



INTERACTION

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President's Address

Dr. L. Marinn Pierce



On Monday afternoons, I spend an hour with two groups of elementary age beings when I teach yoga in an afterschool program. Yesterday, as they were lying supine, legs extended, palms facing up in our final resting pose, I reminded them that one of my teachers says this is the hardest yoga pose. In a practice where so many strive for the next challenge – more yoga, more poses, harder poses, it's easy to miss the greatest challenge... savasana, the final resting pose. One of my teachers, Michael Johnson, is known to suggest at the beginning of his

classes that those who would like a challenge can spend the entire class in savasana. Rarely is he taken up on that offer.

This past summer, I found myself diving into an exploration of Sabbath – theologically, practically, historically. I read Susannah Heschel's introduction to her father's book, *The Sabbath*, in which she described her experience of the practice of Sabbath as a child. She explained the preparation each week for Sabbath. As I read the introduction, I was struck by the fact that as a society we have misconstrued the concept of Sabbath, of intentional spiritual rest. As a society, we have commodified the practice to assimilate to the status quo, and this was not the purpose. Rabbi Abraham Heschel stated, "The Sabbath is a day for the sake of life. Man is a beast of burden and the Sabbath is not for the purpose of enhancing the efficiency of his work." As my friend and colleague, Sherrie Ludwick (to whom I am grateful for her perspective, review, and feedback on these thoughts), stated "This time provides us with the opportunity to be more connected to ourselves in a spiritual and mindful sense versus a physical sense. A sense that the world is more vast than work and entertainment."

President's Address continued on next page.

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President's Address Continued

Christian theologian, Walter Brueggemann, repeatedly emphasized the role of Sabbath as an act of resistance “because it is a visible insistence that our lives are not defined by the production and consumption of commodity goods.” He went on to state, “Thus I have come to think that the fourth commandment on sabbath is the most difficult and most urgent of the commandments in our society, because it summons us to intent and conduct that defies the elemental requirements of a commodity-propelled society that specializes in control and entertainment, bread and circuses... along with anxiety and violence.” For Heschel and Brueggemann, the practice of Sabbath, the fourth of the ten commandments, is an intentional act of consistently refusing to participate in the culture of productivity and acquisition, and as I was reading their works this summer, I was left wondering how our individual and collected cultures might be different if we considered this perspective – one in which we hit pause, honor Sabbath, rest in savasana not for the “self-care” with intent of enhancing our performance, but rather because we are not defined by our productivity, our physical abilities, or our social statuses.

Savasana is considered the “hardest pose” because it is counter-cultural. As my little yogis beg to practice handstand and crow pose and mermaid pose each week, they struggle grasping that the most challenging pose is not the most physically demanding one but the one where we rest, where we stop and do nothing. As we assess our weekly productivity at home and at work and in the world, I suspect, like my little yogi friends, we, too, struggle recognizing that maybe the hardest thing to do is stop and truly do nothing without the intent of bettering our productivity.

The Judaic and Christian religious traditions and yogic spiritual practices hold lessons for us, as counselors and human beings. They challenge us to flip our worldviews, to recognize that our value is not based on our productivity and consumption and that, just maybe, the purpose of self-care, of rest, is not so we can just be more productive.

Are you a graduate student interested in publishing?

ASERVIC is dedicating a section of their newsletter, *Interaction*, to graduate student contributions. We will be accepting submissions for review from Master's and doctoral students for publication in our upcoming newsletters. Publications must be related to the overall mission of ASERVIC: “Our mission is to help counselors, supervisors, counselor educators, and counseling students competently integrate spiritual, ethic, and religious values into our work with clients.” This is an excellent opportunity for graduate students who are seeking to enhance their professional writing skills. You do not need to be a member of ASERVIC. We hope through interacting with our organization, you will become familiar with the work of ASERVIC and consider becoming involved. All submissions will go through a peer-review process.

We welcome submissions that are brief academic articles related to the ASERVIC mission. We are also interested in personal reflections and commentaries that are supported with academic references.

Guidelines:

- All submissions must adhere to the APA 6th edition format (no abstract needed)
- All submissions must be related to the ASERVIC mission
- Submissions are to be approximately 500 to 750 words and double-spaced
- The first author must be a Master's or doctoral student
- Include the author name(s), name of institution(s), and photo(s) in .jpg, .tif or .gif format.

Initial drafts are due by **December 20, 2019** and can be emailed to counseling@heidihenry.com

SPIRITUALITY IN THE FIELD CONTINUED

Healing Anxiety Through Faith

Vasti Holstun

My name is Vasti Holstun and I am an assistant professor in an online program at a Christian University. When I became a counselor educator, I decided to continue to maintain my very small private practice as a Licensed Professional Counselor. I felt that continuing to be a counselor kept me in touch with the realities of the field, which in turn helped me be a more effective educator. Most of my work is done with children, adolescents, adults, and families. While I grew up as a neo-protestant Christian, and even graduated from a Christian counseling program, I didn't always integrate spirituality in my counseling. I thought that the best way to bracket my personal beliefs was to basically ignore them altogether. However, my clients had other ideas. I've been working with clients from many different cultures and belief systems and they inspired me not only to help them explore their own spirituality, but also to come to terms with my own (ASERVIC, 2009, Competency 3).

Anxiety tends to be the most prevalent mental health issue in the general population, with 18% of the general adult population being affected (ADAA, n.d.). The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) identifies anxiety as the most common mental health issue in children, with a prevalence of about 8% in the general population (AAP, n.d.). It is probably safe to say that children with untreated anxiety become adults with anxiety. As such, regardless of their setting, every mental health professional will likely need to become somewhat of an expert in treating anxiety. While utilizing evidence-based techniques and treatments is best practices, I've noticed that my clients tend to heal faster when we also incorporate their spirituality.

I believe anxiety at its core is about control and trust, or to be exact, the lack of both. Those who struggle with anxiety tend to have difficulty letting go of the need to control outcomes. As a counselor educator, I also find that this is the case with my students who are becoming counselors. I am often inundated with messages, phone calls, and emails from anxious students who have difficulty handling "not knowing exactly what the assignment requires",

or have the need to be perfect (perfect grades, only positive feedback, etc.), needing the professor to reassure them, or not being able to start working on an assignment unless they figured out every angle (the proverbial "paralysis through analysis"). It seems like anxiety tends to be a general human experience that both counselors and their clients share.

My own struggle with anxiety started in adolescence. I was probably around 14 (8th grade), and while I can't really pinpoint what started it, I do remember that it was unmanageable at times. Thinking about it now, there was probably a combination of hormonal changes associated with physical development, and also some developmental stress associated with starting high school and living away from home. I struggled with a lot of negative thoughts, many of them derived from religious practice - that I wasn't good enough, that God couldn't possibly love me, that I've "committed the unpardonable sin" (whatever that was), that I should be doing better, and so on. This went on for months. My mother, who was a psychiatric nurse, wanted to put



me on medication, but I refused. One thing that stands out to me now was my deliberate choice to believe. By that point in time, I had read the Bible in its entirety and one verse stood out to me: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15, KJV). Now thinking about this, it does seem a bit dramatic, but at the time, this simple act of faith managed to seal the abysmal hole in my heart. I had to let go of the "end of my rope" in order to land on solid ground. I would like to say that my issues with anxiety stopped in adolescence, but that's not exactly the case. I find that life has a way of taking us back to the same lessons, and every time I need to learn another layer about using faith in managing my anxiety. Whether it's finding quiet time with God, or reading inspirational literature, or meditating on God's word, I find that religious and spiritual practices certainly help me in this area. Moreover, using faith as part of my thought process, and challenging my thoughts from a spiritual perspective appears to alleviate my anxiety.

SPIRITUALITY IN THE FIELD CONTINUED

This experience has definitely informed my work with clients. As I matured in my professional development, I realized that utilizing the client's faith in treating anxiety can be a very effective tool. One of my goals in counseling is helping clients with anxiety recognize their need for control. Those who start to heal also recognize the fact that they need to let go of what they can't control and exercise their faith. I have found that the most resistant clients are those who haven't defined their spirituality or feel betrayed in some ways by God (or their Higher Power, or generally their belief system). Most interestingly, I have also found that helping clients define their spirituality or reconciling with their spiritual beliefs brings healing from anxiety. Even if they don't have a definite belief in a loving, caring, omnipotent God, I have found that believing in something, anything (human kindness, science, an afterlife, etc.) tends to alleviate some of the anxiety.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not trying to say that those of us who struggle with anxiety don't have enough faith. Au contraire, I think that anxiety is a form of faith. While faith is the certainty of a good outcome, anxiety is the certainty of a bad outcome. Part of the counseling process is to shift the focus of this certainty from negative to positive. That is the role of many of the thought changing or thought stopping techniques from evidence-based practices. It's also the shift from recognizing the difference between trying to control things that can't be controlled and things that can be controlled (i.e. The Serenity Prayer). Focusing on things that can be controlled can give the individual a measure of power over their life and build resilience. In reflecting on my own work as a professional counselor, I realize that not addressing spirituality when treating anxiety is a bit like doing counseling with "one hand tied behind your back". When we take our journey with our clients as "fellow travelers" (Yalom, 2002, p.7), one way to lead them

from anxiety to peace is to help them access and use their faith. But to do this, we definitely need to be in touch with our own (ASERVIC, 2009). According to the Association of Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) Competencies for Integrating Spirituality and Religion into Counseling, counselors need to explore their own attitudes, beliefs and spiritual or religious values (ASERVIC, 2009, Competency 3). We may try to convince ourselves that we are "neutral" when we are with clients. However, when it comes to values and beliefs, no one is neutral. Ignoring or avoiding our beliefs may eventually lead to situations in which clients are harmed. The competent counselor will intentionally cultivate self-awareness about spirituality, religion, and values.

We also need to give ourselves and our clients some grace. Managing anxiety doesn't mean that we are never anxious. Nor does it mean that we've failed when we have to revise issues connected with our faith. Faith is a very complex concept. We can always learn more about it.

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Come chat with us on **ASERVIC CONNECT**

If you are a current member of ASERVIC or a current state division member of ASERVIC, you should have access to ASERVIC Connect through ACA Connect. To access ASERVIC Connect, go to ACA's website to locate ACA Connect and the ASERVIC Community:

- 1) <http://community.counseling.org/home>
- 2) **Select Communities**
- 3) **Select My Communities**
(you may be promoted to login to ACA)
- 4) **Find the ASERVIC Community**

If you cannot find ASERVIC under your communities, be sure that you are a current member.



New Member Spotlight

Donna Contreras-Wetherbee, PhD



What drew you to membership in ASERVIC?

I was drawn to ASERVIC when I began to call myself a psycho-spiritual therapist, and it seemed that ASERVIC aligned with my intention to bring a spiritual-religious element into my practice.

How did you get here? What is your spiritual story?

My spiritual story began about 20 years ago when I first met my spiritual director. My family and I had been attending the Episcopal church. I was working as a play therapist specializing in young children who had experienced major trauma and my husband was working as an environmental scientist. Our daughter was about 5 years old and we both believed in providing a religious foundation for her. At that time, I believe I

(we) were more religious rather than spiritual, meaning we attended church on a regular basis and participated in many church functions. However, I would say I did not have a deep relationship with God, but we enjoyed our church family and enjoyed the church traditions.

As a young teen I had been diagnosed with a chronic illness however, I did not allow my illness to stop me from living my life. I went to college got married and we had a daughter. I was living my life, being a mom, and working as a therapist when my health began to decline. My daughter was about 7 years old when my husband and I began to tell her about my declining health and the necessary changes that our family would need to make to accommodate these health changes. I was on hemodialysis for about 8 years while I waited for my third kidney transplant. For most of that time, I was able to continue working, being a mom, and we continued to attend an Episcopal church, which became our extended family. Our church family became critical as my health continued to decline, especially when it became necessary for me to stop working. They helped to care for our family, not only did they help out with meals, but they stepped in to care for my daughter my husband and me.

It was prior to my third transplant that I met my spiritual director at church, and for the past 20 years, she has helped me not only to develop a deeper meaningful relationship with God, my creator but to also find meaning in my life. It was at her suggestion that I decided to become a spiritual director, as well.

Prior to my declining health, I had pondered the thought of getting my doctoral degree. However, it wasn't until much later and after years of recovering from my third kidney transplant that I was able to begin a doctoral program. I recently completed my doctoral program, and for the past year, I have started to call myself a psycho-spiritual therapist, combining elements of both psychotherapy and spirituality. What began as a religious practice of attending church more than 20 years ago, has evolved into a deeper relationship with God and a deeper spiritual connection to those who accompany me on my journey. It is very important for me to continue my own spiritual journey, to continue to explore my purpose and what I am called to do next. But I do know that I want to be genuine and authentic in both my own journey and in my work with others.

How do you see yourself working with ASERVIC?

I would like to keep updated with the latest research and trends in the field and work with ASERVIC to help maintain my professional skills. I'm looking forward to attending conferences, reading journal articles, and taking the initiative to contribute my talent to the organization.

ETHICS CORNER

I See You
Hannah Bayne

As the new co-chair for the ASERVIC Ethics Committee, I wanted to do something a little different for the Ethics Corner column for this edition. Much of my research centers on empathy, including how counselors can navigate value conflicts through empathic connection. I view this as an essential component of ethical practice as well. When we can truly center our clients, viewing them as uniquely wonderful, while maintaining our own sense of self and feeling unthreatened by differences, then we can learn to prioritize the core principles of ethical practice. I think art can help us connect to challenging concepts, and therefore I attempted to capture some of these ideas in the poem below.

I see you.
The richness of your difference
expands the horizons of what I know
and love,
bursting into a kaleidoscope of shades of meaning.
I let myself get swept in
reveling in this world of
new sounds and thoughts and wants and needs.
Searching for echoes of my own truth,
I see golden glimpses of shared humanity,
woven sporadically
yet binding us together.
But your heart is not
my heart,
Your mind is not
my mind.
Our values are beautiful, fragile things,
straining against
imaginary cages
and fighting
unwinnable wars.
I find your truth,
your wholeness,
when my own is at home and secure.
When we both can exist
for all that we are
we become something Divine.
Unthreatened to stretch
beyond myself
I can look through your eyes
and in that moment
I finally
See you.

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UPCOMING WEBINAR

Date: December 10, 2019 **Time:** 12:00—1:00pm EST
Presenter: Dr. Michele Kielty **Topic:** Mindfulness in K-12 Settings
Registration: Register here: <http://www.aservic.org/resources/webinars/>

Webinar Description: The webinar will cover the basics of grassroots approaches to implementing mindfulness into K-12 settings as well as some basic mindfulness strategies that can be used with students. Dr. Kielty will also cover the importance of having one's own mindfulness practice before incorporating it into schools, as well as how to involve teachers and other school personnel.

About the Presenter: Michele Kielty, Ph.D., LPC, Licensed School Counselor is a Professor of Counseling at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, VA and a past president of ASERVIC. She maintains a counseling private practice and she regularly consults with community organizations and school systems regarding the implementation of mindfulness practices. She works with professionals and leaders, as well as with adult clients and groups of kids in schools, to develop personal mindfulness practices. Her work is grounded in neuroscience and practical application for personal and/or professional needs. Her experience includes national and international school-based experiences.



The Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) has been approved by NBCC as a continuing education provider, ACEP No. 1010. Programs that do not qualify for NBCC credit are clearly identified. ASERVIC is solely responsible for all aspects of the program. For more information about ASERVIC's webinars, visit www.aservic.org



Submission Request

SPIRITUALITY IN THE FIELD

Do you have ideas or a story to share regarding your practice of spirituality in the field? If so, please submit to the next edition of the *Interaction*.

The Innovation Committee would like to formally invite current ASERVIC members to consider sharing their “Spirituality in the Field” experiences for publication in an upcoming ASERVIC newsletter.

Inquiries and submissions for this special section of the newsletter can be sent to
LYNN BOHECKER (lbohecker@liberty.edu)

- ◇ Articles include an opening paragraph introducing the author to the readers.
- ◇ Articles include a second paragraph describing how the author incorporates one or multiple Spiritual Competencies in practice.
- ◇ Articles include a concluding paragraph or list of resources (books, trainings, websites/blogs, inspirational quote, etc.) related to the practices and competencies addressed in the article.
- ◇ A professional picture of the author is attached (in .jpeg format) with the article.



**Interested in submitting an article for
the Winter issue of the
Interaction?**

**The deadline is
FRIDAY, January 10, 2020**

Please refer to ASERVIC.org for guidelines for publication or for more information, or email Heidi Henry, *Interaction* Editor, at counseling@heidihenry.com