SPIRITUALITY AND RACE IN THE COUNSELING PREFERENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ADULTS

By

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of TALITHA PARISH EASTERLY find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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SPIRITUALITY AND RACE IN THE COUNSELING PREFERENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ADULTS

Abstract

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Research on counseling preferences of African American adults was extended to include spirituality as a counseling variable. This study investigated the effects of African American spiritual identification and counselor characteristics (i.e., race and spirituality) on favorability ratings in determining counselor preference among African American adults. Respondents included 205 African American adults who completed the TRIOS Spirituality Subscale (Jones, 2003), an assessment of African American spirituality that is a part of the full TRIOS-C Index, and rated and responded to 4 vignettes describing different counseling conditions using the Counselor Favorability Questionnaire (CFQ; Want, 1995). Data was analyzed using a Repeated Measures MANCOVA for main and interaction effects. This study provides support for similar race counselor preference among African American adults. In consideration of within-group variability, this study found that African American participants with a higher level of spiritual identification expressed a much stronger preference for an African American counselor compared to a Caucasian American counselor. This study did not find a preference based on the counselor variable of spirituality and no support was found for the interactions between race of counselor, spiritual encouragement by counselor, and participants' level of spiritual identification.

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Dedication

This is dedicated to those who were denied, stripped, and/or suffocated by the oppressive snares of racism in their aspirations or pursuit of a doctoral degree, including my father,

John Lee Parish, Doctor of **W.H.I.S.P.E.R.**

(**W**isdom, **H**umility, an **I**ndestructible **S**pirit, **P**ower, **E**xhortation, and **R**esilience).

Also, to my mother, ***Esther Barte Parish***, a shining star who exemplifies great strength, perseverance, power, sacrifice, and love. I love you.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Counseling and mental health services are underutilized among racial and ethnic minority groups in the U.S. Studies continue to show that this is the case with American Indians, Asian Americans, African Americans, and Latino/Hispanic Americans (Cheung & Snowden, 1990; Chun, Enomoto, & Sue, 1996; F.T.L. Leong, 1994; Macias & Morales, 2000). Among those minority persons who have utilized mental health services, over half of them terminated prematurely, many not returning after the initial session (S. Sue, Allen, & Conaway, 1975; S. Sue, Fujino, Hu, Takeuchi, & Zane, 1991; S. Sue & McKinney, 1974; S. Sue, McKinney, Allen, & Hall, 1974; S. Sue, Zane & Young, 1994).

Research on the utilization of counseling and mental health services for African American populations is significantly lacking, and a critical examination of the existing research suggests very mixed findings. In a group of studies in college populations, African American college students demonstrated trends indicating they were less likely to use counseling services than white college students (Cheatham et al., 1987; Webster & Fretz, 1978). In contrast, in a later study exploring community mental health services for racial minority groups, findings indicated that African Americans utilized community mental health services at significantly elevated levels relative to other racial groups (Sue et al., 1991). In yet another study, general demographic analyses of African Americans presented a mixed pattern of under, equal, and elevated utilization of mental health services (Snowden, 1999). However, when controlling for demographic characteristics (i.e., socioeconomic status, gender) and diagnoses, a pattern of underutilization was found. While these findings are few and variable, results consistently suggest premature termination (Meyer, 1998; Sue & McKinney, 1974; S. Sue et al., 1974), high

drop out rates (Meyer, 1998), and less positive treatment outcomes for African Americans (Sue et al., 1991).

The research reviewed indicates that African Americans do not necessarily have fewer or different types of mental health concerns than other groups. However, they have difficulty in their experiences with counselors and in managing their concerns throughout the counseling process. From a sociohistorical perspective, Black-White relationships in the United States often lead to distrust among African American communities for things that are of the majority culture, including the field of "traditional psychology," a predominantly Eurocentric based practice. Counseling may be referenced as a component of an institutional racialized system. In particular, researchers have noted that White counselors may be seen as a representation of "the establishment" (Atkinson, 1983; Okonji, Ososkie & Pulos, 1996; Pope-Davis & Dings, 1995). In this apprehension of "the establishment," Whaley (2001) demonstrates that the notion of cultural mistrust is a significant factor in mental health services use within the African American community. With these sociohistorical factors as an inherent anchor, researchers are exploring various counseling process factors that may effect African Americans' utilization of counseling services.

Researchers have explored multiple factors that might affect the experiences of counseling and mental health services of African Americans. One area of research has examined counselor characteristics that are preferred by African American clients and how these characteristics may help to resolve the problems referred to above in counseling settings. Regarding these counselor preferences, African Americans have a general tendency to prefer an ethnically similar counselor to an ethnically dissimilar counselor (Atkinson, Furlong, & Poston, 1986). Beyond this preference, however, an even stronger preference was found for counselor

variables reflecting more education, similar attitudes, older age, and similar personality (Atkinson, Furlong, & Poston, 1986). In a replication and extension of this study, Ponterotto, Alexander, and Hinkston (1988) produced the same five variables for counselor preference indicated above. However, only "similar attitude and value" ranked above similar race. In a meta-analysis of counselor ratings, Coleman, Wampold, and Casali (1995) again found that ethnic minority clients have a tendency to prefer an ethnically similar counselor, but suggested that these preferences are moderated by within-group factors (e.g., cultural affiliation) and the research methods used. In addition, it was postulated that preference for an ethnically similar counselor may be a function of inferences related to attitudes, values, and skills.

In relation to preferences for similar attitudes and values, it is imperative to consider the relevance of attitudes and values commonly held within African American populations. McDavis, Parker, and Parker (1995) inferred that having a better understanding of African Americans entails acknowledging and exploring the background of the two main distinguishing features within the African American population: the family and the church. The features of both the family and the church have strong cultural and historical meanings, and warrant adequate attention and research. While the African American family has received considerable focus in psychological research as a vital topic (Billingsley, 1990; Boyd-Franklin, 1989), the Black church has not.

Counseling psychology as a discipline has taken a fairly unidimensional approach to looking at the African American church, exploring the institution only in the context of a counselor being available to provide services at a Black church (Morris & Robinson, 1996; Queener & Martin, 2001). Even beyond the spiritual expression of the Black church, the field has failed to incorporate the deeper and more encompassing African centered facet of spirituality

within the context of counseling and mental health agencies. Jones (2003) proposes that spirituality is the major component of African American attitudes, beliefs, and values founded in an African legacy.

In the counselor preference literature on African Americans, no studies on spirituality have yet been published. Preference for a counselor with a similar religion has been found to be a mid-level preference, ranking eighth out of sixteen total characteristics (Atkinson, Furlong & Poston, 1986; Ponterotto, Alexander & Hinkston, 1988). However, spirituality may be better encompassed by the counselor characteristic of "similar attitude and value," given its deeply rooted embeddedness in African American beliefs. Preference for a counselor with similar attitudes and values has ranked highest among African American populations (Atkinson, Furlong, & Poston, 1986; Ponterotto, Alexander, & Hinkston, 1988). Therefore, ignoring spirituality would become a disservice to our profession's endeavors to promote cultural competence.

Two studies particularly relevant to the present study have addressed the essential topic of spirituality and its expression. Belaire and Young (2000) found no influence of spirituality on counselor preference among undergraduate students. However, Belaire and Young did not specify a particular population or infuse elements of African American spirituality. Given the significance of spirituality for the African American population, this study sought to find a stronger connection between spirituality and counselor preference. A more recent dissertation by Campbell-Burden (2002) explored the links among spirituality, Afrocentricity, and psychology in an African American women's church group. Campbell-Burden found a preference for an African American female Christian psychologist. When this preference was unavailable, group members expressed that they would seek a Christian psychologist regardless of race or gender.

The present study infused similar components of spirituality into individual counseling descriptions, and included a more in-depth assessment of spirituality.

Purpose of the Study

This study helped to fill gaps in the literature, and built upon existing work that addresses African American spirituality in counseling research. This study analyzed the effects of spirituality and race on favorability ratings used to infer counselor preference. This study is categorized as a counselor preference study, although it is difficult to distinguish from related research on counselor perception. For example, use of vignettes is more common in perception studies. However, the written vignettes utilized in the present study are not actual counseling scripts such as those presented in audio tapes or video recordings in many perception methods. In addition, this study did not involve perception of actual counseling process. Rather, favorability ratings for counselors were obtained using brief counselor vignettes to fit the counselor preference mold defined by Coleman, Wampold, Casali (1995) as an assessment of preference based on descriptors (i.e., race and spirituality).

This study comprised a unique quality even as a counselor preference study. Many counselor preference studies have utilized a forced choice or paired comparison design. Although studies with these designs were referenced in the literature reviewed, this study did not use a forced choice or paired comparison design. This study specifically addressed counselor preference with question #4 (i.e. “Would you prefer to see this counselor if you had a problem?”) of the Counselor Favorability Questionnaire (Want, 1995), which closely mirrors the Counselor Preference Scale (Parham & Helms, 1981). The purpose of this study was to examine the effect African American spiritual identification and counselor characteristics of race and spirituality

had on evaluations of counselor favorability. Favorability ratings were then used to infer counselor preferences among African American adults.

In summary, this study built upon existing literature in various ways. First, the present study enriched the counselor preference research, helping to address the problem of less positive counseling experiences among African Americans. Second, as recommended by Coleman, Wampold, and Casali (1995), the present study examined spirituality as a counseling style variable in comparison to similar race. More specifically, spirituality was classified as an attitude or value characteristic based upon the foundation that having a counselor with similar attitudes and values is preferred over similar counselor race (Ponterotto, Alexander, & Hinkston, 1988). Finally, the present study examined within-group differences (i.e., spiritual identification), which are often ignored in counselor preference studies with specific racial groups.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Related Literature

Introduction

This chapter reviews theoretical, historical and empirical foundations related to the unique values, beliefs, attitudes and worldviews upheld in the African American community and described within the field of African American psychology. Relevant literature portraying the mental health views, practices, and preferences of African Americans is also highlighted. This chapter explores the relationship between spirituality and mental health. Additionally, this chapter emphasizes the overall significance of spirituality in African American culture, and its' relationship to cultural competence within the profession.

African American Psychology

The field of African American psychology grew out of the premise that there exists a particular psychological perspective that is uniquely African American. Nobles (1986) ascertained that in its most authentic nature, psychology was conceptualized as the study of the soul or spirit by ancient Africans, and dates back to ancient Kemet (African-Egyptian) civilizations. Nobles noted that African-Egyptian psychology, defined as the study of the soul or spirit, was borrowed, translated and popularized in Western psychology in Europe and America. The ancient Egyptian roots of psychology now bear little resemblance to Western psychology, based on a modern day White European-American conception of the study of the mind (Akbar, 1994). This conception has been established as a "normative standard of behavior against which all other cultural groups would be measured" (Parham, White, & Ajamu, 1999, p.3). It is for these reasons that exploration from an African-centered worldview was integral as a frame of reference for this research.

African American Culture and Theoretical Worldview

Culture is often equated with variables like food, music, clothing, and artifacts, which are representations or manifestations of culture, but not culture itself (Parham, White, & Ajamu, 1999). Culture was characterized by Jones (2003) as: "(a) *psychological* (i.e., patterns of thinking, feeling, behaving, and valuing); (b) *symbolic* (i.e., representations of psychologically meaningful patterns); (c) *historical* (i.e., cultural elements are selectively derived and transmitted over time); and (d) *dynamic,* which refers to cultural elements that both shape meaning and are transformed by events and actions" (p. 223). Jones' view, that contemporary African American culture is based in African origins, followed the Afrocentric ideology placing African values and ideas at the center of African peoples' world (Mazama, 2001). A driving challenge of Afrocentricity, according to Mazama, is the "ability to systematically displace European ways of thinking, being, feeling, and so forth and consciously replace them with ways that are germane to our own African cultural experience" (p.388). Furthermore, Mazama argued that in efforts towards "victorious consciousness," the European voice is viewed as just one of many and not given value above any others. Additionally, Afrocentrism emphasizes that it is only one way to view the world, without imposing universality (Asante, 1988).

TRIOS (Jones, 2003)

TRIOS, an acronym for time, rhythm, improvisation, orality, and spirituality, is a psychological theory developed by Jones (2003). This theory is consistent with an Afrocentic worldview, which provides a "cultural foundation of an African legacy for African Americans" (p. 217). TRIOS consists of attitudes, beliefs and values about time, rhythm, improvisation, orality, and spirituality. TRIOS emerged for Jones as a way of organizing observations and

associations in African American culture with substantial and compelling cultural data. Jones' (2003) descriptions of each component of TRIOS follow.

Time. Time is often separated into past, present, and future. As suggested by Mbiti (1970a), no word for future exists in Swahili, only for the past (Zamani) and present (Sasa). This implies that a present-past time orientation may be central in African cultural systems (Jones, 2003). In addition, Jones described that "for Africans, time was slow moving and practical, *deriving from* tasks and behaviors *not prescribing them*" (p. 226).

Rhythm. Rhythm is described as complex, recurring patterns of behavior set in time, which give shape, energy, and meaning to psychological experience. It is also a response internally to the external worlds' rhythmic patterns.

Improvisation. Similar to rhythm, improvisation is a way to connect the internal and external worlds. Improvisation provides a means of control and structure within interactions of people. It provides an organizational principle that is goal oriented and expressive. It serves a social integrative function, as well as a personally expressive one enabling creative solutions to problems. Additionally, expression of one's soul and spirit is an act of improvisation.

Orality. Orality is a broad concept, which in an oral tradition encompasses story telling, naming, singing, drumming, and the important lessons of cultural transmission and socialization. The Word (Nommo) is highlighted as the life-force, and the important meanings and values of African culture are spoken or sung, not written. The oral tradition serves as a link connecting the present to the past, with organizing principles and cultural values handed down through stories and parables. The life of a people is communicated by stories that report major events, parables or truths to live by, and important values and lessons which serve as guides for living. Orality gives meaning to life and binds people together in common understandings and humanity.

Spirituality. Spirituality may be the most central aspect of African origins. Jones adopted Jahn's (1961) idea that all things can be assigned to one of four categories: (a) Muntu, which refers to god, spirits, and human beings; (b) Kintu, which are forces that do not act on their own but under the control of Muntu; (c) Hantu, a representation of time and space; and (d) Kuntu, which includes modalities such as beauty and laughter. All four categories are based on the concept of spirituality in that they are all forces. These forces are beyond human beings, but act with effect in the world of human beings. In a sense, causality is determined by multiple forces, and not all causes are material or knowable.

TRIOS, therefore, is a worldview that informs and reflects culture. Spirituality was highlighted by Jones as a central aspect of TRIOS. Thus, African American spirituality was explored as a separate and central concept and assessed using the TRIOS Spirituality subscale.

Conceptualizing Spirituality

Defining spirituality is complex and involves integrating intricate components towards a foundational conceptualization. In the Merriam-Webster's dictionary, spirituality is defined as "the quality or state of being spiritual" along with a "sensitivity or attachment to religious values." Spiritual is further defined as being "of, relating to, consisting of, or affecting the spirit" – "a supernatural being or essence". From a linguistic basis, the root word *spiritus* in Latin means "the breath of life." This meaning is consistent with the Christian Bible, in the Creation text of the Old Testament:

> And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the *breath of life*; and man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7, New King James Version)

As noted by Mattis (2000), this passage refers to the active presence of the divine in the lives of humans. From this broad ideology, a number of researchers have developed intellectual formulations in conceptualizing spirituality.

For example, related concepts noted by Chandler, Holden, and Kolander (1992) include the terms spiritual experience (i.e., any experience of transcendence resulting in greater knowledge and love), spiritual transformation (i.e., stable expression of a new level or stage characterized by greater knowledge and love), spiritual development (i.e., incorporating a spiritual experience towards transformation), and spiritual wellness (i.e., balanced openness or pursuit of spiritual development).

Distinguishing Between Spirituality and Religiosity

Another related term, religiosity, has been used as a synonym of spirituality in the literature. This interchange of terms suggests that they refer to similar ideas. Although they are overlapping constructs, there are important distinctions between them (Mattis, 2000). More recently, a number of researchers explored religiosity and spirituality simultaneously, confirming their related, yet distinctive nature (Constantine, Lewis, Conner & Sanchez, 2000; Constantine, Wilton, Gainor, & Lewis, 2002; Mattis, 2000, 2002; Wallace & Bergeman, 2002). Mattis (2002) explored key distinctions between spirituality and religiosity particular to an African American population. Some key distinctions found included spirituality as the internalization and expression of key values, whereas religiosity involved adhering to particular beliefs and ritual practices related to God. In addition, religion is associated more closely with doctrines and rituals while spirituality is defined as a relational phenomenon with God, self, and/or transcendent forces including nature. Finally, religious values and practices serve as a means of expression towards achieving spirituality, positioned as the ultimate outcome.

Throughout the literature there are also a number of other phrases for spirituality that are not as explicitly researched as "religiosity," but often related conceptually. Examples include: attitudes and behaviors (Jones, 2003); attitudes and values (Atkinson et al., 1986; Ponterotto et al., 1988); core value (Tart, 1975; Mattis, 2002); forces (Jones, 2003; Randolph & Banks, 1993; Tart, 1975); higher power (Brewers, 1979; Jones, 2003); in relation to God (Elison, 1983; Hodge & Williams, 2002; Jones, 2003); essence of life and death (Billingsley, 1990; Mazama, 2001); meaning, purpose, mission, and direction (Chatters, 1999; Hodge & Williams, 2002; Tart, 1975); and relational, interconnectedness (Chatters, 1999; Mazama, 2001). Such varied associations may complicate establishing a unique conceptualization of spirituality. However, Mattis (2002) encouraged a multidimensional approach to defining spirituality.

Multidimensional Conceptualization

In my own multidimensional conceptualization of spirituality, I pulled from broad foundational definitions, grappled with the biblical truths, and navigated through the intellectual formulations in the research literature, all while incorporating my own experience of spirituality. As spirituality is reviewed, defined, and fully conceptualized from varied perspectives, it may appear confusing. Indeed, MacDonald (2000) affirmed that conceptual models of spirituality present a largely confusing picture with research falling under a fragmented and sometimes unrelated span of work. Similarly, Simoni, Martone, and Kerwin (2002) suggested that the construct of spirituality is diffuse and often misunderstood. However, that is ultimately the unique nature of the Spirit illustrated by the Greek word for spirit -"wind":

> The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. (John 3:8a, New King James Version).

Defining African American Spirituality in This Study

In her own research on definitions of spirituality, Mattis (2000) encouraged researchers to explore the relevance of spirituality definitions specifically for African Americans. Although there are a myriad of findings regarding the salience of spirituality in African American groups, there is no agreed upon definition of spirituality (Brome et al., 2000). Spirituality was explored within the realm of African American spirituality as a central aspect informed by an African origin and denoted as a force, higher power, faith in God, and core social value.

Early on, Berdyaev (1939) noted that meanings of spirituality evolve with the ebb and flow of historical and cultural contexts. The Black Church, considered a form of spiritual expression, was also explored as a means of connecting historical and cultural contexts for African American spirituality. The spiritual expression of the Black Church allows for a "sense of support, fellowship and belonging" (Pargament et al., 1983) and allows "individuals to search deep within themselves for resources of self-affirmation and compassion" (Murphy, 1994). In a historical sense, African American spirituality was viewed as a way for one to face and transcend the realities of life and death (Billingsley, 1990).

In the present study, the TRIOS Spirituality subscale was used to operationalize or measure spirituality. An advantage of this measure was that it incorporated numerous facets of spirituality, following the multidimensional nature of my own conceptualization. The subscale items combined represented a belief in an unknowable, powerful and influential higher power (i.e., force, God) that can strengthen, direct and help one deal through prayer. Jones' (2003) all encompassing definition of spirituality as "a belief in a higher power as a functional element of one's daily life" was adopted for this study. In addition, the definition for spirituality was informed by two aspects included within the TRIOS spirituality subscale. The first aspect

involved the role of spirituality in helping one cope with daily life. The second aspect related to the "powerful and unknown forces that intervene to determine life events, in leaving one with confidence that living and doing one's best is what one has a responsibility to do" (p.237). While the TRIOS model provided a foundational definition in this study, African American spirituality is explored more explicitly as well.

The concept of spirituality, as the most central aspect of African origin, was fully supported in the Afrocentric view presented by Mazama (2001). Mazama argued that the "essence of life and therefore of human beings is spiritual" (p.399). This did not deny the material aspect of life, but emphasized that in its simplest terms, "what remains is not the appearance of things, but the indivisible essence of life that permeates all that is, the spirit - the ultimate oneness with nature, the fundamental interconnectedness of all things" (p.399). Parham (2005) accentuated the importance of spirit in relation to the psychology and education of African American children. Integrating spiritual and physical principles may pose a great challenge in an environment dictated by rationalism and positivism, but the power of the spiritual must be infused. God is customarily viewed as the creator and sustainer of the physical world, closely embedded in the lives of humans (Mbiti, 1970b; Parrinder, 1993). Mazama, in keeping with an Afrocentric paradigm, activated our consciousness with "emancipatory knowledge," to open our hearts to the spiritual, deemed of utmost importance and deserving of its due place (2001).

Spirituality has been found to be more salient among African Americans than other populations around the globe (Hodge & Williams, 2002). In a study by Jagers and Smith (1996) with the Spirituality Scale, African American college students reported higher levels of spirituality than European American students. Researchers have emphasized the significant

value of spirituality within the African American community, whose members have a propensity to view themselves as more spiritual than do members of majority groups (Blaine & Crocker, 1995; Walker & Dixon, 2002). Spirituality has been expressed through a number of venues and applications. The Black Church has served as such a corporate venue and was explored as a particular expression of spirituality to highlight the socio-historical basis of African American spirituality.

Spiritual Expression: The Black Church.

In 1997, Dyson and associates explored the meaning of spirituality in a comprehensive literature review. Findings indicated that religious faith and practices may be considered spiritual beliefs or expressions. Morris and Robinson (1996) indicated that among African American populations, religious practice permeates every aspect of ones life. This is further supported by Chatters, Taylor, and Lincoln's (1999) contention that many African Americans tend to express their spirituality through high levels of religious participation. Joanides (1997) and Schiele (2000) described spirituality and religion as a "holistic unity," which is particularly found among African American peoples. Religious beliefs and practices are integral components of the daily lives of many African Americans with the Black Church playing a major role in spiritual expression.

Religion for African Americans has historically developed through the Black Church. In response to racial discrimination and prejudice within churches, African Americans developed a Christian tradition distinct in meanings, beliefs and practices (Morris & Robinson, 1996). Murphy (1994) defined the Black Church as a "general term for many diverse ways of expressing the religious experience of African Americans in the United States. 'The Black

Church' has been strictly defined as the shared institutions among Protestant Christian denominations that have been developed and administrated by African Americans" (p. 145). The Black Church is the oldest and most influential institution founded, maintained, and controlled by Black people (Sanders, 2002). The Black church means a great deal to African Americans in a variety of ways. One such definition, which emphasized a sense of community, entails "the degree to which members feel a sense of support, fellowship and belonging to the congregation; the extent to which they interact and cooperate with each other, both inside and outside of the congregation" (Pargament et al., 1983, p.357).

Murphy (1994) described the Black Church as being united by the "religious insight" available to those persons who are Black in the United States. African Americans can tap into a distinct religious perspective that involves two sources; one that is more obvious and relevant to all African Americans and another one that is more subtle and may affect many but not all. Many African Americans are aware of the religious insight that permeates their "near-universal experience of racial exclusion and prejudice in the United States" (p. 146). This commonality in society's attempts to hinder and marginalize African Americans has challenged these individuals to search deep within themselves for resources of self-affirmation and compassion. African Americans have endured struggle, which has allowed them to develop a "unique and profound understanding of God and his works" (p. 146). The more subtle connection to this religious tradition originated in spirituality rooted in ancestors brought over from Africa as previously described from an Afrocentric worldview. The Black Church is both "black" in its self-determined wisdom arising from its exclusion from White America, and "'African American' in its development of a spirituality born in Africa" (p. 146). The Black Church seems to provide a structural representation supporting an Afrocentric worldview rooted in Africa.

Through the historical struggles of slavery and oppression, African Americans have developed unique forms of coping and resilience rooted in religious foundations and African American spirituality. African American spirituality was characterized as a deep-seated, intrinsic part of the lived experience that enables one to face and transcend the realities of life and death (Billingsley, 1990).

Race and Counseling

Counselor Preference Among African American Samples

In reviewing research on counselor preference, there were a few ways to divide up the literature. Most of these distinctions were presented in a review by Atkinson (1983) and in a meta-analysis by Coleman, Wampold, and Casali (1995). These two works provided a starting point in exploration of counselor preference literature with African American samples.

Atkinson (1983) reviewed ethnic similarity research in counseling psychology. Most of the research involved African American samples. Atkinson indicated that a controversy exists regarding the role that ethnic similarity plays in the counseling process. Advocates of "intracultural counseling" argued that ethnically similar counselors will better understand, serve, and help resolve client concerns. In contrast, "cross-cultural" proponents implied that a culturally sensitive counselor should have the necessary skill to transcend differences of culture in the same way that they are able to transcend differences in economics, gender, religion, and education. Atkinson included in his review studies with counselor-client ethnic similarity as an independent variable that did not include a "psychotic" population and were published in the following journals: *The Counseling Psychologist, Journal of Counseling Psychology, Journal of Clinical and Consulting Psychology*, and *Counselor Education and Supervision*. Atkinson separated these articles into four categories of dependent variables: (a) preference for counselor

race; (b) counselor biases and how they may affect counseling; (c) counseling process variables; and (d) counseling outcome variables. Studies of counselor bias (b) were not further considered because of their irrelevance to the purpose of this study. For category (a), preference for counselor race, there existed a fairly consistent preference for similar race counselor among Black client samples. Counseling process studies in category (c) were inconclusive and did not provide evidence that ethnically similar dyads are more effective. Finally, studies of outcomes measures in category (d) were found to have mixed and inconclusive results. Overall, the greatest effect for ethnic similarity was found in the preference literature included in category (a).

Coleman, Wampold, and Casali (1995) categorized ethnic minorities' ratings of counselors differently than in Atkinson's (1983) earlier review. Coleman and his colleagues distinguished between the "perception paradigm" and "preference paradigm." The perception paradigm probed participants for judgments about the counselors' competency or credibility, (i.e., perceptions of the counselor's process or style), whereas the preference paradigm requested participants state a counselor preference based on race or other specific counseling variable such as warmth or empathy (Coleman et al., 1995). According to the review of Coleman, Wampold, and Casali, preference paradigm studies produced more consistent results.

Although a number of counselor characteristics were researched in counselor preference studies (i.e., race, age, sex, experience level, type of problem, racial self designation, and racial identity), spirituality was not a counselor preference variable prior to this study. The counselor preference literature was reviewed in chronological detail; this review provided concrete examples of the past literature and led into the exploration of spirituality as a significant variable related to counselor preference and race.

Chronological Review. Beginning in the 1960's, the importance of race as a variable in the counseling process became a consideration for counseling researchers and practitioners. Phillips (1960) studied weekly Black student/White counselor dyads over a semester and concluded that White counselors could not adequately reach beyond racial barriers with Black students and thus were ineffective. In 1967, after a brief, but comprehensive review of literature of counseling preferences, Rosen asserted that little research existed involving the race of counselors, and encouraged researchers to explore this variable. Within the following decade, numerous findings emerged showing a preference among Black clients for a Black counselor (Banks, Berenson & Carkhuff, 1967; Harrison, 1975; Stranges & Riccio, 1970). Banks, Berenson, and Carkhuff (1967) studied eight African descent undergraduates and compared one inexperienced counselor of African descent with three white counselors of varying levels of experience and training. Responses to initial clinical interviews indicated that all of the participants would return to see the African American counselor, whereas two-thirds of the respondents reported that they would not return for a second session with a white counselor. Stranges and Riccio (1970) also found that African descent participants overwhelmingly preferred African American counselors and white participants preferred white counselors.

Race was not the only variable surveyed in counselor preference studies. Researchers expanded their counselor preference variables to include other factors such as age and sex (Bernstein, Wade & Hofmann, 1987; Martin & Thomas, 1982), level of experience (Bernstein, Wade & Hofmann, 1987; Cimbolic, 1972), type of problem (Abbott, Tollefson, & McDermott, 1982; Gilsdorf, 1978; Martin & Thomas, 1982), and racial self-designation and identity (Jackson & Kirschner, 1973; Parham & Helms, 1981). Cimbolic (1972) concluded that having an experienced counselor was preferred above a counselor of similar race. Participants rated four

male counselors (i.e., two black counselors, one experienced and one inexperienced, and two White counselors with the same experience distinctions) on the dimensions of effectiveness, likability, and skill. In a particularly small sample of 17 Black freshman students, Cimbolic found that the pair of black counselors was not rated significantly higher than the pair of white counselors. Rather, the pair of experienced counselors was rated significantly higher than the inexperienced counselors on all three counselor dimensions.

In the work of Bernstein, Wade, and Hofmann (1987), participants were Black and White college students ranging in age from 18 to 68. They reviewed nine specific problem types under the broader topics of vocational and academic concerns, social and interpersonal concerns, intimate and interpersonal concerns, and personal concerns. Each problem was paired with a counselor characteristic (i.e., race, sex, age, and level of experience) and a likert scale was used by participants to rate counselor preferences. Bernstein, Wade, and Hofmann concluded that experience level was rated as more important than race, gender or age of the counselor. This result, however, was determined by comparing frequencies and percentages overall, rather than specifics for participants' race or type of concern. Black counselors were preferred by 65% of the participants overall, supporting previous findings that Black participants prefer similar race counselors.

Gilsdorf (1978) utilized picture sets to explore preferences for Mexican-American, Black, and White counselors with two problem situations: administrative and personal. The participants were male community and junior college students on a campus with an ethnic mix that was approximately 45 percent Mexican-American, 33 percent Black, and 20 percent White. Gilsdorf found that Black students had a significantly higher mean preference for the administrative situation with a Black counselor than did the Mexican-American students, but not the White

students. In the personal situation, Black students reported a significantly higher preference for the Black counselor than did the Mexican-American or white students. Gilsdorf concluded that Black students showed a strong ethnic preference, particularly in dealing with more personal concerns.

Martin and Thomas (1982) also explored the type of problem being processed in counseling, along with age and gender, but only with Black college students on a predominantly Black campus. Black professionals of varying ages and genders were shown in a picture set and participants were asked to check the letter of the picture to which they would go for counseling if they had the particular educational, personal, and vocational problems listed. The researchers reported mixed results for counselor gender with females tending to select female counselors for most problems, but with male preferences varying mostly by problem. Both male and female participants preferred counselors in the 35 to 50 age range most often. Martin and Thomas suggested that counseling service agencies can best meet the needs of clients by allowing and encouraging them to note their preferences.

Jackson and Kirschner (1973) noted the importance of preferences as well, but argued that within-group variation should be considered when exploring preferences in African American populations. They studied Black students on a predominantly Black college campus and examined counselor preferences regarding sex, age, socioeconomic background, and race. Racial self-designations of Black (78.26%), colored (1.03%), Afro-American (7.16%), and Negro (13.55%) were used to distinguish within-group variations. The designation of “colored” was dropped from the analyses because it was rarely selected. In response to questionnaire statements (e.g., “I would prefer to see a counselor of the same race as me”), Jackson and Kirschner found that the Black and Afro-American subgroups preferred a counselor of the same

race significantly more than the Negro subgroup. None of the other characteristics resulted in significant within-group variation, and all three subgroups reported a clear preference for both similar socioeconomic status and age. Based on this work, within-group variation seems to be an important consideration, particularly in counselor preferences by race.

Parham and Helms (1981) distinguished racial self-designation from racial identity in their own study. Racial self-designation is defined as one's racial group membership, whereas racial identity refers to a person's beliefs or attitudes regarding her or his own race. Using attitudes associated with Cross' (1971) nigrescence model, Parham and Helms explored the influence of Black students' racial identity attitudes on counselor preferences by race. Ninety-two Black college students were asked to choose their preferences of counselor characteristics (i.e., sex, socioeconomic status, and race: Black or White) across 10 problem situations. Racial self-designation was not significantly related to counselor preferences by race, but racial identity was. Black counselors were preferred by participants with encounter attitudes, while participants with pre-encounter attitudes preferred White counselors and not Black counselors. Parham and Helms determined that the results for racial identity were congruent with predictions based on Cross' model. They also concluded that the mixed findings regarding racial preferences in previous studies might be due to the failure to take into account racial identity attitudes. Parham and Helms also suggested that a relevant Afrocentric frame of reference be incorporated into future research.

In reviewing ethnic similarity research, Atkinson (1983) affirmed that ethnic similarity was not consistently found to be the most significant variable, but that it does have a strong effect in preference studies. Among eleven studies involving Black participants, seven found a same race preference (Jackson & Kirschner, 1973; Pinchot, Riccio & Peters, 1975; Proctor &

Rosen, 1981; Riccio & Barnes, 1973; Stranges & Riccio, 1970; Thompson & Cimbolic, 1978; Wolkon, Moriwaki, & Williams, 1973), while three studies produced no race preference effect (Backner, 1970; Gambosa, Tosi, & Riccio, 1976; Gordon & Grantham, 1979). As detailed above, the results of one study varied depending on the racial identity of participants (Parham & Helms, 1981).

Although it was well established that having an ethnically similar counselor was important for Black participants, Atkinson, Furlong, and Poston (1986) explored just how important racial preferences were for African American participants in comparison to a number of other counselor characteristics. The counselor characteristics reviewed were race, sex, religion, educational background, socioeconomic background, attitudes and values, personality, and age. Atkinson, Furlong, and Poston revealed that the characteristics of more education, similar attitudes and values, older, and similar personality were all chosen in that order as more important than similar race as a preference. In a replication and extension of this study, Ponterotto, Alexander, and Hinkston (1988) examined a geographically different sample of African American students using a more established measure of within-group differences. They found that only similar attitudes and values of the counselor ranked above a preference for ethnic similarity.

Ponterotto, Alexander, and Hinkston (1988) also discussed the limits of past research on preference for counselor race. They highlighted the importance of developing studies that use a disconfirmatory hypothesis-testing approach to research. Such a strategy tests alternative hypotheses that seek to disprove the original hypothesis (Hayden, 1987). Ponterotto, Alexander, and Hinkston suggested that the relative importance of an ethnically similar counselor preference

can be determined by simultaneously investigating variables other than race (e.g., socioeconomic status, religion, age, and personality).

Recent Research. A review of the literature reveals limited and less frequent counselor preference studies with African American participants overall. The more recent research has included variables of racial identity attitudes and demographic characteristics (Helms & Carter, 1991), cultural mistrust (Nickerson, Helms, & Terrell, 1994), style of counseling (Okonji, Ososkie & Pulos, 1996), level of acculturation (Prieto, McNeill, Walls, & Gomez, 2001), treatment length and improvement (Erdur, Rude, & Baron, 2003), and racial consciousness of the counselor (Want, Parham, Baker, & Sherman, 2004).

Nickerson, Helms and Terrell (1994) utilized Black college students to explore the relationships among cultural mistrust of Whites, participant gender, opinions about mental illness, and attitudes toward seeking psychological help. They emphasized that exploration of within-group differences among Black populations has contributed to a greater understanding of counselor preferences and attitudes about seeking therapy. In turn, they suggested that cultural mistrust, as an indicator of an African Americans' orientation towards White persons, might also be a factor influencing counselor preferences and utilization. Nickerson, Helms and Terrell combined the Cultural Mistrust Inventory (CMI), the Opinions about Mental Illness Scale (OMI), the Help-Seeking Attitude Scale (HSAS), the Reid-Gundlach Social Service Satisfaction Scale (R-GSSS), and a demographics questionnaire in a research packet that was randomly ordered with the exception of the CMI, which was last in each packet. The extent of participants' mistrust of White persons significantly predicted their help-seeking attitudes, while participant gender and opinions about mental illness did not consistently predict such attitudes.

It may be inferred that within-group differences beyond racial identity may predict African American attitudes and are essential to include in such studies.

Want, Parham, Baker, and Sherman (2004) more recently explored the favorability of various simulated counselors as a function of the racial identity attitudes of potential clients. The researchers emphasized that even when a counselor and client match by race, they may not share similar attitudes. Participants were 98 African American students from three southern California colleges. Participants were given eight written vignettes (four distractor stimuli, and four experimental stimuli). In two of the four experimental vignettes, the counselors were depicted as Black or African American and Caucasian for the other two. In addition, one of each pair was depicted as high or low in racial consciousness. The validity of the vignettes was determined by 10 judges in clinical or counseling psychology, who identified the level (high or low) of racial consciousness. Participants were administered the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (Short Form; RIAS-B), Counselor Favorability Questionnaire (CFQ), and a demographics questionnaire in research packets, along with the eight randomized vignettes. The results of their study indicated that Black counselors were rated more favorably than the White counselors, and counselors with high racial consciousness were rated more favorably than counselors with low racial consciousness. A significant interaction effect was also found. The Black counselor, high in racial consciousness, was rated the highest in favorability. In addition, the White counselor who was depicted as high in racial consciousness was rated as high as a Black counselor with low racial consciousness. Regarding the racial identity attitudes of the participants, Want and colleagues found that participants with stronger Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, or Internalization attitudes showed high favorability only toward the Black, racially conscious counselor. Thus, a preference was established for Black over White counselors.

Okonji, Ososkie and Pulos (1996) investigated the effect of counseling style (i.e., reality therapy versus person-centered therapy) and counselor race (African American male counselor and European American male counselor) on perceived counselor effectiveness. They sampled a group of African American male students at a Job Corps facility that provided vocational, academic and social skills training to youth. The participants were given the Counselor Effectiveness Rating Scale (CERS) and Perception of Counselor Questionnaire (PCQ) in evaluating four color videotapes in which counseling style and counselor race were varied. One African American male client was featured in all four videotapes. Participants had a more positive perception of African American counselors than of European American counselors, and of reality therapy than person-centered therapy. Counseling style was found to matter more for the African American counselors. In addition, counselor race had a greater effect than counseling style. Okonji, Ososkie and Pulos acknowledged limitations in the generalizability of their findings given their sample, but encouraged researchers to focus on how counseling style and counselor perceptions can be connected to promote more effective counseling outcomes for ethnic minority populations.

Erdur, Rude, and Baron (2003) examined counseling outcomes by utilizing data from university and college counseling centers over a two-year period. They targeted the counseling outcomes of length of treatment and degree of symptom improvement for African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian clients as a function of therapist race. The data set was collected by The Research Consortium of Counseling Psychological Services in Higher Education and the sample included 973 clients and 194 therapists. The Outcome Questionnaire 45 (OQ-45), a measure of subjective distress was completed by clients at intake and immediately prior to each counseling session as a measure of degree of symptom improvement. A change score was

calculated by subtracting the OQ-45 score at the time of intake from the score before termination. In analyses of combined ethnically similar and dissimilar dyads, no significant symptoms effects were found. However, a trend toward greater improvement occurred with ethnically dissimilar dyads. Erdur, Rude, and Baron attributed this trend to the greater distress originally reported on the OQ-45 at intake in ethnically dissimilar dyads. In addition, no significant racial differences were found for length of treatment. Erdur, Rude, and Baron highlighted that ethnic match does not guarantee cultural match, and noted that other variables such as similar attitudes, value, and personality may be more important.

In summary, the within-group variable of ethnicity was an important factor throughout the chronological review of counselor preference. However, in the more recent literature reviewed, researchers acknowledged the importance of exploring within-group variables beyond ethnic identity which included cultural mistrust (Nickerson, Helms, & Terrell, 1994), style of counseling (Okonji, Ososkie & Pulos, 1996), level of acculturation (Prieto, McNeill, Walls, & Gomez, 2001), treatment length and improvement (Erdur, Rude, & Baron, 2003), and racial consciousness of the counselor (Want, Parham, Baker, & Sherman, 2004).

Critique and Limitations of Preference Literature. While counselor preference research has been conducted from various perspectives, there were some common strands of critique and limitations intrinsic to much of the preference literature data. Atkinson (1983) highlighted that inherent limitations exist in survey or analogue research (Atkinson, 1983). Because the research did not involve actual counseling dyads, the conclusions drawn may not have related to actual counseling processes. For example, vignettes were viewed as unable to adequately generalize to actual counseling dyads (Want, Parham, Baker & Sherman, 2004). Coleman, Wampold, and Casali (1995) also raised concern with the validity of simple conclusions about the decisions

ethnic minority participants made about counselors. Due to the preference study design, limited conclusions carried over to counseling effectiveness (Atkinson, 1983). Researchers may inaccurately attempt to make assumptions about counseling processes or outcomes based on counselor preferences.

Another related limitation to be considered in analogue and survey research is the inability to capture all the extraneous factors that lead to participants' ratings and assessment. Atkinson (1983) highlighted that both prior counseling experience, and a particular type of problem a participant had in mind while conducting ratings and assessment may play a major factor in counselor preferences often not accounted for in conclusions.

Even though limitations are an inevitable consideration in research, preference studies produced consistent results for selection of an ethnically similar counselor (Coleman, Wampold & Casali, 1995), which made for a stronger foundation of comparison between race and other important factors (i.e., spirituality). Preference studies provided rich conclusions based on the variable of ethnicity (Atkinson and Wampold, 1993). However, as noted earlier, a limitation exists in focusing on a single variable (ethnicity), while other important variables are minimized and at times ignored (Coleman, Wampold, & Casali, 1995).

Numerous researchers noted the necessity of broadening the variables studied by incorporating within-group differences among participants, particularly when researching the link between race and preference (Atkinson, 1983; Atkinson, Furlong, & Poston, 1986; Coleman, Wampold, & Casali, 1995; Parham & Helms, 1981; Ponterotto, Alexander, & Hinkston, 1988; Want, Parham, Baker, & Sherman, 2004). For example, Coleman, Wampold, & Casali (1995) found that cultural affiliation, the degree to which an individual is affiliated with his or her cultural group, was a moderating variable in counselor preferences (Coleman, Wampold, &

Casali, 1995). Spirituality is a cultural attitude that is considered a major component of African American worldview, expression, affiliation, and health. Although this variable has been ignored in previous counselor preference studies, spirituality has been explored within health research as a viable means of coping.

Combining Race, Spirituality and Counseling

African American Spirituality and Coping

In many ways spirituality and spiritual expression within the church mirror the environment provided by counselors and mental health providers. Researchers have conducted studies that demonstrate a strong connection between coping and African American spirituality (Brome et al., 2000; Constantine et al., 2000; El-Khoury et al., 2004; Mattis, 2000, 2002; Mattis & Jagers, 2001).

Brome, Owens, Allen, and Vevaina (2000) found that higher levels of spirituality benefited mental health, family attitudes, and satisfaction with social support in a sample of African American women recovering from substance abuse. Mattis (2000, 2002) also focused on African American women's religion and spirituality as a means of coping, and provided a relational framework for the study of spirituality and spiritual expression (Mattis & Jagers, 2001). El-Khoury and colleagues (2004), in a study of battered women, found that African American women were significantly more likely than Caucasian women to use prayer as a coping strategy. Finally, spirituality was found to be a significant predictor of coping with perceived discrimination (Scott, 2003). Walker and Dixon (2002) studied spirituality and academic performance in African American and European American college students. Spirituality was broadly defined as a belief system, while religion was generally viewed as formal church affiliation. A Spirituality Scale was developed that identified levels of spiritual

beliefs and religious participation. African American students reported higher levels of spirituality than the European American students did. Ninety-nine percent of the African Americans sampled reported a belief in God.

Black churches also served as a means of coping by offering a safe place for exploring and developing an identity and a sense of worth (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Paris, 1985). The African American church has long been involved in the teaching of effective coping strategies for day-to-day problems (Moore, 1991; Paris, 1985). Partnerships between the counseling profession and the Black Church have proven to be beneficial in the field of mental health (Brashears & Roberts, 2001; McRae, Thompson & Cooper, 1999; Morris & Robinson, 1996; Queener & Martin, 2001). McRae, Thompson and Cooper found that the Black Church service provides a dynamic group process with elements that parallel the group psychotherapy process. In addition, Morris and Robinson (1996) noted that client references to the importance of church or God could be relevant to their overall value system and the counseling process as a whole.

Just as the Black Church has been found to serve as an established form of coping, a small handful of researchers have investigated these spiritual foundations in recovery, resilience, and medical care in African American individuals. In a pilot study that explored the integration of spirituality into medical care for African American men coping with prostate cancer, Bowie, Sydnor and Granot (2003) defined spirituality as a relationship with God or higher power. Utilizing this definition, these researchers found that on a scale of 1 – 10, respondents averaged 8.86 in their rating of how much their recovery depends on their spirituality. In addition, Bowie and colleagues found that 64.3% of respondents had shared their spirituality with their physician and 57.1% wished for their physician and clergy to be in contact during the process of medical treatment. This demonstrates the importance of spirituality in the lives of these individuals.

Scott (2003) explored the relationship between cultural orientation and coping by reviewing perceived discrimination with African American youth. The study included a three-part multidimensional definition of spirituality, a belief that God is in all things, a religious way of life and practices, and a belief in a higher power and supreme force. Participants were asked to rate three cultural orientation vignettes on spirituality, affect, and communalism, which indicated the degree to which actors in the vignettes were like themselves. All dimensions of spirituality correlated significantly with one another, but the dimension reflecting a spiritual way of life and practices was rated significantly higher in within-group comparisons. This finding establishes an integrated link between varying dimensions of spirituality while highlighting the significance of a spiritual way of life and practices in coping. According to Newlin, Knafl, and Melkus (2002), "culturally competent health care for African Americans requires sensitivity to the spirituality component of their culture" (p. 58). Spirituality played an important role as a coping strategy to help deal with stressors (Sue & Sue, 2003). For many African Americans, mental health and prevention of mental illness has roots in their spiritual life and available forms of spiritual expression.

Significance of the Study

Two studies were found that suggest the need and significance for the present study. Belaire and Young (2000), using written descriptions, sought to find the influence of spirituality on counselor selection with a population of sixty-three undergraduate students. Participants were given the Human Spirituality Scale (HSS), the Counselor Description Questionnaire (CDQ) and a demographics sheet. The CDQ was used to solicit participants' response to a statement on spirituality. The CDQ requested that participants select one of two counselors with whom they would prefer to work and provide a rationale for their selection. The two counselors varied in

whether they work with issues of spirituality. Through quantitative analyses, no statistically significant counselor preference effect was found. However, qualitative results suggested that participants preferred a counselor described as having expertise in working with spiritual issues. The purposes and methodology of Belaire and Youngs' work were similar to the present study. The notable difference involved the participants sampled and cultural context reviewed. Belaire and Young did not specify the ethnic background of their sample, and race was not a factor in their analyses. Further, spirituality was not addressed in the context of African American culture. In addition, their study was done using a sample of convenience, undergraduate college students, and their findings may not generalize to other non-similar populations.

More recently, Campbell-Burden (2002) attempted to bridge the gap between Christian spirituality, Afrocentricity, and psychology in her qualitative dissertation. She focused on a counseling group within the context of a Black church. In interviews, she found that spirituality was the defining characteristic for counselor selection among the African American female sample. Campbell-Burden also found that group members preferred an African American female Christian psychologist. If this selection was not available, they would seek out a Christian psychologist regardless of race or gender.

Although, Campbell-Burden's research was based on an Afrocentric worldview and African American spiritual expression, findings from the study are limited as the research was strictly qualitative and focused on a counseling group within the Black church. In contrast, the present study differed in its focus on individual counseling vignettes within the context of a community or university counseling agency. In addition, this study included the sampling of both male and female participants, in quantitative based analyses with a supplemental qualitative component.

An imperative need exists for research incorporating spirituality into psychological practice and training, particularly given the significance of spirituality within an African American population. If practitioners, trainers, and researchers are to envelop cultural competence, spirituality cannot be ignored in African American populations, and within the field of psychology as a whole.

Research Question and Hypotheses

This study explored whether spirituality had an effect on counselor favorability ratings and overall counselor preference, and consequently, whether spirituality as a counselor variable had a stronger effect than counselor race. This question was examined using a research design with conditions that varied (a) the race of the counselor (African American and Caucasian American), (b) spiritual encouragement by counselor, and (c) the spirituality level of the participants. Furthermore, the research design involved independent assessments of (1) the participants' level of spirituality (Spirituality subscale), and (2) counselor favorability and counselor preference (Counselor Favorability Questionnaire, CFQ) based on counselor vignettes varied by counselor race and spirituality inclusion.

Given this research design, the original hypotheses were:

- *Hypothesis 1*: Counselor favorability ratings of the vignettes describing an African American counselor will be significantly higher than favorability ratings of the vignettes describing a Caucasian American counselor.
- *Hypothesis 2*: Counselor favorability ratings of the vignettes for the counselors encouraging exploration of spirituality will be significantly higher than favorability ratings of the vignettes with counselors that did not encourage exploration of spirituality.

- *Hypothesis 3*: There will be no difference in counselor favorability ratings between the higher and lower level spirituality participants.
- *Hypothesis 4*: Respondents with a higher level of spiritual identification, as compared to those with a lower level of spiritual identification, will have significantly higher counselor favorability ratings of the vignettes describing an African American counselor.
- *Hypothesis 5:* Respondents with a higher level of spiritual identification, as compared to those with a lower level of spiritual identification, will have significantly higher counselor favorability ratings of the vignettes for the counselor encouraging exploration of spirituality.
- *Hypothesis 6*: (a) Respondents with a higher level of spiritual identification will provide the highest counselor favorability ratings for the African American counselor who encourages exploration of spirituality, followed by the Caucasian American counselor who encourages exploration of spirituality, the African American counselor who does not encourage exploration of spirituality, and the Caucasian American counselor who does not encourage exploration of spirituality, in that order; (b) Respondents with a lower level of spiritual identification will provide the highest counselor favorability ratings for the African American counselor who does not encourage exploration of spirituality, followed by the African American counselor who encourages exploration of spirituality, the Caucasian American counselor who encourages exploration of spirituality, and the Caucasian American counselor who does not encourage exploration of spirituality, in that order.

CHAPTER THREE

Method

Participants

A total of 227 questionnaires were received during the data collection period. Of the returned questionnaires, five participants were younger than 18 years of age, eight participants did not self identify as African American/Black or of African descent, and nine questionnaires were incomplete. These 22 questionnaires were not included in any level of analysis. Thus, a total of 205 self-identified African American/Black or African descent adults were included as full participants in this study.

Participants included 122 women and 83 men, and ranged in age from 18 to 82 years (M = 30.99, SD = 12.81). One hundred and sixty-five participants self-identified as African American/Black exclusively, twelve selected the African identification, and the remaining twenty-eight participants reported a Black biracial or Black multiracial identity by either selecting more than one ethnicity or writing in their ethnic make-up (all the biracial and multiracial participants denoted African American/Black in addition to other designated ethnicities).

One hundred and nine participants (53.2%) selected “Christian” as their religious affiliation. The other participants specified their religious affiliation as follows: Pentecostal – 19; Baptist – 14; Apostolic – 10; Catholic – 10; Protestant – 6; Methodist – 5; Church of Christ – 3; Muslim – 3; Buddhist -1; and Presbyterian – 1. “None” was denoted under religious

affiliation by 12 participants, six participants selected “other,” and six participants did not provide a response for religious affiliation. One hundred and thirteen (55.1%) participants reported weekly participation in religious attendance, with 42 (20.5%) attending monthly, 28 (13.7%) attending on holidays, and five (2.4%) never having attended any religious meeting.

There was a wide range of education level for participants. Forty-three (21.0%) participants reported having a graduate degree and 23 (11.2%) identified as having “some graduate degree” work. Forty-nine participants (23.9%) noted having a college degree as their highest level of education, with the majority of participants, 79 (38.5%), having “some college” work completed. Seven participants (3.4%) reported a high school diploma or equivalent as their highest level of education and four (2.0%) participants did not select anything listed for education level.

In order to gather a greater range in representation of African American adults, participants were recruited from a variety of community and university settings through student organizations, course enrollment, church enrollment, and community organizations.

Instruments

TRIOS Spirituality Subscale (Jones, 2003)

The combined TRIOS-C index provides an assessment of the dimensions of time, rhythm, improvisation, orality, and spirituality related to African American attitudes and behaviors. The combined index includes 29 items using a 7-point Likert scale to gather responses between –3 “not at all true of me” to +3 “very true of me,” with the “0” point labeled “not relevant to me.” Jones (2003) reported an alpha reliability of .69 for the composite index.

The five TRIOS dimensions can also function as separate factors. To test my hypotheses, analysis was performed on the TRIOS spirituality subscale. The spirituality subscale, which consists of nine items, has the highest reliability coefficient with an alpha of .88. Representative sample items follow:

- Belief in God or a greater power helps me deal with the circumstances of my life.
- In most every aspect of my life, I am strengthened by my spiritual beliefs.
- I believe that the world is full of powerful and unknowable forces.
- There are reasons beyond our understanding for everything that happens.

Counselor Favorability Questionnaire (CFQ; Want, 1995)

The CFQ is a four-item questionnaire modeled after a questionnaire originally developed by Helms and Simons (1977). The 5-point Likert scale ranges from 1 (definitely not) to 5 (definitely). The questions are as follows:

- 1) Do you feel there are topics you could not discuss with this counselor?
- 2) Do you feel this counselor could understand your problem?
- 3) Would you feel uncomfortable talking with this counselor?
- 4) Would you prefer to see this counselor if you had a problem?

Question #1 and #3 were reverse coded in obtaining a sum for these four questions that make up a single score, which ranges from 4 (least favorable) to 20 (most favorable).

Open-Ended Response

Participants provided an explanation of their ratings of the counselor vignettes with written responses to an open-ended question similar to those used by Belaire and Young (2000). The question asked participants to describe the counselor characteristics that accounted for the participants' ratings on each vignette.

Demographics Sheet

General information regarding the participants' age, sex, ethnic classification, college classification, socioeconomic classification, current marital, occupational and income status, and prior counseling experience was gathered. See Appendix A for a copy of the demographics sheet.

*Vignette*s

Vignettes have been adapted from a similar study related to influences of spirituality on counselor preference (Belaire & Young, 2000). The counselor descriptions appeared as follows:

> I am a licensed and certified African American counselor who has practiced individual, couples and group counseling for seven years. My practice includes treatment of both adults and children. In therapy, I focus on providing a supportive environment that encourages clients to explore their personal beliefs, growth, and spirituality.
>
> I am a licensed and certified Caucasian American counselor who has practiced individual, couples and group counseling for seven years. My practice includes treatment of both adults and children. In therapy, focus on providing a supportive environment that encourages clients to explore their personal beliefs, growth, and spirituality.
>
> I am a licensed and certified African American counselor who has been in practice for seven years. My practice involves treating individual adults and children, along with counseling couples and leading groups. In therapy, I focus on providing a supportive and

encouraging environment focused on changing patterns, setting goals, and personal growth.

I am a licensed and certified Caucasian American counselor who has been in practice for seven years. My practice involves treating individual adults and children, along with counseling couples and leading groups. In therapy, I focus on providing a supportive and encouraging environment focused on changing patterns, setting goals, and personal growth.

Procedures

Participants were recruited to volunteer in a study about counselor preference. Each participant received a survey packet containing the following order of material: two consent forms with brief instructions (one copy for their files and another for the researcher), a demographics sheet, four vignettes describing different counseling conditions each with the Counselor Favorability Questionnaire (CFQ; Want, 1995), an open-ended request for explanations of ratings, and the TRIOS-C Index (Jones, 2003). Participants rated each of four vignettes on counselor favorability to assess counselor preferences in these various situations. The order of the four vignettes varied among participants to counterbalance the distribution.

Design and Data Analysis

Data was compiled from survey packets including demographic variables, a TRIOS subscale score on spirituality, four ratings of the CFQ based on the four types of counselors and open-ended responses for preferences. A repeated measures Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) was used to analyze the data for main and interaction effects. The key factors included in this repeated measures multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) design were the dependent variables (i.e., Counselor Favorability Ratings), two within-subjects variables (i.e., Counselor Race and Counselor Spirituality), recoded between-subjects variable

(e.g., spirituality level of participants), and covariate(s) (e.g., age). The within-subjects variables were labeled Counselor Race (2 levels – Caucasian American, African American), and Counselor Spirituality (2 levels –encourages spiritual exploration, does not encourage spiritual exploration), as reflected in the four vignettes. Each participant rated Counselor Favorability for each of the four conditions (See Appendix B). Qualitative analysis involved review of open-ended responses for themes related to counselor preferences.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Determining participants' spirituality level

The variable for participants' spirituality level was included as a means of exploring within-group variation among the African American adult participants' sampled. This variable was conceptually determined using the TRIOS Spirituality Subscale. Recall that the TRIOS Spirituality Subscale is a nine-item Likert scale with values from -3 (very untrue) to 3 (very true). Scale scores can range from -27 to 27. Consistent with the literature identifying the centrality of spirituality for African Americans, the sample scored in a moderately high to high level of spirituality overall, with a mean of 19.23 on the TRIOS Spirituality Subscale. The score distribution was split at the sum scale score of 18, which corresponds to an item mean of 2, indicating a "moderately true" value. The "low" and "high" labels from the original hypotheses were switched to "lower" and "higher" to more accurately reflect the difference between the two subgroups. The data were recoded into two variables: lower-level spirituality participants and higher-level spirituality participants. The lower-level spirituality participants' (N = 70) scores ranged from -18 to 18, while the higher-level spirituality participants' (N = 135) scores ranged from 19 to 27.

Determining covariates

A correlation matrix (see Table 1) and repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were computed to help determine what variables to include as covariates. The demographic variables reviewed included age, gender, education level, income level, employment status, religious attendance, religious affiliation, and prior counseling experience.

After careful review of demographic variables, only age was determined as meaningful for inclusion as a covariate in the final analyses. Thirty-one surveys were not used due to missing data with age as a covariate, resulting in the total number of participants in analyses being reduced to 174 participants. This modification resulted in the following numbers of lower level spirituality participants (N = 59) and higher level spirituality participants (N = 115) respectively.

Table 1

Intercorrelations for Determining Covariates

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	--							
2. Age	.03	--						
3. Education	.05	.30**	--					
3. Income	-.02	.26*	.08	--				
4. Af Am NS	.02	-.15*	-.04	-.10	--			
5. Af Am S	.03	-.11	-.05	-.11	.67**	--		
6. Cau Am NS	.06	-.07	-.07	.03	.20**	.26**	--	
7. Cau Am S	.04	-.01	-.03	-.02	.12	.24**	.71**	--

Note. Af Am NS = African American No Spirituality. Af Am S = African American Spirituality. Cau Am NS = Caucasian American No Spirituality. Cau Am S = Caucasian American Spirituality. *p < .05. **p < .01.

In reviewing the parameter estimates, age was found to have a significant effect (p = .04) on favorability ratings for the vignette describing an African American counselor who did not

encourage spiritual exploration. Younger participants tended to rate the vignette for the African American counselor who did not encourage spiritual exploration higher (b = -.04, SE = .02). In contrast, age was not found to have a significant effect on the ratings of the other three vignettes (i.e., White No Spirituality Counselor (p = .62); White Spirituality Counselor (p = .75); and African American Spirituality Counselor (p = .10)).

Test of Hypotheses

The six hypotheses were tested using a repeated measures multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA). The p value of .05 or less was set in determining significance for each hypothesis tested.

Hypothesis 1: Favorability ratings based on counselor race. Hypothesis 1 examined whether ratings on the Counselor Favorability Questionnaire (CFQ) were significantly different for Counselor Race. It was predicted that counselor favorability ratings of the vignettes describing an African American counselor would be significantly higher than favorability ratings of the Caucasian American counselor vignettes. Two of the four vignettes presented an African American counselor, while the remaining two vignettes described a Caucasian American counselor. The results of the repeated measures MANCOVA (Wilk's Lambda = .81, F (1, 171) = 40.56, p = .00; partial eta squared = .48) found a significant difference with quite a large effect on Counselor Favorability ratings between the African American counselor vignettes and the Caucasian American counselor vignettes. Participants' favorability ratings for the African American counselor vignettes (mean = 15.19) were significantly higher than favorability ratings for the Caucasian American counselor vignettes (mean = 11.65). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2: Favorability ratings based on spiritual encouragement by counselor. Hypothesis 2 predicted that counselor favorability ratings on vignettes for the counselors encouraging exploration of spirituality would be significantly higher than favorability ratings on the vignettes with counselors who did not encourage exploration of spirituality. Although favorability ratings on vignettes for the counselors encouraging exploration of spirituality (mean = 13.49) differed slightly in the expected direction from favorability ratings on vignettes for the counselors who did not encourage exploration of spirituality (mean = 13.36), no significant difference was found (Wilk's Lambda = 1.00, F (1, 171) = .51, p = .48). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Hypothesis 3: Counselor Favorability Ratings by Participants' Spirituality Level. Hypothesis 3 predicted that ratings on the Counselor Favorability Questionnaire (CFQ) would not be significantly different based on participants' level of spirituality. The analysis revealed that there was no significant difference (F (1, 171) = .47, p = .49) on overall favorability ratings between participants with lower levels of spirituality (mean = 13.552) and those with higher levels of spirituality (mean = 13.30). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4: Interaction - Counselor Race x Participants' Spirituality Level. Hypothesis 4 examined whether ratings on the Counselor Favorability Questionnaire (CFQ) would be significantly impacted by the interactions between the counselors' race and participants' spirituality level. It was predicted that respondents with a higher level of spiritual identification would have significantly higher counselor favorability ratings on vignettes describing an African American counselor than those respondents with a lower level of spiritual identification, independent of spiritual encouragement by counselor. Using Wilk's Lambda statistics, there was a significant interaction effect found between participants' spirituality level

and counselor race on favorability ratings (Wilk's Lambda = .97, F (1, 171) = 6.11, p = .01; partial eta squared = .02). The lower level spirituality participants rated the African American counselor (mean = 14.96) more favorably than the Caucasian American counselor (mean = 12.15), and this preference for the African American counselor (mean = 15.43) over the Caucasian American counselor (mean = 11.16) was even stronger for those high in spirituality. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

Hypothesis 5: Interaction –Spiritual Encouragement by Counselor x Participants' Spirituality Level. Hypothesis 5 examined whether ratings on the Counselor Favorability Questionnaire (CFQ) would be significantly impacted by the interactions between the spiritual encouragement by counselor and participants' spirituality level. It was predicted that respondents with a higher level of spiritual identification would have significantly higher counselor favorability ratings on vignettes for the counselor encouraging exploration of spirituality than those respondents with a lower level of spiritual identification, independent of counselor race. No significant interaction effect was found for hypothesis 5 (Wilk's Lambda = 1.00, F (1, 171) = .134, p = .71). Therefore, Hypothesis 5 was not supported.

Hypothesis 6: Interaction – Counselor Race x Counselor Spiritual Encouragement x Participants' Level of Spirituality. Hypothesis 6 asserted that the ratings on the Counselor Favorability Questionnaire (CFQ) would be significantly different for the interaction between race of counselor, spiritual encouragement by counselor, and participants' spirituality. It was predicted that respondents with a higher level of spiritual identification would provide the highest counselor favorability ratings on the vignette for the African American counselor who encourages exploration of spirituality, followed by the vignette for the Caucasian American counselor who encourages exploration of spirituality, then followed by the vignette for the

African American counselor who does not encourage exploration of spirituality, and last for the vignette for the Caucasian American counselor who does not encourage exploration of spirituality. It was further predicted that respondents with a lower level of spiritual identification would provide the highest counselor favorability ratings on the vignette for the African American counselor who does not encourage exploration of spirituality, followed by the vignette for the African American counselor who encourages exploration of spirituality, then followed by the vignette for the Caucasian American counselor who encourages exploration of spirituality, and last for the vignette for the Caucasian American counselor who does not encourage exploration of spirituality. Mean scores and standard deviations for each of these conditions are shown in Table 2. Hypothesis 6 was not supported, as there was no three-way interaction effect (Wilk's Lambda = 1.00, F (1, 171) = .18, p = .68); no further analysis was necessary to interpret the interactions.

Table 2

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Counselor Favorability Questionnaire Ratings

	Counselor Favorability Questionnaire Ratings							
	Af Am No Spirituality		Af Am Spirituality		Cau Am No Spirituality		Cau Am Spirituality	
Group	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Spirituality Level								
Higher[a]	15.32	3.16	15.38	3.15	10.97	3.26	11.34	3.06
Lower[b]	15.22	2.92	14.98	2.59	12.02	3.57	12.29	3.58

Note. Af Am = African American, Cau Am = Caucasian American. [a]n = 115. [b]n = 59.

Qualitative Themes

Qualitative data were reviewed using participants' responses to the single open-ended question, "In review of your ratings above, please provide a brief explanation for factors that may have influenced your description ratings (Include any prior counseling experiences if applicable)." Eighty- two (47.13%) out of the 174 participants included in the statistical analyses provided a response for the open-ended question. These 82 responses made up the qualitative data set that was reviewed for themes as a supplement in the interpretation and discussion of results.

Braun and Clarke (2006) specified that a theme "captures something important about the data… and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set." Themes were selected based on this specification of patterned responses, and relevance in meaning to the purpose of this study. Recall that the purpose of this study involved exploring spirituality and race in the counseling preferences of African American adults in an attempt to fill gaps in counselor preference literature, helping to address the problem of less positive counseling experiences among African Americans.

The five areas with the highest response pattern, and corresponding relevance in meaning for the purpose of this study, were identified and included as main themes for review. The five main themes identified from the data set (N = 82) were: (a) *African American Counselor Preference* (N = 38, 46.34 %), (b) *Uncertainty about the Caucasian American Counselor* (N = 14, 17.07%), (c) *Spirituality Counselor Preference* (N = 10, 12.20%), (d) *Uncertainty with Counseling / Therapy* (N = 7, 8.54%), and (e) *African American Spirituality Counselor Preference (*N = 6, 7.32%). The next most common pattern of responses was mentioned by half

(N = 3, 3/6%) the number of participants as the fifth theme (N = 6, 7.32%), which made for a suitable cut off between identified themes and potentially emerging patterns.

The theme of *African American Counselor Preference* was categorized to include three sub-themes: (a) 'relatedness' (N = 15, 18.29 %), (b) 'commonality' - shared experiences, background and culture (N = 9, 10.96%), and (c) greater overall 'understanding' (N = 8, 9.76%). These were categorized as sub-themes instead of identified as main themes because responses for *relatedness, commonality,* and *greater overall understanding* were based on, and uniquely tied to, the overarching theme of African American counselor preference. They were similarly identified by response pattern and meaning to the main theme of African American Counselor Preference.

Braun and Clarke (2006) highlighted a process meant to "define and refine" themes by "identifying the 'essence' of what each theme is about." The researchers further recommended that the process involve "identifying the 'story' that each theme tells." It is from this direction that each of the five main themes and three sub-themes were explored.

In review of the theme, *African American Counselor Preference*, there were clusters in response patterns that were helpful in defining and refining this theme. The "essence" of this theme was an assumed relatedness to this particular counselor, which included shared experiences, commonality, and an ability of the presumed counselor to understand and identify with the participants based on the variable of race presented (i.e., African American). This is illustrated in the responses, "I would feel more comfortable talking with an African American over a Caucasian about problems I'm attempting to resolve, primarily because I believe an African American would be able to relate to my struggle better," and "I feel as if an African American counselor would be more likely to have endured the same experiences as myself. The

apparent factor that we have skin color in common would make me feel as if we probably have a lot more than meets the eye."

The sub-theme of *relatedness* was categorized based on a pattern of responses that specifically identified an ability to "relate," in describing the connections between counselor and client, as well as in the counselor's insight of the clients' concern. The ability to "relate" was identified in both directions of the therapeutic relationship: counselor to client (i.e., "I believe that I would prefer a Black counselor because they'd be able to relate to me as a black individual."), and client to counselor (i.e., "I feel that I could relate more with an African American counselor and that I would not have to hold back."). References to the counselor being able to relate to the clients' concern or problem is characterized in the response, "there are certain problems that I as a minority would go through that I feel an African American counselor could more easily relate to." Clinically, this told a story of developing a working alliance grounded in relationship.

'*Commonality'* as a sub-theme very specifically described an overlapping presumption of shared experiences, background, and culture. This sub-theme told a story of a community rooted in a common range of experiences – struggle, pain, suffering, hate, and despair; progress, resilience, healing, hope, and love. It seemed that commonality has an essence of being able to more easily establish rapport. One respondent stated that, "I think I would be more inclined to trust an African American counselor more than a White counselor because of shared (or similar) experiences."

A closely associated third sub-theme, *greater overall 'understanding,'* weaved a story of empathy, appreciation, awareness, and multiple ways of knowing based on the commonality of community. This was exemplified by the response, "I feel that an African American therapist

would have certain insights beyond their academic accomplishments and credentials that would be crucial to understanding influences effecting my behaviors or concerns," and more simply put, "I am more comfortable with another Black person. I feel they would have a better understanding of the daily struggle in just being Black."

In contrast to the assumed relatedness and understanding of the African American counselor, the theme *Uncertainty about the Caucasian American Counselor* tells a story of an assumed unrelatedness and lack of understanding by the Caucasian American identified counselor. Examples include, (a) "As an African American male, I have difficulty believing that a Caucasian counselor could FULLY relate with me. Our backgrounds, experiences, and ways in which African Americans and Caucasians are raised are very different," (b) "Well I don't know if a counselor of an opposite race would understand my issues to the extent that someone of my color would," and (c) "When it comes to a Caucasian counselor who wants to support my environment, beliefs, and growth, I feel disenfranchised. He doesn't know the Black family structure or how…African Americans are raised."

In the third theme, *Spirituality Counselor Preference,* there is a preference for a 'spiritual person' who would have an understanding of faith and morals, and take care to infuse spirituality as a part of the counseling process. Some examples for this particular theme include, "I could, however, be most influenced by spirituality, that is going to a licensed and certified counselor that allows me to express (and encourages) me to voice issues related to spirituality," and "I feel like I would be more comfortable ta[l]king to a counselor who focuses on the aspect of spirituality along with personal beliefs and goals. I am a very spiritual person and feel that everything that I do is driven by God. Having a counselor touch on those aspects would be very helpful." This theme also incorporated specific references to Christianity in responses provided,

taking the form of either participants' self identification as Christian (e.g., "I happen to be a Christian, so issues regarding faith tend to be key in my life.") or preference for a Christian counselor (e.g., "I prefer to talk to a counselor who is a certified Christian counselor").

In theme four, *Uncertainty with Counseling/Therapy*, there was a combined essence of lack of trust, disinterest in therapy, discomfort with disclosure, and a perceived 'weakness' in disclosing concerns. A good example from qualitative responses includes, "I have been conditioned not to talk about my problems, but to simply deal with them. I would feel very vulnerable disclosing any part of myself to anyone. I see it as a sign of weakness." While there were some participants who reported no previous counseling experience, this theme was only reflective of those participants who were also uncertain with the idea of counseling and therapy overall (i.e., "I have never participated in counseling before. The idea of discussing myself and my ideals with a s[t]ranger is a concept that has never set well with me").

The theme of *African American Spirituality Counselor Preference* yet again tells a story of a more favorable rating for the more similar counselor based on a perceived commonality. For some participants, the African American spirituality counselor was the most similar counselor, and the defining characteristic in Counselor Favorability Ratings and general counselor preference. In reviewing qualitative responses that helped to develop this theme include one respondent's report that, "I think I would be able to trust and identify more with an African American counselor with a spiritual background. I would have most in common with this type of counselor." Similarly, another participant noted that "as an African American man, I believe that for my own personal growth I would need an African American counselor who not only provides a supportive and encouraging environment, but who also incorporates spirituality.

My gender, ethnic background, and faith have contributed to who I am and I know that a counselor with similar ethnic and faith background would help facilitate the therapeutic process."

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Review of Hypotheses

As predicted by the first hypothesis, favorability ratings for African American counselors were significantly higher than for Caucasian American counselors, confirming that African American participants favored the similar race counselor above the dissimilar race counselor. Hypothesis 1 was also strongly supported by one of the main themes, *African American Counselor Preference*, found in qualitative responses. This theme represented a story of "relatedness," "commonality," and "greater overall understanding," and highlighted the perception that a similar race counselor may have a shared (common) experience that allowed for an increased ability to relate with and understand the similar race participant.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the counselors who encouraged clients to explore spirituality would be rated more favorably than the counselors with no inclusion of spiritual encouragement. This was based on the view of Jones (2003), that spirituality may be the most central aspect of African origins prevalent in African American culture today. No significant difference was found in counselor favorability ratings between vignettes with counselors who encouraged spirituality and counselors who did not.

Recall that participants were split into higher and lower levels of spiritual identification based on scores for the TRIOS Spirituality Subscale (Jones, 2003). Hypothesis 3 was fully supported in that there was no difference on overall favorability ratings based on participants' level of spirituality. More specifically, participants with a higher spiritual identification did not differ from participants with lower spiritual identification on favorability ratings.

Hypothesis 4, which examined the interactions between the race of counselor and the participants' level of spirituality, was supported. The preference for an African American counselor over a Caucasian American counselor was stronger for higher spirituality participants as compared to low spirituality participants. Given the salient nature of spirituality within the African American community, it was not surprising that as African American community members' spiritual identification increases, so might their level of communal affiliation and cultural mistrust. While this still supported the essence of a collective community with similar attitudes and values, it was in the shared concept of 'cultural mistrust.'

Hypothesis 5 was not supported. There was no significant difference across participants' level of spiritual identification in favorability ratings between the counselors whose vignettes encouraged spirituality within therapy and the counselors whose vignettes made no mention of spirituality. The spirituality stimulus may not have been strong enough to elicit a significant difference in ratings on the Counselor Favorability Questionnaire. Considering that there was no agreed upon singular definition of spirituality found within African American groups (Brome et al., 2000), the inclusion of the word 'spirituality' in the counselor vignette, without a descriptive meaning attached, may not have triggered any particular counselor preference. In fact, this may have triggered other terms such as religiosity (Mattis, 2000), higher power (Brewers, 1979; Jones, 2003), or the spiritual expression of the Black Church.

During a climatic point of counselor preference research, Ponterotto, Alexander, and Hinkston (1988) found that only "similar attitude and value" ranked above similar race. Convergent with spirituality as an 'attitudes and values' characteristic (Atkinson et al., 1986; Ponterotto et al., 1988), it was hypothesized that spirituality would have a significant effect in counselor favorability ratings, and overall counselor preference. It was further hypothesized that

this effect would be strongest for participants with a higher level of spiritual identification. However, no support was found for the interactions between counselor race, spiritual encouragement by counselor, and participants' level of spiritual identification examined in hypothesis 6.

Based on this study, counselor spirituality was not significantly related to counselor favorability ratings and overall counselor preference among African American adults. Consequently, the findings did not support the assertion that spirituality as a counselor characteristic is more salient to African American clients when compared to race. This study did provide empirical evidence for the following: (a) African American adults preferred a similar race counselor and (b) the preference for an African American counselor over a Caucasian American counselor was stronger for higher spirituality participants as compared to low spirituality participants.

Incorporating Findings Into Literature Reviewed

The finding that African American adults preferred a counselor of a similar race is consistent with the counselor preference literature which confirmed a general tendency for similar race counselor preference among African Americans (Atkinson, 1983; Coleman et al., 1995). This preference found among African Americans spanned the chronological review of research from its' early beginnings where race became a focal variable in counseling process research and practice (Phillips, 1960), to the meta-analytical reviews presented in the core of counselor preference research (Atkinson, 1983; Coleman, Wampold, & Casali, 1995).

Jones (2003) highlighted that spirituality may be the most central aspect of African origins. The results of this study did not find support for this in relation to counselor preference. However, spirituality remains important and prevalent in the African American community as

the majority of the sample indicated moderate to high spirituality levels. In particular, Hodge and Williams (2002) found spirituality to be more salient among African Americans in comparison to other populations around the globe. The findings in the qualitative theme of *Spirituality Counselor Preference* were consistent with extant literature. As a part of this theme, there were responses that provided strong agreement for the importance of spirituality among African American participants.

In separating out the sample by spirituality level, higher level spirituality participants' had a significantly stronger preference for the African American counselor in comparison to the Caucasian American counselor; participants with a lower level of spiritual identification did not differ much in the preferences regarding counselor race. Findings from this study appeared to be consistent with the literature in that participants that expressed a higher level of spiritual identification may have made certain inferences about the African American counselors' attitudes and values, inclusive of spirituality, assuming that they were more similar to their own high spiritual identification.

In addition, the participants expressing a higher level of spiritual identification may have been more culturally identified within the African American community and more keenly impacted by cultural mistrust norms, thus rating the Caucasian American counselors less favorably. This is further supported by the qualitative analysis related to cultural mistrust. Cultural mistrust is defined by Terrell and colleagues within the Handbook of African American Psychology (2008) as "the belief acquired by African Americans, due to past and ongoing mistreatment related to being a member of that ethnic group, that Whites cannot be trusted" (p. 299). This societal phenomenon may have been the unspoken, yet driving factor in ratings provided by participants demonstrating an increase in both preference for similar race (African

American counselor), and a level of distrust and discomfort with a Caucasian American counselor. These findings were consistent with Nickerson, Helms, and Terrell's (1994) conclusion that cultural mistrust, as an indicator of an African Americans' orientation towards White persons, may have also been a factor influencing counselor preferences and utilization.

Strengths of the Study

In exploring spirituality and race in counselor preferences among African American adults, this study helped fill in some of the many gaps in the literature on this topic, and built upon existing work that addresses African American spirituality in counseling research. As suggested early on by Ponterotto, Alexander, and Hinkston (1988), an intentional effort was made to provide an analysis of variables other than race in counselor preference literature. Parham (2005) emphasized that the power of the spiritual must be infused into the scholarly realm oftentimes dictated by rationalism and positivism. Not only was spirituality investigated as a variable in this research, it was an essential factor juxtaposed alongside the critical factor of race. This study provided a working understanding of the relationships that exist between race, counselor preference, and spirituality. In addition, this study suggested the vital role and importance of including culturally salient factors in counseling processes overall.

In addition, this study brought additional support for the importance of accounting for within-group variation in research as encouraged among a number of researchers that have engaged in counselor preference research. Jackson and Kirschner (1973) argued that within-group variation should be considered when exploring preferences in African American populations. Nickerson, Helms, and Terrell (1994) further emphasized that exploration of within-group differences among Black populations has contributed to a greater understanding of counselor preferences and attitudes about seeking therapy.

Another strength along the vein of within-group variation involved the intentional posture for inclusion of culturally and ethnically diverse respondents. In particular, this sample expanded beyond the college population, oftentimes the core of participants included in psychological research, to include members from a variety of community, university, and religious settings. The sample also covered a wide range by age, gender, employment status, religious background, and geographic location. Drawing from such a varied sample helps strengthen the ability to draw reliable and more generalizable conclusions about behavior among African American adults.

An additional strength in the methodological procedures of this study was having each participant rate each of the four vignettes on counselor favorability with variance in the vignette order to counterbalance the distribution. Finally, as recommended in future directions posed by Want, Parham, Baker, and Sherman (2004), qualitative procedures were included to inform and enhance the overall understanding of results. With the intent for gaining a better understanding of complex human construct (Jennings & Skovholt, 1999), qualitative pieces have supplemented the data gathering procedures and enriched the overall discussion.

Limitations of the Study

Intrinsic to much of the counselor preference literature, researchers highlight several limitations inherent in analogue research (Atkinson, 1983; Want, Parham, Baker & Sherman, 2004). This type of research does not involve actual counseling dyads and may not generalize to clinical processes or outcomes. For example, an identified counselor preference based on an assumed relatedness or commonality may not result in a stronger working alliance and overall outcome for therapy. Coleman, Wampold, and Casali (1995) warn against making simple conclusions about stated counselor preferences.

In addition to challenges created by the use of analogue research, another limitation is the stimulus of "spirituality" contained in the vignettes. One of the greatest challenges recognized by scholars doing research on spirituality has to do with the varied definitions and cultural encapsulation of religion and spirituality. Perhaps the stimulus was not articulated or operationalized clearly enough within the vignette descriptions.

Additionally, it is believed that spirituality is often moderated and/or mediated by such factors as social class, age, and geography. As such, it becomes difficult to identify and control the many factors that can affect participant response. There is no definitive way to determine all the extraneous factors involved in participants' ratings and response. The spirituality stimulus may have taken on very different meanings between respondents considering the variance in definitions of spirituality (Brome et al., 2000) and any past counseling related experiences overall.

Another limitation related to the spirituality variable lies in defining the respondents' spirituality level. As noted previously, the variable for participants' spirituality level was included as a means of exploring within-group variation among the African American adult participants' sampled. The range of scores reported represented moderate to high levels of spirituality, leading to "higher" and" lower" level categorization of participants' spirituality. Additionally, the moderate to high distribution for participants' levels of spirituality support the assertion among researchers that have emphasized the significant value of spirituality within the African American community (Blaine & Crocker, 1995; Jones, 2003; Parham, 2005; Walker & Dixon, 2002). Based on this research, compiling the "low" category may be a lengthy and arduous task within the African American community. Perhaps if we had a "low" category in

spirituality level of participants, we may have found different results related to spirituality as a variable in counseling preferences among African American adults.

It is also important to note that the role of the researcher, an African American and Filipino biracial, Christian identified, female, serving in a multicultural affairs department at the time of data collection, may possibly have impacted vignette ratings and overall responsiveness of participants. This leads to the acknowledgment, from an Afrocentric framework, that this is only one way to view the world, without imposing universality (Asante, 1988).

Future Directions and Clinical Implications

This study serves as a preliminary examination of spirituality and race in the counseling preferences of African American adults, in what will hopefully continue as a series of studies whose purpose is to identify the counselor characteristics that are important and necessary for ensuring good outcomes in cultural competence and racial responsiveness with clients. In future research, it may be beneficial to heighten and clearly define the spirituality stimulus for participants, possibly including a specific operational definition for spirituality, more detailed descriptions for the counselors and/or an actual vignette of a full counselor/client interaction. The stimulus may also be strengthened by an alternate medium for presenting this vignette (e.g. audio, visual and/or technologically based). This could include watching a video session, downloading a session podcast, or reviewing an electronic message thread (i.e. blog session). In addition, participating in an actual counseling session may be impactful beyond counselor preference research to provide information about counseling processes and outcomes. Finally, it would also be beneficial to examine spirituality levels using a continuous measure which included representation for what might be quantified as “low” in spirituality scores, rather than collapsing participants’ into two distinct categories.

It is imperative that mental health providers acknowledge and make allowances for clients' preferences, inclusive of spirituality. Clinical work that is informed by more detailed information on client need and preference may enhance rapport and the therapeutic alliance between counselor and client. Furthermore, attention to client preferences for a similar race counselor may positively impact the overall quality of services, decreasing dropout rates and premature termination.

Consequently, it is imperative that clinical settings have a diverse staff that can be accommodating in matching reported preferences. For example, there are many mental health settings (i.e., community, university counseling centers, hospitals, etc.) that do not have African American mental health providers on staff, possibly limiting the number of African American adults who seek out services and support through these clinical settings. In addition, if mental health providers do not make allowances for these preferences, we may not see improvements so desperately needed in utilization and overall treatment outcomes for African American adults.

An interesting concept to consider in clinical practice and future research is the role of client expectations of racially and ethnically similar and dissimilar therapists. Furthermore, it is essential that clinical settings and training sites recognize the prevalence of within-group variation, encouraging clinicians to cultivate awareness into practice, establishing themselves as culturally competent and racially responsive agents within the profession. In particular, clinicians are encouraged to make changes at both an individual and systemic level. This could include conducting individualized cultural formulations infusing spirituality as a relevant component for client care, along with building awareness around spirituality as a salient variable in the quest for continued development and advancement of the field of psychology as a whole.

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Appendix A: Demographic Information Form

Gender: Male_____ Female _____ **Age:** _____

Ethnicity: African American / Black _____

African _____

Biracial: _____

Multiracial: _____

Other: _____

Country of Birth: _____ In what country did you mainly grow up? _____

Are you employed?: Yes, full-time _____ Yes, part-time _____ No _____

Occupation : _____

If you are a student: Year in school?: _____

School you attend? _____

Major in College? _____

Education Level: High School Diploma (or equivalent) _____

Some College _____ College Degree ____

Some Graduate Degree _____ Graduate Degree _____

Income Level: _____

Marital Status: Single____ Married____ Separated ____

Divorced ____ Living with Partner ____

Primary Language: _____

Religious Affiliation: Christian _____ Catholic _____ Protestant _____ Jewish _____

Pentecostal _____ Methodist _____ Baptist _____ Muslim _____

Church of Christ _____ Presbyterian _____ Buddhist _____ None _____Other _____

Attendance at religious services? Weekly _____ Monthly _____ Only on Holidays_____

Do you have any prior counseling experience? Yes _____ No _____

In what setting? University setting _____ Community setting _____

Church or religious setting _____ Career/ Work setting _____

Appendix B: Counselor Favorability Questionnaire (CFQ; Want, 1995) Rating and Open-Ended Question for Each of the Four Vignettes

On separate pages are several counselor descriptions with a set of four questions that follow each description. Please read each counselor description carefully and indicate the degree to which you find the statement to be true of you by circling the number from the measure below on a scale from **1 (definitely not) to 5 (definitely)**. There are no answers that are considered right or wrong. We want you to simply express how true each statement is of you.

Description 1:

I am a licensed and certified African American counselor who has practiced individual, couples and group counseling for seven years. My practice includes treatment of both adults and children. In therapy, I focus on providing a supportive environment that encourages clients to explore their personal beliefs, growth, and spirituality.

	Definitely				Definitely Not
1. Do you feel there are topics you could not discuss with this counselor?	1	2	3	4	5
2. Do you feel this counselor could understand your problem?	1	2	3	4	5
3. Would you feel uncomfortable talking with this counselor?	1	2	3	4	5
4. Would you prefer to see this counselor if you had a problem?	1	2	3	4	5

****

Description 2:

I am a licensed and certified Caucasian American counselor who has practiced individual, couples and group counseling for seven years. My practice includes treatment of both adults and children. In therapy, I focus on providing a supportive environment that encourages clients to explore their personal beliefs, growth, and spirituality.

	Definitely				Definitely Not
1. Do you feel there are topics you could not discuss with this counselor?	1	2	3	4	5
2. Do you feel this counselor could understand your problem?	1	2	3	4	5
3. Would you feel uncomfortable talking with this counselor?	1	2	3	4	5
4. Would you prefer to see this counselor if you had a problem?	1	2	3	4	5

****

Description 3:

I am a licensed and certified African American counselor who has been in practice for seven years. My practice involves treating individual adults and children, along with counseling couples and leading groups. In therapy, I focus on providing a supportive and encouraging environment focused on exploring personal beliefs and growth.

	Definitely				Definitely Not
1. Do you feel there are topics you could not discuss with this counselor?	1	2	3	4	5
2. Do you feel this counselor could understand your problem?	1	2	3	4	5
3. Would you feel uncomfortable talking with this counselor?	1	2	3	4	5
4. Would you prefer to see this counselor if you had a problem?	1	2	3	4	5

****

Description 4:

I am a licensed and certified Caucasian American counselor who has been in practice for seven years. My practice involves treating individual adults and children, along with counseling couples and leading groups. In therapy, I focus on providing a supportive and encouraging environment focused on exploring personal beliefs and growth.

	Definitely				Definitely Not
1. Do you feel there are topics you could not discuss with this counselor?	1	2	3	4	5
2. Do you feel this counselor could understand your problem?	1	2	3	4	5
3. Would you feel uncomfortable talking with this counselor?	1	2	3	4	5
4. Would you prefer to see this counselor if you had a problem?	1	2	3	4	5

****

In review of your ratings above, please provide a brief explanation for factors that may have influenced your description ratings (Include any prior counseling experiences if applicable).

_____

_____

_____