such that spirituality in counselor education as a content area could feasibly be revised to better incorporate the transpersonal into the scope of its practice. The results of this study also both confirm previous research findings about the nature of transpersonal counseling courses and explicate the mechanisms by which counselors-in-training develop during such courses.

This study also highlights important areas of growth, research, and advocacy for the field of counselor education. Counselor educators interested in advancing the state of the art with respect to transpersonal counselor education can do so by studying the intersection between measures of spiritual counseling competence, religious-spiritual competence orientation, and transpersonal counselor development, by advocating for the inclusion of the transpersonal into content areas pertaining to religion and spirituality in counseling, and by increasing their focus on the intersections between marginalized populations and the transpersonal.

Epilogue

My relationship with the transpersonal continues to evolve in ways beyond my comprehension at the time of its occurrence. I had no idea that a transpersonal experience surrounding the College of William and Mary would lead me to one of the only schools in the country in which the role of the transpersonal in counseling has been studied in any depth. I originally came to this institution under the guise of seeking to advance the field of counseling by exploring the ways in which marginalized populations experienced counseling and the counselor education process; I was unprepared for that form of advocacy to be through study of the transpersonal. I experienced great resonance when one of the participants of this study explained the ways in which their marginalized identities conflicted with their experience of the transpersonal—I too have shared that experience. This journey has been incredibly solitary, isolating, and alienating, yet through it all, I have come to understand myself beyond any perspective I would have imagined possible before my arrival. I grow increasingly aware of my relationship with something beyond myself, some invisible mechanism which guides my hand and winds my path. I have begun to understand why it is that I am the way that I am and why I have the experiences and perceptions that I do. I have also come to realize the incredible compassion instilled in me by this mechanism that moves me, a mechanism that has inspired similar compassion in those whom I have met on this journey. Whatever force it may be, it is a force that unites us across division and allows us to connect deep within our hearts with those whom we encounter. To feel the pain, joy, pride, and sorrow of client, colleague, and companion alike is a privilege unlike any other I have experienced. I am honored to be a part of this process and face the next chapter of my life with a deep sense of reverence.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Email

Greetings!

If you are a current or former student who completed a transpersonal counseling course during

    the Fall 2020, Spring 2021, or Summer 2021 semesters, please consider participating in

    the following study:

Student Experiences of Transpersonal Counseling Courses

During this study, you will be asked to complete an interview via Zoom about your experience of

    the transpersonal counseling course you completed. The interview will be confidential

    and range from one to two hours. You will also be asked to complete a journal entry

    about the interview experience.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Dr. Natoya Haskins at

    nhhaskins@wm.edu.

Thank you for your time!

Appendix B

Qualtrics Survey Message

Greetings! Thank you for considering participation in this study.

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of counselors-in-training who have taken
a transpersonal counseling course. ASERVIC's (2009) competencies state that counselors
should have competency in counseling with respect to diverse spiritual experiences, but
without proper course content, counselors receive minimal spiritual competency training.
ASERVIC's competencies also state that spirituality is integral in client wellness, and
transpersonal counseling offers a solution to promoting counselor competency with
respect to spirituality.

The researcher is a doctoral student in counselor education at the College of William and Mary
and is completing this study as for their dissertation.

Participants agreeing to participate in this study understand that:

• Their identities will be kept anonymous throughout the course of this study and will not be
linked with their data.

• They are not required to participate in this study.

• They have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and discontinue providing data.

Participants in this study will be interviewed once (for a period not to exceed two hours) about
their experiences of a transpersonal counseling course. Questions will include content related to
the counselors'-in-training motivations behind course development and selection of material for
their students. They will also be asked to provide demographic data about cultural identities
relevant to their experience in a transpersonal counseling course. Following the interview,

participants will be asked to complete a brief follow-up journal regarding their experience of the interview.

There are minimal risks associated with involvement in this study. Participants may gain additional insight into concepts related to transpersonal counseling courses, but this study is not intended to have an educational component. These insights may be a benefit for some participants and create dissonance for others. Participation is encouraged and is completely voluntary. All information gathered from interviews will be maintained in confidentiality and coded to protect participant privacy.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Natoya Haskins at nhhaskins@wm.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, the College of William and Mary, School of Education Institutional Review Board.

By completing completing this form, you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project. Upon clicking 'I consent', you will be asked to provide basic demographic and contact information so that an interview may be scheduled.

Thank you for your consideration! Please keep this letter for your records.

Sincerely,

Natoya Hill Haskins, PhD, LPC, NCC

Associate Dean and Director of Diversity and Inclusion

Associate Professor of Counselor Education

Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, President-Elect (2021-2022)

Appendix C

IRB Protocol Confirmation

This is to notify you on behalf of the Education Internal Review Committee (EDIRC) that

protocol EDIRC-2021-09-28-15223-nhhaskins titled Transpersonal in Counselor Education: A

Phenomenological Examination has been EXEMPTED from formal review because it falls under

the following category(ies) defined by DHHS Federal Regulations: 45CFR46.104.d.1.

Work on this protocol may begin on 2021-10-01 .

This protocol must be submitted for annual renewal on 2022-10-01, at which time the PI will be

asked to indicate whether the protocol will continue as active, will continue with changes, or

should be set to inactive.

Should there be any changes to this protocol, please submit these changes to the committee for

determination of continuing exemption using the Protocol and Compliance Management

application (https://compliance.wm.edu).

Please add the following statement to the footer of all consent forms, cover letters, etc.:

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL

STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY

THE W&M PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966)

ON 2021-10-01 AND EXPIRES ON 2022-10-01.

You are required to notify Dr. Ward, chair of the EDIRC, at 757-221-2358 (EDIRC-L@wm.edu)

and Dr. Jennifer Stevens, Chair of the PHSC at 757-221-3862 (jastev@wm.edu) if any issues

arise during this study.

Good luck with your study.

Appendix D

Interview Questions

1. Demographics, including relevant information about spirituality

2. Describe your experience of taking a transpersonal counseling course.

3. How do you describe the transpersonal?

4. How does the transpersonal compare to religion and spirituality?

5. How do your identities and cultural background affect your understanding of the transpersonal?

6. What is your relationship with the transpersonal?

7. How did taking a transpersonal counseling course affect your preparedness to address transpersonal topics in counseling?

8. How did taking a transpersonal counseling course affect your preparedness to address religious and spiritual topics in counseling?

9. How did taking a transpersonal counseling course affect your development as a counselor?

10. How did taking a transpersonal counseling course affect your development as a whole?

11. What is your perception of the relationship between transpersonal topics and the field of counseling?

12. What components of your transpersonal counseling course affected you the most?

13. What was your perception of the course content?

14. What was your perception of the classroom environment?

15. What was your perception of the experiential component of the course?

16. What was your perception of the course instructor?

17. What was your perception of your classmates?

18. How did Covid-19 affect your experience of the course?

19. Is there anything else you would like to share that I didn't ask about?

Appendix E

Participant Journal Prompt Email

Hi!

Below is the prompt for the journal reflection regarding the study.

• What was your experience of being involved in this study?

• What was your experience of the content of the interview?

• Did you have any experiences over the past week that may have been related to your

involvement in the study? If so, how did you perceive them?

Thank you again!

Appendix F

Reflexive Journal Sample

2021 12 03

I just had my first participant interview and it went really well! I was excited but nervous to engage in conversations around the material. I found myself bringing my own interpretation of the phenomena into the interview to a degree. I also slightly deviated from the script of the interview, asking questions as they appeared relevant to the interview. I have a certain degree of anxiety around the interview process. I worry that I am collecting data in a biased way, especially because I talked briefly with the first participant about transpersonal topics after our interview. I actually ended up sending her articles about a topic of Interest relevant to the field. I am doing my best to be as transparent as possible throughout the interview process, offering paraphrases of participant experiences, but I worried that my own experience of the transpersonal is affecting how I'm conducting the interviews. I am a person who is fairly prone to anxiety in the first place, so it is likely that my worries are unfounded, but I do desire to uphold the greatest standards of academic rigor possible.

2021 12 08

I just had my second participant interview. I believe that this interview also went really well. I found it to be exhausting in terms of energy expenditure—The interview itself went for 2 hours straight. overall, I really enjoyed the interview. It was interesting to talk to another non binary person about their experiences of the transpersonal. I found their perception of the ways in which identities intersect with the transpersonal to be insightful and informative. I found resonance in their experience and I also learned from their experience, in particular, their experience around their fat identity. I enjoyed having conversation with this person to the degree that I found myself

feeling friendly and wishing to connect with them further. I enjoyed sharing the space with them and look forward to incorporating their experience into the study. That said, I do find this work to be fairly exhausting. I can sense that the energy expenditure required to complete this work is quite high. I feel the need to rest after conducting this interview, but realize that I have more interviews to conduct.

Appendix G

Bracketing Statement

I have a vested interest in the transpersonal. I perceive transpersonally-informed counselor education as a mechanism by which we as counselor educators can enhance the capacity of the learners whom we serve such that they are able to provide the most effective service possible to any client whom they encounter, particularly those who face marginalization. I sought to address gaps in the literature related to spiritual counseling competence, religious-spiritual competence orientations, and transpersonally-informed counselor education by exploring counselors'-in-training experiences of transpersonal counseling courses specifically because I believed that transpersonal counseling courses contained answers to issues in counselor development and clinical competence that we across the profession. I conducted this transcendental phenomenological analysis with as much transparency and bias reduction as possible, but I would be remiss if I did not make my professional position clear. I hope that, regardless of personal conviction, my findings speak for themselves; however, I also hope that further exploration of the transpersonal in relation to counselor education contains answers to the problems we currently face. In any case, I will take the lessons I have learned from conducting this study and use them to refine my future practice such that I am able to serve the profession to an even higher standard as my career continues. In the spirit of further transparency, I would also like to mention that I received a small stipend from the International Association of Near Death Studies to cover my transcription costs. I do not perceive myself to have misrepresented the phenomenon of near death experiences in any way in this study, but I wished to mention it nonetheless.

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Vita

Unity Nova Walker was born on the 22nd of March in 1992 in Trussville Alabama. They graduated from Jefferson County International Baccalaureate in 2010. They completed their Bachelor of Arts in Psychology at Auburn University in December of 2016, their Master of Education in Clinical Mental Health Counseling in August of 2019, and their Doctor of Philosophy in Counselor Education and Supervision in May of 2022. They hold a National Counselor Certification. They can be contacted at unwalker@email.wm.edu.