

# Measuring Christian Integration in Professional Counseling Practice and the Contributions of Spiritual Formation and Mentoring

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## Abstract

This study surveyed counselors who integrate Christian faith to determine the impact of spiritual formation and mentoring relationships on integration satisfaction and activity. A holistic measure of integrative practice is proposed and used. In a convenience sample of 226 counselors who were Christian, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) found spiritual formation and mentoring relationships significantly contribute to satisfaction ( $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .127$ ) and activity ( $p = .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .041$ ) of integration. A second MANOVA and post hoc tests explore the contribution of spiritual formation and mentoring relationship to 12 integration elements. A *T*-test found mean satisfaction was significantly higher than activity ( $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.7$ ) of integration. Counselor development is discussed in light of study findings with specific recommendations including a focus on spiritual formation.

## Keywords

integration, formation, Christian, satisfaction, activity

## Introduction

Counselors often desire to integrate Christian faith into their clinical practice. Due to sparse research, it is unclear to what extent and in what form this occurs. While integrating has no common prescription, Christians continue to integrate in various forms (Eck, 1996; E. L. Johnson, 2011; Walker et al., 2005). Scholarly dialogue has produced divergent views and lines of research regarding integration that span philosophical frameworks to tangible evidence-based models (Devers, 2013; E. L. Johnson, 2011; Terrell, 2007; Worthington et al., 2013). In this context, a thick dialogue has emerged concerning counselor preparation and the facilitation of integration (e.g., Burton & Nwosu, 2003; M. E. Hall et al., 2009). Student spiritual formation and mentoring relationships have been espoused as integral to developing a capacity to integrate (M. E. Hall et al., 2009; Sorenson et al., 2004; Strawn & Hammer, 2013; Walker et al., 2005). But do spiritual formation and mentoring relationships demonstrate a similar impact on practicing counselors' integration? To answer this question, a holistic measure of integration is required. This study offers one such measure and assesses counselor

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satisfaction and activity of integration in clinical practice. Subsequently, the impact of spiritual formation and prior mentoring relationships on integration are analyzed.

### *Christian counselors and integration*

Scholars have debated if integration requires observable action, or if it is an internal reality for the counselor. For instance, Terrell (2007) suggested integration is explicit simply in the act of loving a client incarnationally. Yet E. L. Johnson (2011) contends this understanding of integration is to perform secular therapy with a profound Christian metaphor applied to its veneer. It is more accurate to suggest a Christian's worldview is an orienting belief system about health and well-being, and therefore integration is embedded in the Christian who counsels (Entwistle, 2009; E. L. Johnson, 2011). This is indicative of a larger debate and general concern with just measuring integration as a set of explicit behaviors. Furthermore, a belief system that accords with God's design also forms what Woltersdorff (1984) called *control beliefs*, which dictate further interpretation and response (cited in Lawrence et al., 2005). Therefore, various authors have suggested how to relate the science of psychology with faith. For example, E. L. Johnson (2010) captured the five views, of which integration is one of the five. The term can also be used as a moniker for the larger discussion of bringing Christian faith into counseling and that is how the term integration is used in this investigation.

Tangible expressions of integration spring forth from internal convictions about the relation of counseling, faith, people, our profession, and more (Greggo, 2016). Moon (1997) outlines specific areas of integrative expression: practical integration (utilizing techniques), personal integration (inner life of the therapist), classical integration/soul care (learning from spiritual forefathers), and contemporary integration (utilizing research and adhering to professional guilds). Gingrich and Worthington (2007) highlight similarly broad categories. Clearly, reducing integration to explicit *Christian techniques* is reductionistic and integration activity contains both internal (thoughts and experience) and external (practical outworking) phenomenon (Devers, 2013; Greggo, 2016; M. E. Hall et al., 2009; Jones, 2006). Walker et al. (2005) have previously reviewed factors that influence counselors' use of explicit integration, finding personal religiousness and clinical training influential. However, they did not investigate *internal* aspects of integration.

### *Counselor training: Spiritual formation and mentoring*

Clinical training literature has identified core factors that facilitate propositional and personal integration learning: (a) counseling knowledge, (b) theological knowledge/appreciation, (c) spiritual formation, and (d) relationally thick contexts for learning (mentoring and supervision) (Greggo, 2016; M. E. Hall et al., 2009; Moon, 2012; Scott, 2018; Sorenson et al., 2004). This literature has generated a comprehensive reflection on the necessary factors to facilitate growth across elements of integration which are reviewed momentarily. An equally complex appraisal of clinical practice has not occurred.

Multiple voices discuss the crucial role of spiritual formation in the co-mingled process of forming a Christian's identity, spirituality, and clinical skill (Greggo, 2016; Moon, 2012; Strawn & Hammer, 2013; Tan, 2001). Spiritual formation includes the degree to which convictions are shaped, that lead to lived expressions of Christian faith and virtue (Greggo, 2016; Roberts, 1997). This occurs as a personal experience of being beloved by God shapes convictions and alters the core beliefs that orient a counselor's engagement with clients (Greggo, 2016; Scott, 2018). In short, spiritual formation alters the counseling expression (integration) of counselors. The question remains whether this integration is seen primarily through internal use of Christian resources or explicitly through counseling actions.

Similarly, mentoring has been recognized in counselor development, with Sorenson et al. (2004) suggesting integration is more *caught* than *taught* and Sites et al. (2009) provide relational examples. A groundbreaking set of studies over 10 years by Sorenson et al. (2004), concludes, "The way

students learn integration is through relational attachment with mentors who model that integration for students personally” (p. 363). Affect-laden bonds between faculty-mentors and students within the environmental context appear to influence the learning of integration (Ripley et al., 2009). Furthermore, supervisors have been identified as key mentors that model and explicitly support integration (Barto, 2018; Walker et al., 2008). Humble mentors who *live and breathe* integration through conceptual and experiential integration appear formative for counselors (M. E. Hall et al., 2009, p. 23; T. W. Hall & Porter, 2004).

### *Satisfaction and activity with holistic integration*

Given a prior focus on explicit integration activity, a holistic consideration of a counselor’s integration is warranted. This study assesses the following six elements of integration: (a) explicit interventions, (b) internal thought and reflection, (c) consistency in lived expression according to core beliefs, (d) learning about integration, (e) the use of a model, and (f) reliance upon intuitive convictions (Gingrich & Worthington, 2007; Greggo, 2016; E. L. Johnson, 2011; McMinn et al., 2009; Moon, 1997). All of these aspects of integration manifest to various degrees and impact counselors’ ability to address the spiritual needs of clients. When client needs are addressed accurately, counselors avoid values conflicts, and reduce internal dissonance that can lead to burnout and distress (Barto, 2018; Holaday et al., 1994; Tan, 2009). However, counselors differ in their satisfaction and activity with each of the elements of integration above. It is hypothesized that these differences relate to spiritual formation and prior mentoring. This study opens up counselors’ offices by assessing to what extent spiritual formation and mentoring relationships contribute to activity and satisfaction with integration across the six elements above (12 total elements as the six are repeated for satisfaction and activity).

### *Research questions and hypotheses*

**Research Question 1:** Do counselors who are Christians significantly differ in their satisfaction and activity with integration in clinical practice according to spiritual formation and mentoring relationship?

**Research Question 2:** To what degree do spiritual formation and mentoring relationship contribute to the elements of integration for activity and satisfaction in clinical practice?

## **Method**

A between-subjects survey design was used to assess the contributions of spiritual formation and mentoring relationship to satisfaction and activity of integration. A purposive convenience sample was used and participants self-identified as Christians and counselors.

### *Procedure*

Calls for participation were emailed directly to a PhD Counselor Education and Supervision cohort at an east coast Christian University, to a Midwestern ACA mailing list, and posted on the CESNET-L listserv. Participants expressed agreement with screening criteria (Christian and counselor) and informed consent. Spiritual formation and mentoring relationship scores were collapsed into thirds by percentile to form Low, Medium, and High level groups.

### *Population and sampling*

Participants were counselors aged 25 to 76 ( $M=44.4$ ,  $SD=11.8$ ). The sample was predominantly White (85%) and spread across 30 states with the largest group in MO ( $n=84$ , 37%). The majority

**Table 1.** Socio-Demographic Data.

Demographic	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Age</b>		
20–34	56	24.8
35–49	90	39.8
50–64	68	30.1
65+	11	4.9
Total	225	99.6
Missing	1	0.4
<b>Counseling experience</b>		
1–10	143	63.3
11–20	56	24.8
21–30	18	8
31+	4	1.8
Total	221	97.8
Missing	5	2.2
<b>Race</b>		
American Indian/Alaska Native	1	0.4
Asian	2	0.9
Black African American	15	6.6
Hispanic/Latino	5	2.2
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2	0.9
White	192	85
Other/Mixed	7	3.1
Total	224	99.1
Missing	2	0.9
<b>Highest education</b>		
MA/MS	179	79.2
PhD	47	20.8
Total	226	100

identified as working in Christian private practice ( $n=61$ , 27%) or undefined private practice ( $n=65$ , 29%), with average length of Christian faith being 33.5 years ( $SD=12$ ). See Table 1 for further socio-demographic details.

## Measures

### *Spiritual formation*

Spiritual formation is yet to have a validated instrument, and an amalgam of key constructs and instruments was utilized to approximate the construct. Total scores for the Duke University Religion Index (DUREL), Religious Belief Salience Scale (RBSS) items, and Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale (DSES) provided an amalgam and continuous predictor variable.

### *DUREL*

The DUREL, originally published in 1997 is a five-item self-report survey designed to be a comprehensive, low-burden measure of religiosity (Koenig & Büssing, 2010). The instrument has been normed on over 7,000 individuals aged 18 to 90 across the United States, and studies of its psychometric properties have found it to be a reliable and valid measure of religiosity (Koenig & Büssing, 2010). Two-week test-retest reliability produced an intra-class correlation coefficient of .91,

internal consistencies between .78 and .91 were found, and convergent validity between the DUREL and other measures were between ( $r=$ ) .71 and .86 (Koenig & Büssing, 2010).

### **RBSS**

The RBSS was adapted from King and Hunt's (1975) Religiosity Salience-Cognition Scale to assess the prominence of religion in daily thought and feelings (Blaine & Crocker, 2007). The original scale uses five items, two were eliminated as they were almost identical to items on the DUREL. The three remaining items offer a face-valid measure of religious belief strength given their similarity in wording to the DUREL and the Religious Orientation Scale created by Allport and Ross (1967). Within Blaine and Crocker's (2007) study, the RBSS provided a Cronbach's alpha of .94.

### **DSES**

The DSES uses 16 self-report items to focus on experiences of connection with transcendence in daily life, including constructs such as awe, gratitude, mercy, and compassionate love (Underwood, 2011). The scale provides accessible language that is less cognitive and attempts to capture convictions through lived experience (Underwood, 2011). Multiple studies found good test-retest reliability with correlations of .85 and above, and Cronbach's alphas of .89 and above (Underwood, 2011).

### ***Mentoring relationship***

Seven items were developed based on theoretical constructs derived primarily from Sorenson et al.'s (2004) work on mentoring relationships and W. B. Johnson et al.'s (2014) meta-review of effective mentoring in medical settings. The items represent wide ranging constructs, for example, mentors creating interpersonal comfort, and delivering specific instruction in technique. This is a theoretical and face-valid tool to assess experiences of mentoring relationships. Items include, *I've had a mentor figure I respected in integrating Christianity and counseling*. Items were scored by asking for percentage of agreement from 1 to 100. Summed scores for the seven items provide a scale predictor variable.

### ***Satisfaction and activity with integration***

Six elements central to the construct of integration were theoretically derived from a review of integration literature and included (a) explicit interventions, (b) internal thought and reflection during sessions, (c) consistency in lived expression according to core beliefs, (d) learning about Christian integration, (e) the use of a model or theory of the relationship between psychology and Christianity, and (f) reliance upon intuitive convictions (Gingrich & Worthington, 2007; Greggo, 2016; E. L. Johnson, 2011; McMinn et al., 2009; Moon, 1997). These constructs were formed into six items that could be measured for both satisfaction and activity. Participants were asked to suggest what percentage of time (0–100) each item represented their counseling practice. For example, to measure satisfaction: *I am \_\_\_% satisfied with . . . My explicit attempts to integrate Christianity in counseling*. A mirror item was used for activity: *Utilizing explicit attempts to integrate Christianity into my practice describes my counseling practice \_\_\_% of the time*. Scores for the items were summed, with a final range of 0 to 600 for satisfaction and activity.

### ***Data analysis***

Of the initial 271 participants, 37 with largely incomplete responses were removed along with three cases that did not meet screening criteria. Four further cases were removed as outliers leaving 226

for analysis. Missing variables on any item were below 1%, except for one item of the mentoring scale ( $n=4$ , 1.7%). Missing data were assessed using Little's MCAR test finding no significance, and 23 scores were computed through IBM SPSS EM algorithm. Analysis of univariate and multivariate outliers led to the removal of four further cases (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Further assumptions were investigated following the recommendations of Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) and no further adjustments were made. To answer the second research question, further data screening was necessary. Analysis of each item from the satisfaction and activity instrument showed skewness (greatest = -1.7) and kurtosis (greatest = 3.3) in six items. Log transformations were not appropriate due to multiple identical scores for items which reduce the number of scores for analysis and confuse interpretation (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). Theoretically, negative skewness is expected as one would expect counselors to generally report that integration satisfaction and activity accords to internal convictions (Greggo, 2016). Transformations were not made and this requires interpretations to be weighed cautiously even while the impact was statistically mitigated as possible (e.g., Pillai's trace). Multivariate outliers were removed, leaving 218 cases for the second analysis. Multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were conducted, interpreting Pillai's trace due to moderate challenges to assumptions. Planned post hoc tests used Scheffe's procedure due to differences in sample sizes and Bonferroni's adjustment was applied.

## Results

A MANOVA with planned post hoc tests analyzed 226 cases for the impact of spiritual formation and mentoring relationship on integration satisfaction and activity. Main effects for spiritual formation,  $F(4, 434) = 15.8, p < .001$ , and mentoring relationship,  $F(4, 434) = 4.6, p = .001$ , on integration satisfaction and activity were significant. Spiritual formation had a large effect size ( $\eta_p^2 = .127$ ) and mentoring relationship had a small to moderate effect size ( $\eta_p^2 = .041$ ). Interaction effects were non-significant. Tests of between-subjects effects found spiritual formation significantly impacted satisfaction,  $F(2, 217) = 7.6, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .066$ , with moderate effect, and activity,  $F(2, 217) = 36.6, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .252$ , with a large effect. Mentoring relationship significantly impacted satisfaction,  $F(2, 217) = 4.92, p = .008, \eta_p^2 = .043$ , with small to moderate effect, and activity,  $F(2, 217) = 8.7, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .074$ , with medium effect. In sum, spiritual formation and mentoring relationship significantly impact satisfaction and activity with integration to differing degrees.

Post hoc pairwise comparisons showed significant differences for levels of spiritual formation and mentoring relationship across satisfaction and activity. For spiritual formation, all group levels differed significantly in activity (effect sizes from  $d = 0.4$ – $1.3$ ), but only the low and high level groups showed moderate significant difference in satisfaction with integration ( $d = 0.65$ ). For mentoring relationship only, low and high level groups showed moderate significant difference for both satisfaction ( $d = 0.5$ ), and activity ( $d = 0.58$ ). Finally, a  $T$ -test found overall means for satisfaction were significantly higher than for activity,  $t(217) = 11.2, p < .001, d = 0.7$ .

To answer the second research question, a second MANOVA with planned post hoc tests used items from the satisfaction and activity scale as separate dependent variables (DVs) (12 total). Main effects for levels of spiritual formation on the 12 satisfaction and activity items was significant ( $p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$ ), but not for mentoring relationship ( $p = .11, \eta_p^2 = .08$ ). Spiritual formation provides a large effect on the 12 integration items (15%) and mentoring provides a moderate effect (8%). Interaction effects were not significant.

Table 2 shows which elements of integration were significantly impacted by spiritual formation and mentoring relationship. This information is reported for mentoring relationship despite its non-significant main effect due to the exploratory nature of the study, and the relevance of mentoring relationships effect size in relation to past research. All large effect sizes were generated by spiritual formation impacting elements of activity of integration (14.3% to 20.6%). Other effect sizes can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Significant Effects of Spiritual Formation and Mentoring Relationship on Integration Constructs by DV.

DV	Integration construct	Spiritual formation				Mentoring relationship			
		<i>F</i>	Sig. <i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$	% exp.	<i>F</i>	Sig. <i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$	% exp.
Satisfaction with:	Explicit Int.	5.2	.007	.047	4.7	–			
	Internal during	7.4	.001	.066	6.6	–			
	Conviction alignment	6.8	.001	.061	6.1	–			
	Time and energy	4.8	.009	.044	4.4	–			
	Model/theory as guide	4	.019	.037	3.7	5.1	.007	.047	4.7
	Intuitive ability to Int.	–				3.9	.022	.036	3.6
Activity of:	Explicit Int.	17.7	<.001	.145 <sup>a</sup>	14.5	3.5	.031	.033	3.3
	Internal during	13.6	<.001	.115 <sup>a</sup>	11.5	7.2	.001	.065	6.5
	Conviction alignment	5.6	.004	.051	5.1	–			
	Time and energy	26.8	<.001	.204 <sup>a</sup>	20.4	6.3	.002	.058	5.8
	Model/theory as guide	17.5	<.001	.143 <sup>a</sup>	14.3	–			
	Intuitive ability to Int.	5	.007	.046	4.6	4.8	.009	.044	4.4

DV: dependent variable.

<sup>a</sup>Denotes large effect.

Results of the post hoc tests that show differences between each level of spiritual formation and mentoring relationship in relation to satisfaction and activity with integration are shown in Table 3.

The only integration element to show significant differences between medium and high level group means for spiritual formation was time and energy put into the activity of learning integration ( $p = .005$ ,  $d = 0.51$ ). The only significant difference between medium and high level group means for mentoring relationship is the complex response to integration activity aligning with convictions ( $p = .043$ ,  $d = 0.4$ ). For this element, mean scores for conviction alignment were *lower* for the medium level group (81) than the low (85.7) or high (87.5) level groups.

## Discussion

This study of counselors who integrate Christian faith in their practice found that the percentage of time counselors are satisfied with their integration was significantly higher than the percentage of time they conducted integrative activity. It could be that questions around satisfaction are perceived as an indicator of Christian fidelity and elicit bias. It is also possible that these findings are exposing the ebb and flow of counselors' integration activity as they attune to clients, leading to higher satisfaction. This aligns with Greggo's (2016) discussion of moment-to-moment decision making, but certainly warrants further investigation.

Spiritual formation and mentoring relationship significantly contribute to counselors' satisfaction and activity with integration. Spiritual formation showed a greater contribution (12%) to the difference in counselors' satisfaction and activity in clinical practice, while mentoring relationship contributes less (4%). This suggests spiritual formation has greater significance in overall integrative counseling practice, particularly for those starting with low spiritual formation. Both spiritual formation and mentoring relationship showed larger contributions (25% and 7.4%, respectively) toward increased activity of integration than satisfaction with integration (6.6% and 4.3%, respectively). Figure 1 illustrates that for counselors with lower spiritual formation, meaningful mentoring relationships may somewhat mitigate decreased satisfaction. Figure 2 illustrates that medium levels of mentoring are enough to significantly raise integration activity for those with lower spiritual formation. Figure 2 also suggests that despite the level of spiritual formation, poor mentoring

**Table 3.** Significant Differences Between Group Levels of Spiritual Formation and Mentoring Relationship on Each Element of Integration for Satisfaction and Activity.

Variable	Integration element	Low group mean	Low-medium p value	Difference in means	d	Low-high p value	Difference in means	d
Spiritual formation Satisfaction	Explicit Int.	67	—	7.5		.007	11	.55
	Internal during	69.3	.047	7.5	.38	<.001	12.7	.67
	Conviction alignment	80.5	—	4.8		.001	9.1	.67
	Time and energy	57.5	—	7.1		.005	13.9	.56
	Model/theory as guide	67	—	6.2		.018	10.9	.47
	Intuitive ability to Int.	74.7	—	3.5		.049	8	.4
	Explicit Int.	32.7	<.001	17.8	.74	<.001	22.7	.91
	Internal during	59.8	.001	13.8	.54	<.001	19.4	.8
	Conviction alignment	79.7	.044	6.3	.38	.005	8.8	.55
	Time and energy	31	<.001	18.4	.7	<.001	33 <sup>a</sup>	1.3
Mentoring relationship Satisfaction	Model/theory as guide	32.7	.001	17.6	.59	<.001	27.4	.96
	Intuitive ability to Int.	68.6	.031	10	.4	.013	11.9	.49
	Explicit Int.	72.4	—	-1.2		—	3.5	
	Internal during	73	—	1.4		—	7	
	Conviction alignment	84.3	—	-0.5		—	2.5	
	Time and energy	60.2	—	2.3		—	9.9	
	Model/theory as guide	71.7	—	4.9		.004	12.5	.56
	Intuitive ability to Int.	74.5	—	2.8		.02	8.9	.47
	Explicit Int.	45.7	—	4.7		.039	10.4	.38
	Internal during	63.3	—	7		.001	14.9	.63
Activity	Conviction alignment	85.7	—	-4.6		—	1.7 <sup>a</sup>	
	Time and energy	39.7	—	6.8		.001	17	.65
	Model/theory as guide	43	—	3.8		—	9.3	
	Intuitive ability to Int.	69.9	—	5.6		.01	12	.49

p values given when significant.

<sup>a</sup>Denotes Sig. difference between medium and higher group.



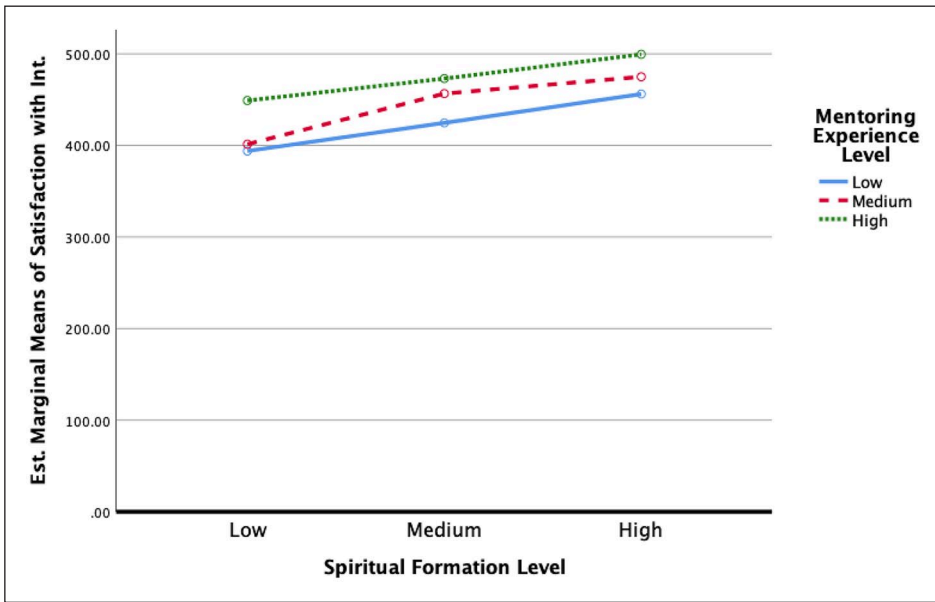


Figure 1. Increase in satisfaction with integration by mentoring relationship and spiritual formation levels.

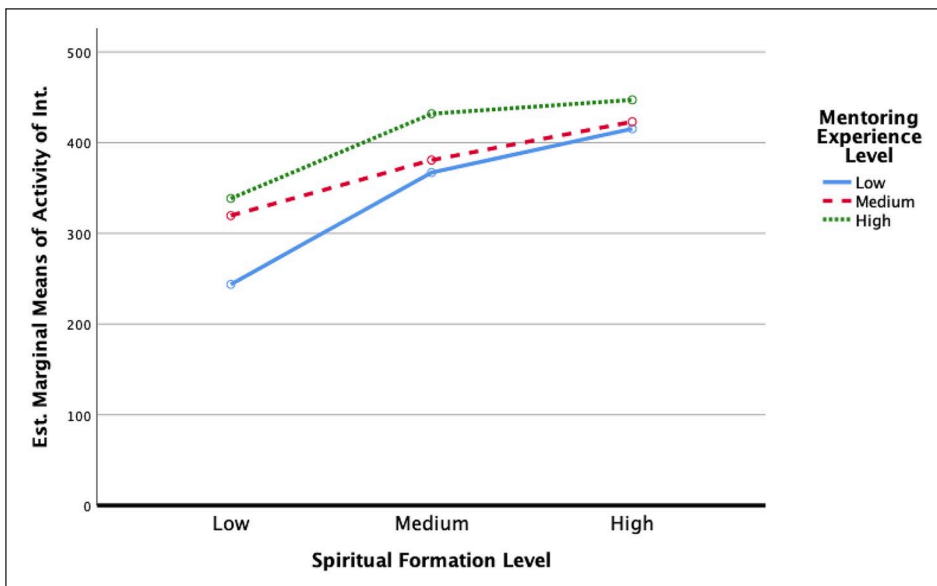


Figure 2. Increase in activity with integration by mentoring relationship and spiritual formation levels.

experiences may increase the risk of lower integration activity. Further investigation of the motivating impact of spiritual formation is warranted.

In sum, counselors wishing to increase their satisfaction with integration do well to pursue spiritual formation and mentoring. However, if one wished to increase their activity, focusing primarily on spiritual formation is suggested. This seemingly contradicts what is espoused in the counselor training literature (e.g., Sorenson et al., 2004). Yet, it makes intuitive sense that mentoring

relationships may be less important to professionals who have completed training, and therefore their integration is maintained as an expression of personal conviction. Nonetheless, these findings confirm the significance of spiritual formation, and to a lesser degree, mentoring relationship.

## **Specific Contributions of Spiritual Formation and Mentoring Relationships**

The data exposed the broad impact of spiritual formation as it contributes to increases in all but one element of integration satisfaction and activity measured. In contrast, mentoring relationship contributes to only half of the items and with lesser effect. Critically, both spiritual formation and mentoring may significantly contribute to the activity of intuitive integration. This contribution of mentoring relationships hints toward a crucial dynamic hidden within the data. Increasing mentoring relationship does not correspond with increases in activity of using a model or theory to guide integration, but it does correspond to moderate increases in intuitive activity, and increases in satisfaction with use of a model/theory. Mentoring may allow for learning from modeling, which may reduce the felt need to actively use one's own model or theory. This aligns with the findings of Sorenson et al. (2004) and Sites et al. (2009) who suggest counselors learn primarily from mentors. One could further surmise that this modeled learning is internalized into convictions in a manner similar to that espoused by Greggo (2016) and Loosemore and Fidler (2019). Further supporting this theory is the moderate effect mentoring relationship contributes to counselors' internal considerations of the impact of their faith, increases in learning activity, and explicit integrative actions in sessions.

Increasing spiritual formation corresponded to large increases in activity of integration, specifically with motivation to learn about integration, thinking about Christian impact during sessions, and using a model or theory to guide explicit interventions. The mean for each of these items for the low spiritual formation group started below the mean for low mentoring relationship group, but ended higher for the high spiritual formation group than the high mentoring relationship group. Possible explanations are that spiritual formation might bring the notions of spiritual competency and/or integrative motivation to mind more regularly, resulting in the increase of activity. Of course, spiritual formation may also increase a counselor's sense of dissonance between non-integrative counseling and their own value system, or it may relate to self-efficacy with spiritual integration. The underlying motivational factors clearly require further exploration. What is clear is that spiritual formation and not mentoring relationship corresponds to increases in satisfaction with integrative practice across multiple elements, and this likely occurs by primarily promoting alignment between a counselor's life, work, and thoughts while they work. This suggests the importance of coherence between identity and techniques for counselors to report satisfaction with integration. It also urges us to consider if coherence and identity concerns related to integration extend to counselors' general satisfaction and resilience in their work. This understanding lends validation to the academic discussion focused on trying to help Christian counselors make sense of their identity, convictions, and practice in a confusing landscape of licensure, ethics, multicultural concerns, and marketplaces (e.g., Greggo, 2016; Hathaway, 2009; Scott, 2018; Sells & Hagedorn, 2016). Finally, these findings provoke the following questions: Does an increase in integration satisfaction precede activity? Or, does an increase in activity precede satisfaction? Or, is the relationship more complex (which is likely)?

## **Implications**

Findings supports prior researchers' assertions that spiritual formation and mentoring relationships are important in clinical training and critically extend this finding for practicing counselors (see Moon, 1997; Scott, 2018; Sorenson et al., 2004; Strawn & Hammer, 2013; Walker et al., 2005, among others). Particularly, this study suggests spiritual formation is critical, as the lowest satisfaction and activity with integration is found in counselors with lower spiritual formation on almost

all indicators. Spiritual formation also increases activity and satisfaction above and beyond scores associated with higher mentoring relationship experience on most items. This is highly directive for the thousands of professionals who have little access to mentors and urges them to engage in their own spiritual formation.

Fostering spiritual formation should be of prime importance to those involved in counselor training, supervision, peer-consultation, and the like, if they desire to inspire dedication to the study and action of Christian integration. It is hypothesized that spiritual formation directly impacts motivation for these activities and this assertion warrants further study. Greggo (2016) suggested Christian counselors are governed by their convictions and this study lends direct support to this contention. Therefore, the author recommends utilizing multiple means to encourage spiritual formation in our counselor peers. Recommended resources include the work of Strawn and Hammer (2013) who outline the use of teaching, mentoring, and experience for the purpose of spiritual formation; Crisp et al. (2019) as they curate a dialogue between psychology and spiritual formation; and Coe's (2000) interaction with church forefathers.

While recognizing the importance of spiritual formation, mentoring must not be overlooked. Mentoring (formal or informal) plays a key role in forming convictions (Greggo, 2016) and helping Christian counselors identify pathways toward active integration (M. E. Hall et al., 2009). Critically, this study found that low mentoring for those with higher spiritual formation may lead them to self-determined discovery, but those lacking in spiritual formation are likely to remain less satisfied and active with integration. Effective mentoring is encouraged with the caveat that settling for average mentoring may inhibit Christian counselors in regard to aligning their integration activity with their convictions. Perhaps moderate mentoring is a distraction, confuses, or worse? If left unaddressed, this could lead to dissonance, and demoralize or inhibit development (Holaday et al., 1994). This is a sobering finding that warrants further investigation. Those in education and training environments would do well to heed these cautions especially as prior research has esteemed mentoring (Sorenson et al., 2004), yet it is reality that multiple pressures in our lives impact our best intentions. It also appears that high spiritual formation motivates some counselors to push through a discrepant mentoring experience and learn their own integrative models and activities, which may mask issues in mentoring. Prioritizing spiritual formation or mentoring relationships need not be a conundrum in counselor training, they can be forged together (Moon, 2012). For example, mentoring relationships could focus in part on spiritual formation; a supervisor (or peer-mentor) might guide supervisees (or peer-mentees) to develop a professional and personal rhythm of spiritual formation and encourage them to maintain this throughout their career.

### *Limitations*

This study has external and ecological validity concerns due to the sampling method and design (Onwuegbuzie, 2000). Participants may have distorted their responses; for example, Christians may fake good on spiritual dimensions. Furthermore, participants self-screened and sampling through online platforms with snowballing opens the survey to unknown populations. The sample was measured against itself, uses self-reports, and is self-referencing, although sample size was adequate.

Measures combined validated instruments and those designed by the researcher. This challenges construct and content validity, and reliability for key variables (mentoring relationship and integration satisfaction and activity). The integration instrument design relied upon theoretical constructs, definitions from the literature, face validity and peer-review, and may have introduced error. The DUREL suffers from ceiling effects with a conservative Christian population, and an amalgam score with other instruments that relied on face validity may have led to overlapping constructs that increase error.

The study does not rule out other reasons for fluctuations of activity and satisfaction in integration (Onwuegbuzie, 2000). Work settings, years of experience, and education all may influence

counselors both positively and negatively in regard to integration. The study itself is limited due to its exploratory nature, and dependence upon both inductive and deductive reasoning. Caution is warranted as quantitative data by itself is rarely sufficient for exploring new lines of inquiry into complex human processes. Conclusions are questionable until they are verified and instrumentation is validated.

### **Further research**

Questions that stimulate further research are posed throughout. First, are the proposed measures of integration and mentoring valid, reliable, and what is the extent of their utility? Second, this study might be repeated with other Christian mental health care providers to confirm or challenge the findings. Third, researchers could investigate intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that generate satisfaction and activity with integration practice. This would help us understand more comprehensively why these variables are increased by spiritual formation and mentoring, and what counselors may need to support development. Particularly, is satisfaction with integration a product of aligning one's spiritual convictions and counseling actions? Fourth, what is the relationship between satisfaction and activity? Does one precede the other in the majority of cases and why? The author's educated guess would suggest activity precedes satisfaction, which may have implications for counselor development. Finally, can we rely on our current systems to continue developing counselors that integrate? Are conferences, licensure, peer-conversations, and personal reading and spiritual life enough, or can we do more to help professionals integrate?

### **Conclusion**

This exploratory study supports assertions in the literature that spiritual formation and mentoring relationships impact integration in clinical practice by studying active counselors. The challenge before leaders in the field is how to facilitate counselors' spiritual formation into the future without losing site of mentoring. How can we move beyond rich academic discussion, and academic contexts to reach more professionals? Can we harness local conferences and gatherings, the potential of media resources, and not lose the gifts mined by our church forefathers? The question is wide open. Finally, new measures of mentoring and integration in clinical practice were suggested that synthesize recent academic discussion into holistic appraisals. The measures appear to have practical utility and warrant critique, study, and validation.

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