

Spirituality as a Cultural Asset for Culturally Diverse Youth in Urban Schools

Christine J. Yeh, Noah E. Borrero, and Munyi Shea

Spiritual issues are culturally important for many youth in urban schools. In this article, the authors describe how spirituality is associated with cultural values, mental health, coping strategies, and adjustment among culturally diverse youth. Using the case of a 17-year-old Samoan high school student, the authors demonstrate how spiritual issues related to faith, meaning making, and cultural identity can be addressed in a school counseling context.

In this article, we discuss the role of spirituality in counseling culturally diverse youth in urban schools. Using cultural and social justice perspectives, we emphasize the role of counselors as culturally competent social justice change agents (Goodman et al., 2004). The evolving and complex relationship between youth and their spiritual beliefs is also discussed as being interwoven with their multiple cultural, religious, and academic identities. Using a case example, we describe how school counselors in particular, and school systems more generally, can provide support for how students work on spiritual issues.

Urban schools are becoming increasingly culturally diverse, which underscores the need for school counselors to be open to a range of cultural beliefs that may be spiritually embedded. Specifically, school-age children and youth make up 25% of the total U.S. population. Of these youth, 48% are racial and ethnic minorities (Anne E. Casey Foundation, 2008), and 22% of youth in the United States are from immigrant families. These demographic statistics highlight not only the extensive racial and cultural diversity of adolescents in the United States but also a need for reconceptualizing school counseling services for these growing groups.

Spiritual issues are especially salient in urban schools because ethnic minorities often consider spiritual beliefs and practices in their conceptualizations of well-being (Sue & Sue, 2007). For example, researchers (Chiang, Hunter, & Yeh, 2004; Cook & Wiley, 2000; Tiago de Melo, 1998) have suggested that African American and Latino(a) cultural values emphasize religious and spiritual beliefs, including the use of prayer, in coping with stress. For many Latino(a) groups, connection with the spiritual world via folk healers is a culturally relevant method of dealing with suffering (Sue & Sue, 2007). Among the many Asian American ethnic groups, spirituality

Christine J. Yeh, Department of Counseling Psychology, and Noah E. Borrero, Department of Teacher Education, University of San Francisco; Munyi Shea, Department of Psychology, California State University, Los Angeles. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Christine J. Yeh, Department of Counseling Psychology, School of Education, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117 (e-mail: cjyeh@usfca.edu).

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185

has been viewed as a source of strength when dealing with the loss of a loved one (Inman, Yeh, Madan-Bahel, & Nath, 2007). Moreover, a central aspect of African-centered coping is the emphasis on harmony with nature, spirituality, and collective consciousness (Utsey, Adams, & Bolden, 2000). For many African Americans, healthy functioning is inseparable from their spiritual lives (Sue & Sue, 2007).

Interdependence and Spirituality

Traditional counseling models focus on individual, verbally oriented, insight-focused direct communication and do not incorporate the indigenous nature of many cultural groups' values and beliefs (Sue & Sue, 2007). For example, many school counselors and mental health practitioners make clear distinctions between physical, mental, and spiritual existence and mental health (Obasi, 2002) and exclude spiritual worldviews and healing methods from their practice (Sue & Sue, 2007). Although individual therapy is the dominant paradigm for school counseling, this form of intervention may be culturally inappropriate for students in urban schools who may see their psychological, physical, and spiritual worlds as interconnected (Yeh, Hunter, Madan-Bahel, Chiang, & Kwong, 2004). In fact, many culturally diverse clients may want to discuss spiritual themes in their life, but their practitioners are unprepared or uncomfortable to do so (Hage, Hopson, Siegel, Payton, & DeFanti, 2006; Sue & Sue, 2007).

Although spiritual issues have not been prioritized in school counseling, the relationship between spirituality and physical and mental health is overwhelmingly positive (e.g., Miller & Thoresen, 2003). Thoresen (1998) analyzed over 200 studies examining the impact of spiritual beliefs on health and found that individuals with higher levels of spirituality are psychologically and physically healthier. In addition, spiritual beliefs are a critical aspect of indigenous healing—a culturally relevant and respected form of coping with stress (Lee, Oh, & Mountcastle, 1992) among numerous racial/cultural groups and with immigrants in particular. Because many racial and ethnic minorities often rely on spirituality or the use of indigenous and traditional healers (instead of counselors; Garrett & Wilbur, 1999; C. Kim & Kwok, 1998; Yeh et al., 2004), priority must be placed on training counselors to work with students on spiritual themes.

Why Is Spirituality Relevant in Counseling Youth?

Despite the inherent difficulties in differentiating these two terms, religious and spiritual issues are important and relevant to individuals living in the United States. Among American adolescents, 95% state that they believe in God, over 85% say religion is important in their life, and close to 50% claim that they frequently pray alone (Smith & Denton, 2005).

According to Sink and Richmond (2004), spirituality is primarily concerned with "meaning making" (p. 291), making sense of the world around you.

Adolescence is an age of a striving for purpose, a desire for connectedness (Erikson, 1968), and also a period marked by developmental challenges and confusion about one's future (Peterson, Kennedy, & Sullivan 1991). Religious and spiritual involvement may provide adolescents with support in addition to or in lieu of family and other social support to weather these developmental storms (Yeh, Arora, & Wu, 2006). Kessler (2002) suggested that a void of spiritual guidance and a disconnection from social and religious involvement may lead to a perpetual sense of emptiness and meaninglessness among adolescents. The lack of perceived purpose may subject adolescents to risk-taking behaviors as an alternative search for life fulfillment, connection, and meaning (McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 1993).

Spirituality and Youth's Mental Health

Recent outcome studies and systematic reviews (Dew et al., 2008; Wong, Rew, & Slaikou, 2006) on religious and spiritual issues among youth suggest that religiosity and spirituality could be protective factors for this population against internalizing mental health problems, externalizing problems, social adjustment, and coping as discussed in the following sections.

Internalizing problems—anxiety and depression. A study of ethnically diverse, at-risk youth showed that overall spiritual well-being predicted lower levels of anxiety (Davis, Kerr, & Kurpius, 2003). Specifically, existential well-being (a sense of life purpose and life satisfaction) rather than religious well-being (a sense of well-being in relation to God) better predicted trait anxiety among at-risk youth. Similarly, Briggs and Shoffner (2006) found that spiritual well-being—the extent to which one personifies aspects of spirituality such as life meaning, inner resources, and transcendence—was associated with lower levels of depression among older adolescents.

Religious involvement was also found to be related to fewer depressive symptoms among youth (Le, Tov, & Taylor, 2007). Drawing from a large sample (i.e., National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health), Le et al. (2007) indicated that both internal religiousness (i.e., importance placed on religion) and external religiousness (i.e., engagement in religious activities) were important predictors of depression among European American and African American youth. Religious involvement may provide spiritual support and positive social experience through connection with a congregation, which helps to buffer against depression (Pearce, Little, & Perez, 2003). For ethnic minority youth, religious involvement may represent a form of culturally valued behavior, thereby enhancing their self-esteem and psychological well-being (Le et al., 2007). These findings suggest that having meaning and purpose in life or self-transcendence alone, with or without organized religion, may contribute to decreased anxiety and depression. It is also important to consider how schools may foster a sense of purpose among their students.

Externalizing problems—substance use, suicide, delinquent and criminal behaviors. It has been suggested that adolescents who uphold the importance of religion

are less likely to use tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs (National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, 2001). In a sample of over 2,000 ethnically diverse middle and high school students, Walker, Ainette, Wills, and Mendosa (2007) found that multiple measures of religiosity (e.g., religious involvement, nonreligious spirituality) were significantly related to less substance use. R. J. Kim and Jackson (2009) also reported that incorporating culturally appropriate spiritual components in a substance abuse program contributed to decreasing Asian and Pacific Islander youth's substance abuse problems. These findings may suggest a pathway through which spiritual and religious values influence adolescents' prosocial behavior (Thomas & Carver, 1990), sense of control, and tolerance for deviance, which in turn may have an impact on their affiliation with peer substance users and decisions about substance use (Walker et al., 2007). These potential buffers are especially relevant in the school context where students may experience peer pressure related to substance use and could benefit from spiritual guidance and validation.

On the other hand, researchers cautioned that not all types of spirituality protect adolescents against substance use. Sussman, Skara, Rodriguez, and Pokhrel (2006), in an effort to examine different dimensions of spirituality in relation to substance use, found that drug-use-specific spirituality was associated with higher prevalence of cigarette smoking and hallucinogen use among 500 ethnically diverse adolescents. The results may be due to a culturally accepted notion of seeking spiritual enhancement via hallucinogens as well as a popular misconception of cigarette smoking as a stress-coping strategy.

Another challenging mental health concern faced by adolescents is suicidality. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for adolescents. Suicide rates vary by race, ethnicity, and gender. American Indian/Alaska Native male adolescents constitute the highest risk group for suicide deaths; African American female adolescents have the lowest suicide risk (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2006). Risk for suicide attempts was highest among American Indian/Alaska Native female adolescents and lowest among African American and Caucasian male adolescents (Eaton et al., 2006).

The increasing prevalence of suicide among adolescents has led researchers to examine associated risks and protective factors. However, limited studies have addressed religious and spiritual factors in adolescents' suicidal behavior. Some studies indicated that religiosity and spirituality were associated with lower levels of suicide risk and attempts (Maimon & Kuhl, 2008). Results from Maimon and Kuhl's (2008) study revealed that living in a religiously integrated neighborhood diminished the effect of depression on youth and their risk of suicidality, which suggest that religiosity may function as an adaptive coping strategy for youth to handle stress and receive support from congregation members. However, the association between religiosity and spirituality and adolescents' suicidality was not consistent. For instance, Osman et al. (1996) found that religious beliefs did not predict various suicide-related outcome variables when psychological distress was accounted for.

Research on the role of religiosity and spirituality and youth's delinquent behaviors also revealed inconsistent results. Religious involvement or spiri-

tuality provides a source of external control, emotion coping strategies, and new perspectives, which may mitigate delinquent behaviors. Contrary to this intuitive expectation, religious involvement and spiritual orientation are not reliably associated with lower levels of delinquent behaviors or criminal offenses among adolescents (Giordano, Longmore, Schroeder, & Seffrin, 2008). Giordano et al. (2008) suggested that for many socially and economically disadvantaged individuals, having a religious faith alone is not a sufficient deterrent against delinquent behaviors because these individuals have already developed bonds with peer substance users and criminals. Severing these social ties may entail circumscribing a source of financial and emotional support for these youth.

Social adjustment. Two independent studies on U.S. Christian youth and Indonesian Islamic youth, respectively, indicated that religious involvement is associated with these youth's socioemotional competence and adjustment (French, Eisenberg, Vaughan, Purwono, & Suryanti, 2008; Thomas & Carver, 1990). Similar results were obtained in a large sample of female African American youth in urban settings: The family's religious involvement and the youth's own religiosity were related to higher levels of self-esteem and psychological functioning (Ball, Armistead, & Austin, 2003). It is possible that engagement with a religious organization and/or spiritual orientation may reinforce spiritual teachings and values in the life of adolescents, thereby motivating prosocial behaviors and facilitating the development of emotional control and a positive sense of self (French et al., 2008; Smith & Denton, 2005; Thomas & Carver, 1990).

Spirituality and youth's coping. Religiosity and spirituality were implicated as an important coping mechanism used by youth through times of adversity. In a qualitative study conducted by Lindsey, Kurtz, Jarvis, Williams, and Nackerud (2000), the majority of former runaway or homeless youth identified spirituality (e.g., personal faith in a Higher Power, praying to God, or the spiritual element of an intervention program) as a source of personal strength for managing their life disruptions and transitioning into young adulthood.

Results similar to those of Lindsey et al. (2000) were found in Kidd's (2003) qualitative interviews with 80 youth who are living on the street. Findings indicated that spirituality gave meaning to the suffering of these youth, hence making the harsh reality of living on the street a little more bearable. Other studies suggested that religiosity and spirituality helped adolescents cope with grave mental and psychological issues, such as terminal illness and bereavement, by contributing to their exploring and attaching meaning to existential issues (Balk, 1991; Spilka, Zwartjes, & Zwartjes, 1991).

Spirituality in the Urban School Context

Spiritual issues for students in school tend to focus on various meaning-making activities such as creative writing and reflection, identity development, career development and decisions, and relational conflicts and priorities (Sink & Richmond, 2004). These issues may be hard for students to articulate and

may arise during nonverbal activities such as listening to music, reading an inspirational poem, meditating, or spending time in nature (Sink & Richmond, 2004). Spiritual issues may also emerge when youth are questioning their own religious background and identity. The following case (a fictional case based on themes we encounter in our work with urban youth) demonstrates the complexity surrounding issues of spirituality as they intersect with cultural values and expectations in an urban school context.

Case of Samoan High School Student

Silei (a pseudonym) is a 17-year-old, female, Samoan American female living in San Francisco. She was born in California, and both of her parents were born in American Samoa and immigrated to San Francisco in search of greater economic opportunity. Silei's mother works for the local Samoan church and her father is a bus driver. The family lives in a two-bedroom apartment in a community where the population is made up predominately of Samoans and African Americans; it is one of the city's most impoverished neighborhoods. Recently, Silei has started questioning some of the aspects of her life as a member of the Samoan community and as a student at school.

Silei is a junior in a public high school and is one of four Samoan students in the school of over 1,600 students. She has always been strong academically (until last semester she had never received a grade lower than a B on her report card). She does not attend the local high school that her Samoan peers do, but instead commutes to school on city buses each day. The route takes approximately forty minutes each way and requires that she change buses twice. Silei prides herself on her strong work ethic and focus on academics, so she spends much of her time outside of school commuting and working on homework. She has some friends at school, but her two closest friends are Samoan and attend the school in her local community. She spends some time with them, but feels their friendship is waning because they have different ambitions in life. Specifically, Silei wants to be the first member of her family to go to college, and she wants to be a physical therapist.

Two weeks ago, Silei's mother received a phone call from Ms. Lee, a counselor at her school who was concerned about Silei's attendance problems and subsequent report card grade in her chemistry class. Silei's mother was not concerned about the absences (she knew that Silei had missed an entire week of school because of attendance at a Samoan funeral) but was concerned about her grade—her first D. When she approached Silei about the situation, Silei told her that everything was fine and she was working to get her grades back up. In reality, however, Silei was in the midst of an extremely stressful time in her life that she did not feel she could share with her mother. She believed that her struggles were largely coming from her questioning of the family schedule and cultural traditions that her mom expected her to follow and her anxiety about failing chemistry (something her mom would not understand at all).

At school, Silei could not keep up with her work in her chemistry class. She was already struggling with some of the material of the course, but when

she missed a week of class, she was overwhelmed. She could not recover, failed the final exam of the semester, and just got by with a D. Upon meeting with Ms. Lee, Silei shared that she was used to missing school for Samoan church events (common in Samoan culture), but she had always been able to make up the work upon her return. She shared that she was nervous about her ability to pass chemistry.

Silei was very reserved during her first sessions with Ms. Lee and only focused on the details of her chemistry assignments. Eventually, Silei began to share more about her situation and how hard it was for her to balance her family obligations with her schoolwork. More specifically, Silei shared that she needed more time at home to keep up with her schoolwork, but her weekends were entirely committed to her time at church. Through a series of conversations about this, Silei revealed strong resentment toward her parents and the church for not realizing that she needed time on the weekends to achieve her personal academic goals. She also believed that her time at church kept her from keeping in touch with her friends and participating in many of the extracurricular events at school. When Ms. Lee asked her if she thought that church was a valuable part of her life, Silei replied, "Absolutely—faith is everything."

As their sessions continued, Silei shared more about her sense of faith. She was committed to her Samoan cultural heritage, her connection to her entire family (in the United States and in American Samoa), and her faith that a higher being watched over her. What she was questioning was her commitment to the Samoan church as it was defined in her life. She viewed church attendance as a cultural obligation that she met to please her parents and did not view it as a defining attribute of her faith. Church for her was something that belonged to her parents (and all of their friends who were there every weekend as well) and represented their connection to life in Samoa. She felt distanced from the meaning of many church events because they were all conducted in a language she did not know (Samoan) and were geared toward the elders in the community. Furthermore, she was jealous that her Samoan peers did not have to go to church.

The concerns described were relatively new stressors and questions for Silei. She began to share with Ms. Lee that she was starting to wonder about what gave her meaning in life. She was holding on to both her role in her Samoan family and her school aspirations so tightly that these new questions about them were jolting her sense of who she was as a person.

She continued to meet with Ms. Lee during the spring semester of her junior year. Her anxiety about chemistry increased and she talked about needing more time for schoolwork. She even wondered if she should drop the course. She also expressed that she was preparing to talk to her parents about her role and attendance at church. This was frightening for her because she did not think that her parents would understand her stress about chemistry, her desire to participate in some of the weekend events at school, or her questions about the importance of church every weekend. She feared that they would question her faith.

Case Analysis and Application

Silei's case underscores many critical issues for youth who are facing spiritual issues either as presenting or as indirect concerns in the school setting. Silei is an exceptional young woman. She is overcoming many of the barriers and the negative stereotypes facing her and her Samoan peers as she pursues her academic goals. What is not extraordinary about Silei are the questions she is asking about her spirituality and its role in her life. Especially for culturally diverse youth in urban settings, spirituality is a pivotal part of adolescence because, like Silei, many youth experience vastly different cultural worlds at home and at school (Borrero, Yeh, & Tito, 2009). These distinct cultural worlds force youth to navigate obligations and expectations from adults and institutions who know very little about each other. Youth, then, are in vulnerable positions where they need support to keep their family and school lives manageable. Spirituality and belief in a higher being can be an aspect of life that youth in urban settings need to count on for this support because, as in Silei's case, adults (especially teachers and parents) often do not understand the divergent social and cultural contexts that youth navigate each day (Borrero et al., 2009).

It is this meaning-making role of spirituality (Sink & Richmond, 2004) that Silei is struggling with in the previously described case. Although she is concerned about her chemistry grade, getting into Advanced Placement Physics, getting into college, and becoming a doctor, she is also worried that her mother will not understand any of her anxieties about chemistry and will also disapprove of any questioning of the Samoan church or the time commitment that it requires. Ultimately, however, Silei is like many adolescents in that she is questioning who she is and the meaning of her priorities in life. Her sense of identity as a Samoan American and as a student is wavering. Again, for youth in urban settings (and especially for the children of immigrant parents) the role of spirituality in shaping their sense of cultural identity cannot be overlooked.

Spirituality and School Counseling

Schools and school counselors need to provide opportunities for youth to discuss their spiritual life, its impact on their identity, and its role in being a successful student. In working with Silei, it would be important to consider how spiritual, academic, and cultural identities are both intersecting and in contradiction. Many of her underlying questions about her career and her academic development are embedded within a Samoan cultural framework that must be understood. Ms. Lee should consider focusing on validating Silei's experiences and concerns as a normal part of negotiating cultural and school identities. In addition, depending on Ms. Lee's cultural awareness, she should also consider collaborating with Samoan community members or local agencies that may provide support outside of the school context and after Silei completes her sessions with Ms. Lee. Because the larger issues of

meaning making are central to many youth in schools (Sink & Richmond, 2004), Ms. Lee may consider working in a group setting focused on the themes of identity, culture, and career choice. Moreover, a group format would be consistent with Samoan cultural values that prioritize unity (Borrero et al., 2009) and would provide a level of community support that could help youth like Silei.

The case of Silei demonstrates the important intersection of spirituality and students' identity and psychological well-being in school. Hence, the role of spirituality needs to be more adequately addressed in the practice and research of school counseling (Sink & Richmond, 2004), especially regarding nonmainstream spiritual traditions and cultural backgrounds (Hanna & Green, 2004). The challenge to explore spiritual issues with students partly involves school counselors' concerns with diffusing the boundaries between their personal values and professional work (Lonborg & Bowen, 2004) and inadvertently imposing faith tradition on students because of the power differential in the client-counselor relationship, thus violating the ethical codes of their professional and educational affiliations. Nevertheless, minimizing, diverting, or excluding the discussion of religion and spirituality in counseling relationships would negate an important dimension of human diversity and devalue students' worldview and experiences.

Prevention and intervention programs must consider spiritual beliefs and themes as an essential aspect of youth's lives. For example, it has been found that effective programs for at-risk youth were more likely to (a) adopt a comprehensive approach that addresses varying aspects of an adolescent's development, including religious and spiritual dimensions, rather than focusing on any single element, and (b) to mobilize support from concerned members in the community such as parents, peers, and school counselors (Allen & Coy, 2004; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

Single-case studies also revealed the importance of linking religion and spirituality with intervention. For instance, by incorporating the knowledge of a student's religious and spiritual belief into suicide prevention and exploring other coping mechanisms, a counselor successfully mitigated a student's risk for self-injurious behavior (McWhirter, 2002). In another study, when the counselor realized the centrality of religious faith to the client's academic and personality development, she collaborated with the parents and a church counselor to develop a holistic intervention plan for addressing the student's academic and behavioral problems (Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2008).

School Counselor Training in Spirituality

School counselor training activities must consider the highly relevant literature on multicultural counseling competencies (Sue & Sue, 2007). Specifically, the American School Counselor Association's (2004) *Ethical Standards for School Counselors* calls for professional school counselors to become aware of and attend to students' cultural context of development and implement cultur-

ally appropriate interventions and techniques. Hence, to be successful with culturally diverse youth, conceptualizations of school counseling services must include a focus on spirituality (Sink, 2004).

Student experiences with spirituality should also be considered in the context of the school community and surrounding society. For example, are there community resources that might be valuable to students, such as community agencies or youth groups catering to different cultural groups? Moreover, some school counselors may assume that complete assimilation and assuming an American school identity should be the goal of culturally diverse youth in urban settings; however, it is critical for schools, counselors, and teachers to value student assets and provide opportunities for students to explore and take pride in their native culture (Borrero, 2007; Borrero & Bird, 2009).

As described in the case analysis, school counselors must consider various culturally relevant activities when working with spiritual themes. These interventions may include the use of community agencies, cultural elders, and family collaboration. These connections will help the school counselor understand the familial and community context in which the student is embedded. In addition, many spiritual practices are nonverbal. School counselors may consider creative activities that will foster self-exploration. School counselors may encourage students to do spiritual work beyond the classroom and help students find community resources. Sue and Sue (2007) discussed the importance of counselors being aware of their limitations and willing to make outside referrals to church counselors, youth groups, and community resources if they personally are unable to help the student in a culturally competent manner. Finally, spirituality should be seen as a critical component in the counseling process (Morrison, Clutter, Pritchett, & Demmitt, 2009; Sue & Sue, 2007); therefore, counselors and counselor trainees need to be more familiar and comfortable with spiritual issues in clients.

Future Directions for Urban Schools

As presented in the previously described case of Silei, the relevance of spirituality for culturally diverse youth in urban settings cannot be overlooked by school counselors. As a cultural context, schools must provide support and space for youth to express their spiritual strengths, questions, and aspirations. School counselors can be pivotal providers of such support and space, but as shown through some of our analysis of Ms. Lee's work, they must continually consider the larger cultural contexts that their youth must learn to navigate. For Silei, these cultural contexts were her urban school and her Samoan community. The incongruity between these settings prompted much of her anxiety and questioning. When confronting apparently dissonant cultural worlds, school counselors have a tendency to focus on the differences and deficiency's of cultural traditions that seem to hinder youth's success at school. This "othering" of students and their cultural values at

school contributes to their isolation and feelings of inadequacy (Borrero, Yeh, Cruz, & Suda, 2010, para. 1). Cultural values and worldviews that are inclusive of spiritual identities and themes should be seen as strengths and as possible coping strategies. In particular, students in urban schools face numerous stressors associated with violence, poverty, and crime. Urban schools often have limited financial resources to help youth deal with social and economic factors that may impede their progress in schools. Because of the strong connection between spirituality and well-being, schools may benefit from developing youth's coping strategies.

We can no longer afford to force youth to fit a certain mold (namely, that of an upper-middle-class European American) if they are to succeed in school. Spirituality plays a vital role in this asset approach because it can be a definitive aspect of cultural identity that many youth of color bring to school each day. It helps connect them with their families, their cultural heritage, and their sense of who they are. If spirituality is ignored or seen as a deficit, school counselors are missing out on core values that our youth rely on each day at home and at school.

To effectively work with culturally diverse youth in urban schools, school counselors must understand their own worldview, cultural values, identity, and biases, but they must also view student issues from a developmental point of view (Sink & MacDonald, 1998; Yeh, 2004). School counselors' knowledge and self-awareness is especially influenced by their understanding of issues concerning cultural identity development and meaning making. The topics discussed in this article have many important implications for school counselor education and training. Specifically, counselor education programs need to address the importance of self-awareness, emotional growth, and introspective development (Yeh & Pituc, 2008). In fact, the recent literature indicates that more and more counseling professionals are using spirituality in their practice and interventions (Morrison et al., 2009), and more school counselors may be open to the mental health benefits of spirituality (Sink, 2004).

It is overly ambitious for school counselors to obtain knowledge about every single student's religious and spiritual background. However, school counselors should make every effort not only to learn specific knowledge about students' cultural background but also to integrate this knowledge into the counseling interventions and programs (Yeh & Kwong, 2003; Yeh & Pituc, 2008). Specifically, school counselors should frequently ask themselves, "Whose values are reflected in my assumptions about spirituality and in my counseling approaches?" In terms of knowledge, school counselors need to be aware of widely varied within-group ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural differences and avoid perpetuating stereotypes about groups. Spiritual and cultural knowledge also extends far beyond historical facts and customs and must include values, religious norms, educational norms, cultural identity-making, and histories of oppression.

We believe that although school counselors can be more proactive in their advocacy for spiritual issues, infusing spiritual themes should be a holistic,

programmatically activity (Sink, 2004), not an individual counselor's agenda. School programs must adapt to the changing demographic face of U.S. society, and the school must work collaboratively across teachers, counselors, students, families, and administrators to be responsive to educating the whole child (Sink, 2004). Such comprehensive school counseling programs can focus on educating the whole student (inclusive of spiritual identities) and must incorporate ecological perspectives and expectations from the American School Counselor Association's National Model for school counseling programs (see Sink, 2004, for an excellent description of school programs).

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