Evangelical Christian Students' Experiences in Secular Counselor-Training Programs

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Abstract

This phenomenological study involved an exploration of the lived experiences of 16 evangelical Christian students attending secular counselor education programs at two campuses of a for-profit university in the southeastern United States. The theistic worldview of evangelicalism can conflict with the humanistic perspective espoused in counselor education programs. These conflicts are represented in issues such as creationism versus evolution, religious multiculturalism, abortion, LGBT issues, and sexual expression outside marriage, among others. Results indicated that although the evangelical Christian students attending secular counselor education programs did have generally positive experiences, they experienced some resistance and unfriendliness pertaining to certain aspects of their values and beliefs. The participants saw their experiences as challenges to encourage them to work harder and excel. They also considered their faith as a great source of strength and support. Additionally, suggestions for counselor educators, evangelical students as well as recommendations for future studies are discussed.

Evangelical Christian Students' Experiences in Secular Counselor-Training Programs

The conflict between secular education and evangelical Christianity has been ongoing. Some commentators, such as Reule (2001) and Weber (2010), have written about the separation of church and state and advocated against allowing religious teachings and values in public schools. Reule admonished the judiciary to be wary of fundamentalist Christians who seek to remove evolution from academic textbooks because it is irresoluble with their Christian beliefs. On the other hand, writers such as Hodge (2002) and Limbaugh (2004) have pointed out the discrimination against people of faith in secular institutions of learning. Limbaugh (2004) charged that there is a deliberate effort in academia to suppress biblical values or beliefs while affirming other values that many Christians find offensive. Limbaugh stated, "Public schools are replete with values laden curricular, from sex education and sexual orientation instruction to notions of self-esteem and death education" (p. 4).

Schaefer (2006) discovered that conservative orthodox Christian students who attended secular, accredited counseling and counseling psychology programs experienced some devaluation of their Christian worldviews, values, and beliefs. Evangelical Christians often feel discriminated against, left out, and disregarded by secular institutions, and are acutely aware that their ideals are not exemplified in culture-influencing establishments such as the television industry, magazines, newspapers, newsrooms, and movies (Hodge, 2004). Furthermore, academic texts frequently contain inaccurate or unfair descriptions of evangelical Christians

(Hodge, 2004; Unruh, Versnel, & Kerr, 2002) or are dismissive of religious persons (Bray, Egan, & Beagan, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand the lived experiences of evangelical Christian students attending secular, accredited, counselor-training graduate programs at two campuses of a for-profit university within the southeastern United States. Additionally, it involved an exploration of their experiences while expressing their values and beliefs and how those experiences influenced their performance in the university environment. This study is significant given that The American Counseling Association (ACA), the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC), and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) have recognized the importance of spirituality as an aspect of multiculturalism and have indicated the need to include spirituality training in counselor-training programs. However, very few counselor-training programs have added spirituality as part of their curriculum (Bartoli, 2007; Briggs & Rayle, 2005; Hull, Suarez, Sells, & Miller, 2013; Myers & Williard, 2003). This study can help counselor educators to understand and to extend multicultural sensitivity to this population of students as well as help evangelical students gain some perspective from the experiences of other evangelical students and what they did to be successful.

To better facilitate this phenomenological study, two research questions provided guidance: What are lived experiences of Evangelical Christian students enrolled in secular counselor-training programs? and What are the Evangelical Christian students' perceptions of how their experiences have influenced their performance as students?

Ideological Issues

Evangelical Ideology

In exploring the definition of spirituality, Unruh et al. (2002) discussed the various delineations of spiritualty in the literature and identified some thematic categories used to demarcate spirituality. From that exploration, seven thematic categories emerged, which the authors further narrowed down to three groupings: (a) definitions that reflected faith in and relationship to a sacred or higher power, (b) more secular definitions that made no reference to any higher being, and (c) definitions that may be considered secular or sacred. Unruh et al. further suggested there is a secularization of how spirituality is defined in health literature and noted this trend has received significant objections. McColl (2011) assessed this secularization as being possibly dismissive of the spiritual views of religious individuals.

The population upon which this study focused was students who hold a sacred definition of spirituality (Unruh et al., 2002), specifically evangelical Christian students. The literature identifies this population using many different terms such as Conservative Christians, Baptists, Pentecostals, Full Gospel, Word of Faith, and Fundamentalists (Todd & Coholic, 2007; Hodge, 2004; Marshall, 2000). While there are subtle differences between these groups (e.g., experience with the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues), it would be safe to say that they are bound together by certain tenets. Evangelicalism is a trans-denominational, Protestant, inclusive movement that is unified by the following tenets: (a) a belief in the final authority and inerrancy

of the Bible; (b) an experience of a spiritually transformed life through conversion or a rebirth, resulting in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ; (c) a commitment to spread the gospel; (d) a concept of personal and universal sin; and (e) emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Bray et al., 2012; Fox, 2008; Hodge, 2004; Lowery, 2000; Moran, 2007).

Evangelicals, who believe in the final authority of the scriptures (Bray et al., 2012; Fox, 2008; Hodge, 2004; Lowery, 2000; Moran, 2007; Webster, 2008), and look to the scriptures for guidance (Gregerman, 2009), believe the first humans, Adam and Eve, sinned against God by disobeying His law. Biddle (2005) described sin as man's failure to live according to God's plan, which consequently incurred a penalty. This sin carried a price of death or eternal damnation and estrangement from God as stated in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death" (New King James Version [NKJV]). Furthermore, this sin and death infected all of humanity (i.e., universal sin) as indicated in Romans 3:23 which states, "…for all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God" (NKJV). Therefore, God, in His love for humanity, offered to pay the death price for man's sin Himself and came in the person of Jesus Christ, through the Virgin Mary, to die and rise again in the stead of humanity (Hodge, 2004). The statement made by Jesus in John 3:16-18 (NKJV) validates this notion:

> For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Furthermore, evangelicals believe God loves every human being and calls everyone to a repaired connection with Him (i.e., salvation). For evangelicals, the process of salvation can be summed up in this account in Acts 16:30-31, where the Philippian jailer asks Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? So they said 'believe in The Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household'" (NKJV). This affirms the tenet of the experience of a spiritually transformed life through conversion or a rebirth, resulting in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (Bray et al., 2012; Fox, 2008; Hodge, 2004; Lowery, 2000; Moran, 2007).

Many evangelicals are motivated by the charge given by Jesus to take this message of salvation to all of humanity. Jesus made this commission in Mathew 28:19 when He stated, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (NKJV). This commission, among other motivations such as compassion for the needy, contributes to their humanitarian and other activities (Sider & Unruh, 2001). However, this commitment to spreading the gospel, which could be construed as assuming that other religious viewpoints could be mistaken, may perhaps be problematic within counselor education programs, especially as it might be seen as inconsistent with section A.4. of the ACA (2014) *Code of Ethics* regarding avoiding harm and imposing values and the commitment of educators to provide an equitable and non-oppressive environment for all students (Todd & Coholic, 2007).

Evangelicals believe in a theistic, transcendent authority that determines right and wrong (Hodge, 2002; Schulz, 2005). Therefore, when it comes to human behavior and values, they believe the standards for morality or right and wrong have been elucidated in the scriptures. As

stated by Hodge (2004), "The Bible which is viewed as God's message to humankind, functions as a guidebook for faith and practice in the believers ongoing walk with God" (p. 252). Webster (2008) and Gregerman (2009) also affirmed this concept of the Bible. Furthermore, evangelicals believe that social ills, for example, are a result of the fall of humanity (i.e., sin) and social justice can be achieved by the transformation of the human heart through salvation. Therefore, they are motivated by Jesus's commission to get the message of salvation to all.

The evangelical worldview tends to be more politically conservative and is generally more conservative on sexual morality, abortion, and sex roles (Schmalzbauer, 1993). Hodge (2002) affirmed that evangelicals derive their truth from a divine source. This theistic perspective runs contrary to the secular, liberal, and humanistic perspectives of the "new class" (Hodge, 2002; & Schmalzbauer, 1993). The divergence between this evangelical perspective and the humanistic perspective discussed in the next section sets the stage for most of the conflict.

Humanistic/New Class Ideology

An issue that surfaced in this literature review was related to the rise of what is termed the new class (Hodge, 2002; Hunter, 1980; Schmalzbauer, 1993) and its ideology. Hunter (1980) contended that fundamental to the social and economic structure of this advanced industrial society is a massive new "knowledge industry" (p. 156), which consists predominantly of college professors and professionals who derive their livelihood from this knowledge industry (Hunter, 1980). Schmalzbauer (1993) and Hodge (2002) affirmed Hunter's assertion.

A more narrow definition of the new class was advanced as those involved in the "cultural production" professions (e.g., academe and media) and occupations whose interests are served by the growth of government e.g., social workers (Hodge, 2002; Schmalzbauer, 1993). This was in line with Hunter's (1980) assertion that public education, especially at advanced levels, is the institutional home of the new class. Hunter further contended that the new class exerts control over the symbols that define the environment—including the definition of reality, purpose, morality, and obligation—from their locus of sovereign control over specialized knowledge and skills that are produced and made available only through public higher education. Hodge (2002) indicated that the new class exerts tremendous power by their ability to delineate the boundaries of public dialogue and subsequently ignores or excludes evangelical views from meaningful discussion. Hunter (1980) stated that the worldview of this class is secular humanism, which excludes divine measurements of reality. Hodge (2002) observed that the ideology of the new class is associated with "political liberalism, rejection of traditional moral values, and functional secularism" (p. 403). This posture consequently creates a humanistic view of morality, which posits a belief that man is the measure of all things and there are no values other than those that are man-made. The result is the tendency to measure existing traditions and societal conditions against intellectual normative standards (i.e., what things could be and should be). This cognitive posture is what forms the ideological foundation of the new class as well as its reformative goals. Contrary to this worldview, evangelicals believe in a theistic, transcendent authority that determines right and wrong (Schulz, 2005).

Hostility and Discrimination

In the article, "Does Social Work Oppress Evangelical Christians? A 'New Class' Analysis of Society of Social Work," Hodge (2002) argued that the profession of social work,

which is informed by the new class philosophy, does indeed oppress evangelical Christians, a charge Dessel et al. (2011) disputed as erroneous. As an example of what Hodge called the "corrosive effects of new class status on theism" (p. 403), he pointed out that a larger percentage of social workers who were sampled affirmed non-theistic beliefs or disavowed faith in a personal God. He argued that because the new class fundamentally determines the issues that are discussed in society, it tends to disregard and dismiss any issues that run contrary to its ideas. Because religious expression falls outside of the predominant ideology of the new class, it tends to be disregarded.

Evangelicals derive their truth from a transcendent source while progressives believe that truth is relative. This clash of perspectives in how these groups see reality, along with the existence of a power differential, sets the condition for oppression [of evangelical students] (Hodge, 2002). Hodge (2002) further charged that evangelicals and other religious faiths, being the last remaining groups that are not dependent on the new class channels of information production, have drawn hostility from the latter. Hodge continued to express that this hostility is expressed in the fact that evangelical persons and their views are presented in a pejorative manner in television, comic strips, and textbooks, including those used in psychology and social work. In the same vein, Rosik and Smith (2009) asserted that studies have supported the fact that traditional Christians are regularly labeled in scornful and stereotypical terms such as intolerant, untrustworthy, narrow-minded, and hostile to women.

Moreover, Moran (2007) cited research that indicated some evangelical Christian students reported experiencing bias and resentment on campus and viewed themselves as experiencing oppression because of their beliefs. She reported that some evangelical students experienced environments that were culturally dissimilar to their own in their secular universities in that they embraced diverse values and beliefs from others. She further emphasized that evangelical Christian students might be reluctant to reveal their identities for fear of real or perceived antagonism. Similarly, Souza (2002) discovered that Christian students tended to suppress their views for fear of being judged or for fear of offending others.

Furthermore, Burnett (2008), who identifies as a Mormon, Feminist, and Democrat, in speaking about what she called "this hypocrisy of mixing tolerance for minorities and intolerance for mainstream religious adherents" (p. 7), stated, "yet at the universities where I have taught, I have found it difficult to balance my beliefs with a system that periodically rejects me and my likeminded students" (p. 7). She further asked, "Where is the political correctness for the religious?" (p. 7). In her study, Barker (2013) found participants expressed that they experienced little diversity in terms of political ideology in their social work programs, and there was no room for divergent opinions on issues such as homosexuality or abortion, among others. The participants indicated there was an overall dismissal of religious diversity in their social work programs, particularly Christianity. These findings seem to be contrary to the values of inclusivity and multiculturalism as espoused by both the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the American Counseling Association (ACA).

In addressing cultural competence and social diversity issues, the NASW (2008) *Code of Ethics* stipulates that "social workers should not practice, condone, facilitate, or collaborate with any form of discrimination on the basis of . . . religion" (p. 4.2). Still, Section 6.4d charges social workers to: act to prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination

against any person, group, or class on the basis of . . . religion. (p. 6.4d). These standards are similar to those espoused by the *Code of Ethics* of the ACA (2014) concerning diversity. Section F.11. addresses multicultural/diversity competence in counselor education and training programs and states:

> F.11.a. Faculty Diversity: Counselor educators are committed to recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty.

> F.11.c. Multicultural/Diversity Competence: Counselor educators actively infuse multicultural/diversity competency in their training and supervision practices… Counselor educators include case examples, role-plays, discussion questions, and other classroom activities that promote and represent various cultural perspectives. (p. 16)

Conclusion

Prior research supports evangelical students in secular educational systems can experience less than welcoming environments. While the literature does not seem to support overt, physical hostility toward evangelicals, it does show the perspectives of evangelicals are met with some resistance in most colleges and universities. Certainly, significant worldview conflicts exist between the humanistic academic world and the theistic religious world. What have not been explored in much detail are the experiences of evangelical students who attend secular counseling-training programs.

Participant Profiles

Nineteen students responded to the initial recruitment, but three withdrew, including the only two male respondents. The final sample included 16 female participants. All participants met the criteria as identifying as evangelical Christians based on their avowal of the doctrines of evangelicalism by their responses to the spiritual questionnaire. They also validated their participation as graduate counseling students enrolled in a secular counseling program. Participants were solicited through e-mail messages sent to student e-mail addresses as well as word-of-mouth referrals by participants. All participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire. All 16 participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. A total of 13 participants completed and returned the demographic information sheet. Two participants, Doris and Grace, provided no demographic information other than their program of study and education level. One participant, Jackie, provided no demographic information at all. Their campus affiliations were not identified to further protect their anonymity. Table 1 shows participants' demographic information and the pseudonyms assigned.

Instrumentation
Spiritual questionnaire. Participants were selected based on their responses to a slightly modified version of the spiritual questionnaire developed by Fox (2008), which he used to explore the perceptions of evangelical freshmen students at two secular universities regarding student alienation. One question was removed due to its specificity to Fox's study and its irrelevance to the current study (i.e., Where did you attend church prior to coming to college?). The 12-item questionnaire is designed to pinpoint candidates who self-identify as born-again or evangelical Christians, as demonstrated by their affirmation of the basic tenets of evangelicalism. The questionnaire is designed to accomplish two things: (a) assess how much the respondent

knows about the key doctrines of evangelical Christianity, and (b) determine the respondent's level of commitment to evangelicalism. In other words, is the respondent a genuine evangelical Christian?

Demographic questionnaire. Participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire that contained 13 questions designed to provide some understanding of each respondent's background. The demographic questionnaire also provided some insight regarding some common trends within this population.

Table 1
Participants' Demographic Information

ID	Age	Race	Level of Ed.	Prog. of Study	Rel. Status	Sexual Id.	Religious Affiliation	Time as Evangelical	Region
Rita	32	CA	EdD	CES	Married	Heterosexual	Non-Denom	25yrs	Southern
Carrie	32	AA	EdD	CES	Single	Heterosexual	Non-Denom	15yrs	Southeastern
Lynn	42	AA	EdD	CES	Married	Heterosexual	Non-Denom	27yrs	Southern
Cindy	33	AA	EdD	CES	Single	Heterosexual	Non-Denom	28yrs	Southeastern
Grace	NA	NA	EdD	CES	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Lynette	39	AA	EdD	CES	Married	Heterosexual	Baptist	12yrs	Eastern
Doris	NA	NA	EdD	CES	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Krista	46	CA	MA	CMHC	Married	Heterosexual	Baptist	39yrs	Southern
Jamie	34	AA	EdD	PCC	Married	Heterosexual	Baptist	14yrs	Southeastern
Mona	31	AA	EdD	PCC	Partnered	Heterosexual	Pentecostal	13yrs	Southern
Bernice	46	CA	MA	CMHC	Divorced	Heterosexual	Non-Denom	20yrs	Southeastern
Brandi	35	AA	MA	CMHC	Single	Heterosexual	Non-Denom	4/12yrs	Southern
Jean	36	CA	MA	CMHC	Divorced	Heterosexual	Baptist	27yrs	Southeastern
Tiffany	30	AA	MA	CMHC	Single	Heterosexual	Non-Denom	13yrs	Southeastern
Gini	33	AA	MA	CMHC	Single	Heterosexual	Baptist	11yrs	Southeastern
Jackie	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Interviews. Both semi-structured and unstructured interviews were conducted face-to-face or over the telephone when face-to-face was impossible. Semi-structured interview questions included the following:
1. What are your experiences as an evangelical Christian student in a secular counselor-training program?
2. What have you experienced when disclosing your Christian values and beliefs during class discussions? (Possible follow-up) How did that make you feel?

3. What do you perceive are the attitude toward evangelicals and/or evangelical values at your university?
4. How would you describe your feelings after expressing your Christian beliefs and values during class discussions or when writing papers?
5. How do/did your religious views influence your graduate school experience?
6. Tell me about the response you get from others, during class or on campus, when you express your Christian values.
7. What was your perception of how other students and professors received your beliefs, values, and worldview when you shared them?
8. Discuss your perception of how these experiences might/might have influenced your performance as a student.
9. Are there questions you thought I would ask that I did not ask?

The unstructured interview topic was:

1. Talk about areas of convergence and conflict between your spiritual values and secular/humanistic values espoused in your counseling program.

Procedures

Data collection with graduate students at the identified institutions who classified themselves as evangelical Christians took place over a 3-month period. Participants were solicited through word-of-mouth and mass e-mails with IRB approval and the permission of campus authorities. A spiritual questionnaire was used to screen participants. Data collection methods included conducting semi-structured and unstructured interviews, which were done face-to-face or over the telephone when face-to-face was impossible. Interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim. Additionally, participants were asked to keep a diary or journal of their lived academic experiences during the period of the study. The participants were asked to journal any occurrences of conflict in values and worldviews as well as how they responded to them during the period of the study. Only two participants provided brief journal entries.

Limitations

Due to the nature of qualitative studies and because this study involved the experiences of evangelical students in two private university campuses in the southeastern United States, results have limited generalizability. Experiences might be different in varying regions of the United States. Additionally, the participants in this study were heterosexual female students who identified with three denominations: Baptist, Pentecostal, and non-denominational.

Furthermore, the lead researcher's role and personal background might have affected the study in that personal bias has the ability to influence the results of the study. Inherent in qualitative research is the fact that researchers bring some biases, experiences, and prejudices to a study. The lead author is an evangelical Christian and has been since 1986 when he experienced the conversion experience. Furthermore, he was born into a church-going family. Additionally, he earned his bachelor's degree in Biblical studies, a master's degree in professional counseling, and a doctorate in counselor education and supervision. The influence of this background and experience was mitigated by asking open-ended questions and using a peer coder, along with member checking and the co-authors who represent different spiritual perspectives.

Description of Data Analysis Method

The taped interviews were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts and journals were read and re-read to note significant issues and common themes that emerged. The same codes were used for the transcripts and journals. Based on the themes that surfaced, the data were grouped under different headings. Additionally, to further assist in data analysis, the data were analyzed using the MAXQDA computer program.

Rigor was ensured by clearly explaining the steps and processes used in data collection and analysis in order to make it repeatable. Furthermore, using member checking, each participant was allowed to review the transcript to ensure that the reports were accurate and the data reported the meaning the participants meant to convey. Additionally, the researcher ensured there was no shift in coding by keeping a list of the codes and their definitions and by constantly comparing data with the codes.

Moreover, validity was assured through triangulation, which refers to using different data sources, methods, and evidence from diverse sources to illuminate the research (Creswell, 2006). The sources for this study included taped interviews and participant journals. Furthermore, the biases the researcher brought to the study, which included background and personal experiences, were clarified. Additionally, a peer coder was used to encourage validity. The peer coder was asked to code the first two transcripts independently of the researcher and develop a separate coding system. The two codes were then compared for consistency and differences. Although the peer coder identified fewer themes compared to the principal investigator and used different terms and names, the meanings and issues identified were similar with only one minor difference observed. The difference was reconciled by incorporating that theme into another larger but similar theme.

Results

In reviewing the interview transcripts, two major themes emerged that fit into the two research questions: lived experiences, and influence on student performance. Theme 1 yielded four sub-themes: overall experience, attitudes on campus, response from others, and subjective experiences. Theme 2 yielded two sub-themes: influence of experiences on student performance, and influence of religious values on school experience. Table 2 includes a depiction of the themes, and sub-themes.

Table 2
Themes and Sub-themes

Theme	Sub-theme
Theme 1: Lived experiences	Overall experience
	Attitudes on campus
	Response from others
	Subjective experiences
Theme 2: Influence on student performance	Influence of experiences on student performance
	Influence of religious values on school experience

Theme 1: Lived Experiences

Research Question 1 was, What are the lived experiences of evangelical Christian students enrolled in secular counselor-training programs when expressing their worldviews, values, and beliefs in the university environment? Several issues surfaced that provided some insight into their experiences.

Sub-theme 1: Overall Experiences

Fifty percent of the respondents reported their overall experiences had been positive. Another 25% noted their experiences were mixed. The final 25% of the participants reported they were challenged regarding their beliefs and values.

Sub-theme 2: Attitudes on Campus

When asked about the attitudes toward their faith on their campus, the following sub-themes developed within the negative attitudes theme: restricted (81.2%), dismissive (56.2%), discriminatory (43.8%), watched closely (43.8%), and ignorance/not interested (43.8%). On the other hand, sub-themes that emerged in the positive attitudes theme were welcoming (50%) and nothing negative (43.8%).

Sub-theme 3: Responses from Others

All (100%) reported unfriendliness, 50% reported being judged, and 25% described "The Look" response. Furthermore, speaking about faculty responses, 50% reported unsupportive faculty responses, 43.8% were neutral, while 25% reported supportive responses from their faculty. Additionally, 37.5% expressed supportive student responses while 25% shared that they experienced unsupportive student responses.

Sub-theme 4: Subjective Experience

Although 81.2% of the participants indicated they were generally comfortable in expressing their views, 56.2% of the participants reported they experienced uncomfortable feelings at times. Some of the feelings mentioned by the participants included fear, ashamed, nervous, judged, angry, alone, discouraged, disliked, powerless, coerced, frustrated, and attacked. Some of the participants (56.2%) expressed that when they did get the chance to share they felt positive about the opportunity.

Theme 2: Influence on Student Performance

Research Question 2 was, What are evangelical Christian students' perceptions of how their experiences have influenced their performance as students? All of the respondents (100%) reported that their evangelical views positively influenced their school experience, while 87.5% of the students expressed that their experiences influenced their student performance in positive ways.

Conclusions and Discussions

Research Question 1

What are the lived experiences of evangelical Christian students enrolled in secular counselor-training programs?

The results showed the participants' perceptions of their experiences in their counseling programs were mostly positive. Some described their experiences as a mixture of good and bad, and some described them as nothing out of the ordinary. However, they described the real and perceived challenges helped them grow as professionals and as individuals. This finding is consistent with what Barker (2013) discovered in her research among Christian students in social work educational programs.

However, it was evidenced in this study that some aspects of the participants' experiences were challenging concerning expressing their beliefs and values. Moran (2007) described that evangelical Christian students reported bias and resentment and viewed themselves as experiencing oppression on their campuses. Likewise, Fox (2008) discovered that the participants in his study perceived overall condescension and hostility toward them because of their evangelicalism. Similarly, the participants in the current study reported unfriendly reception on their campuses when they were expressive of their evangelical views. They seemed to encounter troubles and negative responses when it came to expressing some of their evangelical values and beliefs. The results indicated some participants perceived some negative attitudes such as restricted, dismissive, discriminatory, being watched closely, and ignorance about or disinterest in their beliefs.

Results of the current study revealed over 50% of participants perceived the attitude in their program of study was dismissive of their beliefs and views. This finding supports what Barker (2013), Bray et al. (2012), and Schulz (2005) asserted. This research also showed some of the attitudes in their program were discriminatory toward evangelical students (Hodge, 2002, 2004; Rosik & Smith, 2009). Furthermore, the literature supports evangelical views were restricted on secular educational campuses (Hodge, 2002, 2004; Rosik & Smith, 2009; Todd & Coholic, 2007; Unruh et al., 2002). Synonymous with that assertion, 81% of participants in the current study reported that they perceived their views were restricted in their programs of study. Although there was no evidence of an overt or official restriction against evangelical views, the participants seemed to notice that they were not free, for the reasons elucidated in this report, to talk honestly about their views in their programs. Furthermore, similar to what Barker (2013), Schaefer (2006), and Hodge (2004) discovered, as well as what Unruh et al. (2002) affirmed, the respondents shared their perceptions that there was some ignorance, lack of interest in, or unfair descriptions and misrepresentations of evangelicalism on their campuses or in their programs. While it would be beneficial to address this ignorance and misrepresentation of evangelicalism by implementing some of the recommendations advanced in this study, future study could focus on exploring why such misrepresentation exists.

What seems to be new from this research is the finding that the evangelical students felt they were being watched closely. This is suggestive of a suspicion that they would be imposing their beliefs on other students or clients. However, it is understandable why this behavior is necessary. Such reasons are explicated in the ACA (2014) *Code of Ethics*. Burnett (2008) speculated that one of the reasons why some people reject religious individuals might be the feeling that there is an attempt to impose religion on them. This may stem from some evangelicals feeling mandated by their faith to share their beliefs and values with others. She then pointed out that this is the same sentiment religious students feel as they come into the classroom. However, the participants in the current study did not seem to take offense at this practice and saw it as part of their school experience. Future study could be conducted to

discover whether similar scrutiny is being made of believers in other religious systems or atheists to ensure they will not impose their non-theistic beliefs on theistic students or clients.

On the other hand, some respondents shared that the attitudes on their campus ranged from welcoming to nothing out of the ordinary. This seems to contradict the literature, which overwhelmingly supports negative, or at the very least unfriendly, attitudes toward evangelicalism on secular campuses. One explanation could be that the participants in this study described the welcoming attitudes in terms of their universities' overall multicultural postures.

Regarding the types of responses the participants received from others when they shared their views and beliefs, results of this study showed all of the respondents reported unfriendly or hostile responses from others. This experience supports the findings of Rosik and Smith (2009), Moran (2007), and Schulz (2005). This study also showed some of the respondents felt others were judging them as well as labeling them as radical, judgmental, or "crazy" (Bray et al., 2012; Rosik & Smith, 2009). Twenty-five percent of the respondents shared that sometimes when they disclosed their views, others gave them what they termed "The Look," which they described as condescending. They also described this look as "rude" and "weird." This response was not prominent in the literature review conducted for this study. For instance, Schaefer (2006) reported a similar response from the participants in his study, but classified it under one general theme—negative peer and faculty interactions. Moreover, some of the negative responses that were reported in the current study included "being dismissed" and "nasty or condescending looks." The participants also reported negative reactions such as "instantly get upset," "attacked," "pushback," "static," "got heated," "bullied," "get out of hand with it," and "angry." However, some of the participants indicated that most of the time it did not go too far either because the professors would stop it or they would agree to disagree.

Concerning how faculty responded to them, 50% of the study participants reported unsupportive faculty responses, which supports what Rosik and Smith (2009) found in their study. They reported that Christian students attending secular institutions reported higher discrimination and prejudice from their faculty compared to those who attended Christian schools. Similarly, Lowery (2000) reported that the students in his study described adverse interactions with faculty members who acted in ways they termed as anti-Christian. However, 25% of the participants in the current study reported supportive faculty responses, which was contrasted by the 37.5% who perceived supportive student reactions and the 25% who experienced unsupportive responses from other students. Although the challenges came from both professors and other students, this sample reported more supportive responses from other students than unsupportive at the rate of 37.5% to 25%, and greater unsupportive responses from faculty than supportive at the rate of 50% to 25%. They also seemed to indicate some professors were supportive in some cases where the professors held identical beliefs, and at times, some professors served as moderators and did not take sides either way. However, there were some professors, in some cases, who expressed dislike toward their views. It also seems that the times in which some of the professors did take sides, the students experienced some negative impact.

Participants in the current study experienced certain feelings as a result of these occurrences. A total of 56.2% of the participants reported that they experienced uncomfortable feelings as well as feeling guarded, apprehensive, and cautious when sharing their views. Some of the general feelings mentioned by the participants included fear, shame, nervousness,

judgment, anger, aloneness, discouragement, dislike, powerlessness, coercion, frustration, and being attacked. On the other hand, 81.2% of the participants indicated they were comfortable in expressing their views. However, it appeared they related their comfort level to the fact that they were settled in what they believed more than in their willingness to share those beliefs on campus. Furthermore, there seemed to be a relationship between their levels of comfort and how much of their views they were willing to reveal. Furthermore, 56.2% of the participants expressed that when they did get the chance to share, they felt positive about the opportunity. This finding seems to support that allowing students to share their beliefs more would be beneficial for the students and enhance their experiences as well as perhaps enhance their feelings of acceptance.

Research Question 2

What are evangelical Christian students' perceptions of how their experiences have influenced their performance as students?

Results indicated 87.5% of the students professed that their experiences influenced their student performance in positive ways by making them work harder. Marshall (2000) stated that evangelical students tended to place lower on the academic achievement scale than students from other religions. Although this researcher does not intend to dispute that comment because of its limited context, that assertion was not supported by the results of this study. In fact, the opposite was the case. It appeared the students saw the challenges as opportunity to excel academically for God. Similarly, 100% of the respondents reported that their evangelical beliefs positively influenced their school experience by providing them with spiritual support and helping them to persevere. This perception supported what Marshall found: "There is evidence that their faith might help them to be more diligent in school" (p. 144). This could be explained by the fact that participants in the current study tended to be more chronologically mature or at later stages of spiritual development (Fowler, 1981).

Suggestions for Professional Practice

Given the preceding discussion, these researchers advance the following suggestions for professional practice. First, in order for effective dialogue and positive movement by both sides to take place, both sides would do well to refrain from describing each other in demeaning, dismissive, and insolent terms. Name-calling tends to signal the exhaustion of thought, and insults and labelling produce no benefit in this matter. Evangelicals would do well to refrain from presenting themselves as sanctimonious. Non-evangelicals would do well to refrain from labelling evangelicals as bigoted, intolerant, and narrow-minded (Hodge, 2002; Rosik & Smith, 2009), or archaic, radical, judgmental, and crazy, among other demeaning terms as described by the participants of this study.

Both sides could endeavor to identify and focus more on each other's positive characteristics as opposed to the negative and divisive. Efforts could be made by both sides to highlight each other's strengths and areas of commonalities as opposed to focusing exclusively on the areas of divergence. To that end, counselor educators could serve as process facilitators and spearhead this effort. Counselor educators could endeavor to assist students on both sides to gain awareness about their own biases and how these biases could influence their relationships with divergent populations while holding each other accountable for their own biases as well. The first set of recommendations is addressed to counselor training programs.

Multicultural Sensitivity

This study echoes what Burnett (2008) asked, "Where is the political correctness for the religious" (p. 7). To this end, Marshall (2000), as well as Kelly-Woessner and Woessner (2006), suggested some sensitivity to students' values may be constructive and recommended educators seek out ways to relate to this population as they do to other underserved populations. Some effort could be made to understand this population as an underserved group within the academic system rather than dismiss them with a broad brush. It is true that some individuals claim to be evangelicals but hold views that might be considered oppressive of certain minority populations. There are those who misinterpret the Bible to support their own personal attitudes, and these individuals perhaps possess limited understanding of the purposes of God as believed by other evangelicals. To this end, it might be helpful to try to understand who the evangelical students truly are and what motivates them. One possible way to accomplish this could be to invite evangelical ministers to present lectures on campus pertaining to their belief systems and allow students to ask questions. Additionally, the students could be invited to share their beliefs during classes.

Affirm that Being Evangelical is Acceptable

As expressed by some or the participants, there was a perception that their views were unwelcome. Counselor-training programs would benefit by exploring ways to eliminate the perception that evangelical views are unwelcome. One way to accomplish this could be to seek out actively evangelical professors to be included in the faculty and try to eliminate the underrepresentation of conservatives in the faculty (Gartner, 1986; Yancey, 2012). This will send the message that being an evangelical Christian is acceptable, just as being a Buddhist or Jewish would be. Furthermore, professors could perhaps endeavor to reinforce that it is acceptable to hold evangelical views just as it is acceptable to hold other competing views. Conceivably this could be accomplished by providing validation as opposed to condemnation or dismissiveness. While the participants reported some level of acceptance, they perceived that their views were unwelcome in their programs. This lead author acknowledges the challenging nature of this task due to the polarity of some of the perspectives, but has faith in the ability of those in academia to surmount such difficult challenges. Academia has been able to bridge gaps, validate, as well as extend multicultural sensitivity for minority groups before, such as the African American population, and could do so again in this case.

Create a Safe Classroom Environment

Counselor educators should seek out ways to make the academic environment, as one participant (Gini) put it, "a more safe classroom environment, and equality within the classroom environment for the non-believer as well as the believer." Effort should be made to protect all students, whatever their views, from personal attacks and devaluation. Institutions of learning might benefit from creating an environment where students feel safe to share their views and allow the ideas to be debated and discussed without the idea holder being castigated, attacked, devalued, or dismissed. To enhance learning, the classroom should be a place where separating the individual from the idea that is being discussed occurs. Educators might want to consider creating an atmosphere where people are safe, yet no idea is protected or safe from challenge.

All Ideas Should be on the Table

The participants acknowledged that some topics were more challenging than others to discuss. The academic environment should be a place where no idea is sacred or taboo and all ideas are on the table to be debated on their own merits. A place where even strange ideas come to be ferreted out and valid or popular ideas come to be challenged. When academia endorses one point of view, they disavow the other and deny the student the process of discovery. Is the process of learning not more important than the end result? Is it not true that when one discovers his or her own answers, the individual will be able to own that knowledge as opposed to being fed what the answer should be? Is that not what counseling is about, allowing the counselee to discover his or her own truth and reality? The student needs to engage in the process of discovery by being presented with all sides of every issue equally and without prejudice. Anything outside of that may be perceived as indoctrination.

The academic environment should be a place where ideas can be discussed freely regardless of social acceptability. For instance, an atheist should be allowed to advance his or her argument to support that view and a theist should be allowed to do the same. Both sides of any issue should be presented equally and without bias and discussed honestly. Open debate of issues would provide the opportunity for honest exploration and learning for the students. The presence of evangelicals as well as other groups in the classroom could provide divergent perspectives and should be encouraged. Furthermore, counselor educators should continue to serve as moderators as students engage in the process of self-exploration and discovery.

Suggestions for the Evangelical Community

Historically, some have erroneously used the Bible to support their personal attitudes and to validate their oppression of other populations as well as used strategies that have been ungodly in some cases. This has created a perception that turns some people off to the message of the church. It is the perception of the first author, based on the scriptures, that God never intended for one group of people to oppress or persecute another. It might be beneficial for evangelical Christians to address this perception. One possible way to address this is for evangelicals to endeavor to confront and challenge any individuals who present themselves as Christians and yet advance notions and attitudes that are misrepresentative of Christlikeness. In Mathew 7:15 and Acts 20:29, both Christ and Paul warned Christians about "wolves" who infiltrate the church for their own selfish and deceptive purposes. Evangelicals would do well to be wary of such individuals and notions.

It is conceivable that one problem some have with evangelical Christianity has to do with the suspicion of values imposition on others. While evangelicals seek to spread the gospel, they would do well to continue to adhere to the counsel that has been attributed to St. Francis of Assisi in which he admonished Christians to preach the gospel by their deeds and use words if necessary. The expression of love must continue be the platform for relating to others. Evangelicals would do well to understand that the work of God in the hearts of men could not be accomplished by human force but by the power of the Holy Spirit. Evangelicals would do well to continue to follow the recommendations of Thiessen (2011), who suggested that any use of physical, psychological, or social coercion in evangelistic efforts must be avoided. Thiessen (2011) also suggested that evangelism must involve respect for human dignity and civility.

Recommendations for Future Research

As a result of this study, several recommendations for future research can be made. First would be to explore the experiences of non-religiously inclined students who are enrolled in secular counseling programs and compare their experiences to those of religious students. A similar study could explore the experiences of non-evangelical students who are in classes with evangelicals. This venture might provide some insight as to how evangelical students' views affect others as well as explore whether others intended the rejection that evangelical students were feeling. Additionally, it might be beneficial to duplicate this study at different sites and regions of the United States to explore whether the outcomes would be identical. Recruiting more male participants might result in different outcomes than what was found in the current study. Furthermore, as discussed in this study, there could be some relationship between self-fulfilling prophecy and the experience of evangelical students. Future research could focus on that relationship. One of the discoveries made in this study was the perception by the participants that they were being watched closely to ensure they were not imposing their beliefs on clients. Future studies could be conducted to discover whether similar scrutiny is being made of believers in other religious systems or atheists to ensure they are not imposing their non-theistic beliefs on theistic students or clients.

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