

Fractured Therapists: The Consequences of Disintegrated Functioning in Faith and Practice

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Abstract

With a renewed focus on strengthening professional identity in counseling, Christian counselors must improve the models and approaches for describing faith and spiritual development to incorporate critical elements of distinctive Christian worldviews into the process of establishing a professional identity. Without an ethical means for including components of faith and spirituality from the personal self into the professional self, Christian counselors become fractured and disintegrated practitioners, struggling to establish cohesion between the critical values of faith in their personal lives and the practical role of the Holy Spirit through their professional lives.

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Although the counseling profession strives to establish a strong professional identity rooted in prevention, empowerment, wellness, and lifespan development (Burkholder, 2012; Mellin, Hunt, & Nichols, 2011), this identity lacks cohesion and uniformity across the variety of disciplines within counseling (Alves & Gazzola, 2011; Calley & Hawley, 2008; Woo, 2013). The American Counseling Association recognized this need for improved identity as well, making a unified identity the focus for their 20/20 vision (Kaplan, Tarvydas, & Gladding, 2014). Hawley and Calley (2009) recognized that the concrete steps for unifying and integrating the philosophical, personal, and professional aspects of counselor identity are absent. With a professional identity encompassing components of both personal and professional identities (Alves & Gazzola, 2011; Dollarhide, Gibson, & Moss, 2013), Christian counselors must establish a cohesive identity within the broader professional sphere while ethically incorporating elements of their faith and spirituality as a model personally, professionally, and academically of being the salt and light inherent in their identity in Christ (Worthington, 2010). A cohesive or integrated identity must incorporate a comprehensive understanding of the self from a biblical lens, articulating the influence and operation of this worldview upon the counselor's professional identity. These elements necessitate a consideration of the place for faith development and integration along with the process of professional identity for Christian counselors. In this article, I will explore the components of professional identity development and faith and spiritual development, considering the role integrated faith and spirituality might play in establishing a cohesive and balanced professional counselor identity as a follower of Jesus Christ.

Background

Professional Identity Development Theory

Professional identity development theory is a theoretical framework founded in Erikson's (1968) identity development theory that combines the identity components of personal development, including faith development, with a progression through professional preparation to establish an integrated theory for meaning-making and identity in an occupational context (Limberg et al., 2013; Pittman & Foubert, 2016; Trede, Macklin, & Bridges, 2012). Professional identity development is the process of integrating the personal self into the professional self through the skills, social frameworks, and professional contexts of one's professional community (Burkholder, 2012; Cardoso, Batista, & Graça, 2014; Mellin et al., 2011; Moss, Gibson, & Dollarhide, 2014). With counseling's efforts to establish a unified identity as a profession distinct from social work, psychology, and psychiatry (Emerson, 2010), professional identity development theory provided a model for describing the process of professional differentiation and development needed and occurring within the field (Colbeck, 2008). As Gale and Austin (2003) suggested, the field of counseling is still within its adolescence regarding identity development.

Myers, Sweeney, and White (2002) heralded the imperative for counseling to establish a unified identity around purpose, role, and direction if the field of counselor were to effectively mature and move forward. By 2010, the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2010) established their 20/20 vision with a consensus definition established and approved by 29 organizations, noting that "counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals." From this definition came the broader distinctive elements of prevention of harm,

wellness, empowerment, and lifespan development, noting how the personal elements of relationships, values, theories, and techniques integrate with the professional self to form one's professional identity (Burkholder, 2012; Moss et al., 2014). Using a grounded theory approach, Gibson, Dollarhide, and Moss (2010) described the transformational tasks required for professional identity development in counseling, including discovering one's personal definition of counseling, adopting responsibility for professional growth, and integrating the personal and professional selves into a systemic counselor identity (Gibson et al., 2010). Building from these elements, Emerson (2010) and Woo (2013) aligned the defining characteristics of a counselor's professional identity with the academic standards of the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). Using the professional identity development framework, researchers in the field of counseling have established core principles and definitions for counselor professional identity (CPI) (Calley & Hawley, 2008; Woo, 2013), established professional standards and training tasks (CACREP, 2015; Hawley & Calley, 2009; Reiner, Dobmeier, & Hernández, 2013), defined the role of professional associations in professional identity development (Luke & Goodrich, 2010), explored factors unique to mental health counselors' professional identity (Burkholder, 2012), and developed instruments for measuring CPI (Emerson, 2010; Healey, 2009; Puglia, 2008; Woo, 2013).

Conspicuously missing from these models, however, is a place for faith integration. Elements of faith and spirituality from the personal identity provide the ethical basis for belief and value within all worldviews and a critical element for identification and reflection within professional contexts (ACA, 2014). The *ACA code of ethics* (2014) expects counselors to be “aware of – and avoid imposing – their own values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors” (p. 5). Awareness requires insight, exploration, understanding, and development of these elements of

personal and spiritual identity, growing in understanding of self as one grows in understanding and relationship with God (Benner, 2015). Everyone has a worldview, the lens through which this process of awareness and assimilation occurs (Wronka, 2008). For Christians, this worldview is determined by the depth of development in their faith and spiritual identities (Martoia, 2008; Sire, 2004). If professional identity development requires the effective integration of personal and professional identities into a cohesive whole within a professional environment, Christian counselors must possess practical and effective means for incorporating these diverse selves through a biblically integrative lens so that the resulting professional identity maintains an ethical but biblical perspective. For many Christian counselors, the faith element of their personal selves lies disintegrated and fractured from their professional selves, limiting the practical working of the Spirit within their daily engagement and alienating the function of faith within the day to day practice of counseling.

Faith and Spirituality Development

As Strawn and Wright (2014) explored, theological tradition and background shapes the flavor of one's worldview and the resulting integration between Christianity and psychology. Faith and spiritual practice must exist as a foundational component of a counselor's personal identity if it is to influence or inform his or her clinical practice or integration process, which was an area of deficit Eck, White, and Entwistle (2016) identified in their exploration of current undergraduate students. For a counselor to effectively integrate his or her faith and beliefs into the practice of counseling, the counselor must be firmly grounded and engaged in Scripture (Moon, 2012). Faith and spiritual development exist as core personal identity elements for Christians, but without a common starting point or metric from which to discuss and incorporate these components of faith (Entwistle, 2015), Christian counselors are left to attempt to establish a

professional identity on their own, using the secular literature to drive the affective and practical components of professional identity and some components of the Christian integration movement to provide cognitive or technique aids for their clinical work. This disconnect creates a fracture within the counselor's perception of his or her personal and professional self, limiting his or her ability to mature professionally as an integrative Christian counselor.

Existing faith and spiritual development approaches tend to utilize a stage model, providing limited versatility or complexity necessary to provide a description of how faith functions practically across individuals, the lifespan, and cultures (Duvall, 2015). As Parker (2011) suggested, Fowler's five stage faith development theory (FDT) provides a useful tool for assessing spiritual growth and development apart from specific faith traditions, but a stage model struggles to provide practical utility in describing or capturing the daily experience of faith as it is lived for many people. With a millennial generation seeking connection through storied experience, stage models that group according to stereotypical categories or mile markers lack the flexibility for experiencing aspects of faith and spirituality as an integral element of life, creating additional fragmentation for many with the fracturing of self across stages defined by faith, profession, family, and friendships without a cohesive method for incorporating faith and spirituality as one an integrated facet of one's personal and professional self.

Faith and spiritual development form a significant contributor for the Christian counselor, establishing the foundation for values, beliefs, and worldview upon which the motivations and ethics of the counseling profession should rest. Stage models of faith development seem insufficient for integrating personal and professional lives that may grow and mature at different rates and with different contributors to development. Because faith changes and matures throughout life according to situations and experiences, counselors must continue to adjust the

balance of integration of their personal selves with their professional selves, incorporating those elements of growth that positively contribute to their professional engagement within their given context and bracketing those experiences that might impede their ethical practice (ACA, 2014; Burkholder, 2012).

Duvall's (2015) Faith States model (Appendix A) provides a dynamic model for Christian integration, critiquing Fowler and Peck's linear and unilateral designs respectively, by proposing a faith states theory by which faith maturity can be explored and measured through faith transforming event interaction (FTEI). This dynamic faith states model provides an active approach to describing the experience and expression of faith across the lifespan and assists counselors in aligning their spiritual development with their personal and professional development according to an active process of growth in insight, awareness, and faith (Duvall, 2015). Duvall's (2015) dynamic faith states model also aligns well with Spurgeon, Gibbons, and Cochran's (2012) recommendation that counseling programs define the personal dispositions, aspects of presence or being, necessary as defining characteristics inherent in effective counselors. They boiled these traits down to the five dispositions of commitment, openness, respect, integrity, and self-awareness (Spurgeon et al., 2012). For Christian counselors, these dispositions stem from a base grounded in a biblical framework defining created purpose, human dignity, and a desire to "do all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). Growth in these personal dispositions mirror the process of absorbed, assumed, arrested, or adopted faith (Duvall, 2015).

Integration

Integration has been and continues to be a broad topic within Christian counseling and psychology, producing a variety of analogies, models, and definitions (Entwistle, 2015).

Typically spanning five approaches or views for integration, Moon (2012) suggested integration may hopefully be viewed not as five distinct and competitive approaches, but as factors for addressing healing across a spectrum of cases requiring a variety of approaches from varying philosophical and theological approaches. Moon's (2012) suggestion acknowledges the validity of aspects of each component across the integration spectrum while also highlighting how as professionals our style and approach must adapt and adjust to meet the current needs of the client. Integration is complex because the levels from which integration occur are also complex, incorporating theoretical, personal, and applied approaches across the multi-faceted and layered disciplines of psychology and Christianity (Edman, Feenstra, & Jackson, 2016). As many have suggested, attempts to integrate Christianity and Psychology must answer the question of which Christianity and which psychology (Entwistle, 2015; Moon, 2012; Strawn & Wright, 2014). Some, like Worthington (2010), instead suggest integration is better conceptualize as the cooperative dance between theology as God's Word and psychological science as God's work, providing a relational and mutually contributive approach to a fuller understanding of God and people.

Whatever the specifics one takes for integration, whether through a filter or relational approach, for effective integration in clinical counseling practice to occur, Moon (2012) advocated a three-legged stool incorporating: "1) professionally sound and respected training in a mental health discipline; 2) classic models of spiritual direction (Orthodox, Ignatian, Anglican, etc.); and 3) the best from a body of modern Christian thought that presents a high and explicit Christology" (p. 69). Entwistle (2015) also highlighted the critical role of Christian character formation in the person of the counselor as a redemptive agent of God with a Gospel-orientation. A dynamic personal relationship with the Lord as a follower of Christ is a necessary component

for integration to occur, providing a theological lens through which and by which reality is viewed (Entwistle, 2015; Moon, 2012).

Integrating the Identity Development Models

Drawing these elements together, Entwistle (2015) acknowledged how “Christian theology cannot be separated from Christianity as a way of life; it is not just our minds that are being redeemed by Christ. Christian redemption entails the formation and transformation of character so that we may be more Christ-like... applied and lived out in individual and corporate life” (pp. 4-5). For a Christian counselor to incorporate the elements of Christian faith and practice into the clinical realm, the counselor must not just integrate his or her cognitive, doctrinal knowledge of theology, but must allow his or her faith to permeate all of life, integrating his or her personal faith and identity in Christ with his or her CPI. In exploring the question of CPI as a Christian, we must acknowledge that our starting questions that form our worldview foundation of “Where am I?” and “Where am I trying to go?” will provide a different starting point for when we begin the final question of “How can I get there?” For a Christian, the direction and flavor of CPI will look different and take a different route because we start from a different location (Entwistle, 2015, p. 249).

Jones (1996) emphasized the pervasive obligation of Christian integration for counseling, noting how Christian practice must lay claim to every area of our lives, obligating us as followers of Christ to “do all for the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31) as God’s “agents of reconciliation and healing in the world, [seeking] the immediate and ultimate good for those about us” (p. 138). For Christians to pursue the integration of their personal and professional lives in CPI, they must first begin the process of being dead to self and alive to Christ as they put on the new man as a follower of Christ in their personal lives (Colossians 3:12-17). The

progression from death to life as a follower of Christ is a continual battle this side of glory, requiring adjustments and changes in our perception of self and God through growth in Christ and awareness of both Him and ourselves (Benner, 2015). This acknowledgment of continued personal growth and adjustment matches the necessity of growth and progression in the professional identity literature, acknowledging how the process of CPI occurs across the lifespan, adjusting to changes in self and others as a developmental process of professionalization (Calley & Hawley, 2008; Healey, 2009; Jebiril, 2008; Pittman & Foubert, 2016). A Christian counselor must manage and balance the competing identities of a personal self as a follower of Christ and the variety of other multiple roles and selves (Worthington, 2010) with the necessities and requirements of his or her professional self as a counselor. This integration task goes beyond the cognitive practice of theology and psychology and demands an insight and self-discovery of self as loved by God to demonstrate that love to others in the practice and profession of counseling.

Establishing Ethical Balance and Cohesion as Character

As noted earlier, the ethical imperatives of non-imposition of beliefs, values, and attitudes in the *ACA Code of Ethics* (2014) leave the faith and Christian identity core of many Christian counselors fragmented and disintegrated from their professional selves. This fracturing of faith and belief as a necessary core component of one's personal self from the professional development process robs the counselor of the exact motivation and skills necessary for effectiveness through the Holy Spirit while also limiting his or her ability to effectively develop professionally as the personal and professional selves are unable to ethically coexist. This struggle to align all the elements of personal, professional, and spiritual, leaves the Christian counselor unbalanced, providing lip service to the theological elements but head and heart to the psychological sciences. Integration of the spiritual and personal requires careful insight and

growth in awareness, seeking to integrate “faith into every dimension of a person’s life and character” (Entwistle, 2015, p. 258).

As Christian counselors, we must be honest and intentional in the acknowledgement of our Christian assumptions, recognizing the role our faith provides in how we conceptualize human nature, the study and science of human behavior, and how this faith informs and adjusts our application of care for clients and the direction for treatment we pursue (Entwistle, 2015). For too long we have ignored the first part of the *ACA Code of Ethics* (2014) calling us to awareness of our values, attitudes, and beliefs, and instead assumed personal values could be fully avoided or bracketed from our clinical practice. As Ratts (2008) suggested, the beliefs and values of the counselor cannot be removed from the counseling relationship as they are the very reason the counseling relationship exists. Instead, we must work to acknowledge the role and value of our beliefs, recognizing their influence and importance in our work as Christian counselors. As Ripley and Dwiwardani (2014) highlighted, “In becoming aware of the states of our hearts, this opens opportunities for Christ to be invited into the process and to do his maturing work in us” (p. 226).

Conclusion

With the field of counseling seeking to strengthen counselor identity, emphasizing our core components of wellness, prevention education, lifespan development, and empowerment, Christian counselors have a responsibility to actively speak to the importance and role of spiritual development and faith. If our Christian faith is to permeate all aspects of our lives (John 15), then when Christian counselors integrate their personal and professional selves as professional counselors their faith must also be integrated throughout all their practice. Faith, belief, attitudes, and values cannot be separated from the practice of counseling for Christians

because those elements are critical components of what make us Christians. As Christian counselors, we need to demonstrate the benefit of this integration in our personal and professional lives, living out our faith so that the world will “know that [we] are [His] disciples [by our] love for one another” (John 13:35), demonstrating God’s love to a lost and dying world for the glory of God.

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Appendix A: Faith States Model

