



# INTERACTION

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## President's Address Dr. Ryan Foster



Over the last few months, I have noticed something with myself. I have noticed that my access to using words to describe my experiences has decreased significantly. I have noticed that I have moments of deep feeling and moments of grinding cognition. My endless scrolling through social media and news sites has taken a toll on my spirit. When I come upon something that could help deepen my awareness, it is usually prescriptive rather than descriptive.

I find myself working with clients who are approaching practices such as deep breathing, meditation, and yoga as prescriptive rather than descriptive. It seems they are trying to rid themselves of pain and anguish rather than exploring it and bringing it to awareness. And when I see Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook posts about how to de-stress, there is usually mention of meditation or deep breathing.

This prescription for feeling better is not so new. Often people use other spiritually-oriented practices as prescriptive rather than descriptive; for example, the cliché, “just pray it away.”

I'm aware that I have ended up in with a similar script in my mind. I have been looking for ways to prescribe away the pain and anguish and deep divineness that I feel within myself as a reflection of my environment. I find myself leaning on the Zen theory of change as paraphrased by Rick Carson (2003): “I free myself not by trying to be free, but by simply noticing how I am imprisoning myself in the very moment I am imprisoning myself” (p. 10; italics in original). This paradoxical principle seems evermore meaningful to those of us who view ourselves, others, and the world through humanistic principles.



President's Address continued on next page

## President's Addressed Continued

I wish for each of you to hold on to hope, optimism, soul, and spirit. While the world seems to have stopped spinning, chaos continues to grow. Virginia Satir and her colleagues (1991) knew the inescapable role of chaos in the process of change. She also knew how to hold to a felt sense of light that would, over time and with intentional work, break through the darkness and result in integration.

ASERVIC is a place for those of us who are searching for a professional home that is uplifting, safe, and diverse. It is a professional organization that recognizes our shared humanity and the essentials that bind us together and can sometimes pull us apart from each other. We can disagree. We do not have to be of one mind. There is no group-think in ASERVIC. ASERVIC is a place to share ideas, to check those ideas out with ourselves, to **keep what we'd like and discard what we don't and**, to maintain acceptance and appreciation for the process of feeling, thinking, and changing. I am glad you are here. You may be feeling chaos or hope or both. What is important, in my opinion, is

that you are experiencing, you are noticing, you are working to attend to your moment to moment needs, and you are maintaining a sense of internal and external boundaries. And this work, as you well know, will impact your clients and your students – and they maybe need you more than they ever have before.

Be well.

*Ryan Foster*

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# New Member Spotlight

## What drew you to membership in ASERVIC?

I strongly believe that we are created as holistic beings – physical, cognitive, emotional and spiritual. I believe in integrating all four of these aspects of what it means to be human into the counseling room. ASERVIC is a community that supports the integration of spirituality and values into counseling, and helps me bring a thoughtful and research-informed into my counseling approach.



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

Like many spiritual stories, my own of faith has been a long and windy road. During my childhood and early adolescence, my family attended the local Catholic church regularly. I obediently completed many of the Catholic rites of passage. During early adulthood, like many, I began to contemplate the existence of God and if being religious was part of my emerging identity. Looking back, I understand it as a natural developmental process of moving away or towards family identity, and developing my own individual identity, and hopefully thoughtful, decision towards a spiritual life. Everything was up for questioning at that time!

Early adulthood brought an investigation of the tenants of Christianity – I even attended a Bible study in a local evangelical church to figure out who God was and how Jesus fit into the picture. It was at this time that I began to understand the relational aspect of faith, rather than simply the rites and rituals. Eventually, I accepted Christianity as my faith. During that time, I felt a calling to move from my current vocation as a librarian and research analyst to my current joyful calling of counseling.

**My first job out of school was as a bereavement counselor at my community's Hospice. Following the death of a loved one, there seems to be a particular focus on issues wrapped within spirituality. Where does my loved one go after death? How could God allow this to happen? How does my pain and loss have purpose beyond me? Grief work requires meaning-making, and this is usually done through a highly spiritual process. It was also during this time that my father died unexpectedly, and then my best friend followed due to cancer a month later. This is where my training and faith intersected so beautifully, strengthening both and allowing me to walk the rocky path of grieving and lament.**

Although I have since moved into private practice, I carry these faith experiences with me, and I believe that they help me enter my clients' worlds, no matter where they are in their own personal spiritual journey.



## How do you see yourself working with ASERVIC?

It is my heart to serve others, and I see a volunteering capacity based on my skills and giftings. As a doctoral candidate with Regent University, I also believe in the importance of writing, publishing, and reading others' inputs into how we do our work well. As a counselor educator, I hope to impart to my students the importance of attending conferences, staying current on research, and the ethical use of faith into the counseling room.



# Mindful Eating:

## The Spiritual and Ethical Implications of Counselor Self-Care

John J. S. Harrichand<sup>1</sup> and Benjamin Hearn<sup>2</sup>

State University of New York at Brockport<sup>1</sup>

Self-care is a popular concept that often gets used by members of the public while addressing the stressors experienced from inter- and intra-personal activities related to family, friends, education, administrative, and professional relationships. Thomas and Morris (2017), define counselor self-care as “an action that enhances mental, emotional, physical, or spiritual well-being resulting in a more holistic, balanced individual” (p. 2). For counselors, self-care is more than a practice, it is an ethical responsibility due to the high probability of experiencing burnout and impairment from the physically and emotionally challenging work we engage in daily (Lent & Schwartz, 2012). The American Counseling Association’s (ACA) *Code of Ethics* (2014) states, “counselors monitor themselves for signs of impairment from their own physical, mental, or emotional problems and refrain from offering or providing professional services when impaired” (2014, p. 9). One way counselors can engage in self-care is through the practice of mindful eating, i.e., “slow intentional eating while focusing on sensation of satiety and triggers of overeating” (Daly et al., 2016, p. 23). This article addresses the spiritual and ethical implications of counselor self-care through the process of mindful eating.

Food is important to our survival; it nourishes our bodies, provides us with energy, and allows us to engage in daily life activities. We spend a significant portion of our waking moments procuring, preparing, and/or consuming food and as a result it forms part of our identity.

How often have you heard someone say, “I am a mac and cheese guy” or “a fish and chips girl”? The foods we consume play an integral role defining our cultural identities, and dictating social and behavioral norms, for example, in collectivist cultures family and friends often eat meals from the same plates, a display of affection and solidarity. Foods also dictate our spiritual identities, for example, food is used to celebrate religious holidays and moments of success, and process moments of pain, suffering, and loss over; food possesses the powerful *healing* ability to hold people and societies together. Foods also influence our physiology, i.e., thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, for example, foods rich in carbohydrates often leave us feeling fatigued, caffeine often gets our thoughts flowing which can lead to more physical activity, and foods rich in fats can have the deleterious effect of obesity and heart disease.

The practice of intentional eating allows us the opportunity to slow down from the busyness of the counseling world, and enjoy our meals for the nourishment it provides. Intentional eating also allows us the opportunity to engage in community with others, i.e., fellow counselors and peers, enjoying moments of social connection; or if you prefer to eat alone, it allows you the opportunity to reflect, refocus, and even contemplate on the blessings you have, i.e., it allows you the opportunity to reflect, refocus, and even contemplate on the





blessings you have, i.e., food to eat, employment, shelter, and the ability to bring healing and hope to hurting people.

By engaging in mindful eating, we allow our body, mind, and spirit to engage in healthy communication, how? When consumed food connects us to the land (Earth, our source of energy drawn from the Sun), this fuels our physical body, and in so doing impacts our brain, and the way we engage the world. Therefore, counselors who infuse intentional eating to their self-care practice of a balanced and nutritious diet, are feeding their mind-body-spirit connection and attending to their own well-being so that they can fully and ethically meet the needs of their clients.

We may understand intentional eating as an aspect of self-care, and thus ethical practice, as we develop greater awareness of the connection between food and our mind, body, and spirit. Neglecting self-care and these connections is considered to be an ethical violation by the Green Cross Academy of Traumatology (GCAT, n.d.) *Standards of Care*. The GCAT is an international non-profit, humanitarian assistance organization oriented towards helping people in crisis after traumatic events. They suggest that every helper is deserving of emotional and spiritual renewal in and outside their work and emphasize the importance of self-restraint with types and amounts of food as **excess can compromise ones' competence as a helper**. The *ACA Code of Ethics* (2014) echoes this call to monitor for signs of impairment of physical, mental, or emotional problems in Code C.2.g.

Do we notice our thoughts racing and more difficulty in staying present after a breakfast of black coffee? Do we find ourselves craving snacks after a challenging session to distract ourselves from reflecting? Practiced regularly and over time, intentional eating enhances the recognition of the interdependence of these types of problems and their relationship to food. Without practicing intentional eating, it is more likely that these relationships between food and our physical, mental, and emotional states will remain out of our awareness and thereby increase the chance that they may negatively impact our clinical practice, and our overall health and well-being (Phillips, 2019). Perhaps we may discover ourselves to be more effective counselors after eating some foods than others.

Overall, the practice of intentional eating acts as a hub which promotes more holistic connection with ourselves, family, friends, colleagues, and clients in addition to the world around us. It can help us to become more grateful of the blessings we have while enabling reflection on and growth of the relationship between the foods we consume and our bodies, mind, and spirit. Over time, intentional eating heightens our awareness of these relationships and thereby becomes a part of ethical counseling practice as a means of self-care. As your day continues, we hope you find time to slow down, pay attention, and notice the ways in which what you eat impacts yourself and those around you.

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John J. S. Harrichand, Ph.D., LMHC, LPC, NCC, CCMHC, ACS is a member and Co-Chair of the ASERVIC Ethical Values Committee. He is an Assistant Professor of Counselor Education at the State University of New York at Brockport. E-mail: [jhar-richand@brockport.edu](mailto:jhar-richand@brockport.edu)



Benjamin Hearn, M.A., LPCC, NCC is a member of the ASERVIC Ethical Values Committee and second-year doctoral student at the University of Cincinnati. E-mail: [hearnbg@mail.uc.edu](mailto:hearnbg@mail.uc.edu)

# Webinar Information

Date: December 9, 2020 from 12-1 EST

Presenter: Dr. Elizabeth O'Brien

Topic: Ethical Leaders: Maintaining Values in Toxic Times

Registration: See ASERVIC website

## Content Description:

Leadership can be experienced from two sides, as a designated leader and as through followership of a leader. Individuals who aspire to leadership roles must understand the personal traits they possess that contribute to successful leadership as well as toxicity within organizations; additionally those who are influenced by leaders must be able to recognize toxic leadership, understand the allure of toxicity, and how individuals' can resist toxicity in favor of staying true to personal values.

The counseling professional contains ethical codes that govern professional behavior and can translate well to leadership roles, however other professions can also provide guidance on organizational ethics and decision making that can help individuals engage in healthy leadership practices. This webinar provides an overview of common traits of successful and ethical leaders, identifies traits of toxic leaders and organizations, and provides a framework practicing ethical leadership.

## Learning Objectives:

- Review the traits and behaviors of ethical leaders.
- Understand the concepts of toxic leadership and organizations; identify personal traits that may contribute to a toxic environment.
- Review framework for practicing ethical leadership/engage in case study to review ethical decision making in toxic environment.

Bio: Elizabeth O'Brien, Ph. D., LPC-MHSP is a UC Foundation Professor at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

Dr. O'Brien is also a Co-Director of the School of Professional Studies in the College of Health, Education, and Professional Studies. She is a past-president for the Association of Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling, a division of the American Counseling Association, and currently serves as a member of the American Counseling Association's Governing Council. Elizabeth maintains a small private practice in the Chattanooga area.

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](http://www.aservic.org)



Stay tuned for information on our Winter and Spring Webinars

# Counselor Awareness Acuity

Jennifer D. Vincas-Cua, PHD, LMHC, LPC, ACS, NCC  
Spiritual and Religious Values Committee Chair



The competencies for spiritual and religious values in counseling are highlighted through series dedicated to providing a refresher review, section by section.

The first part of the series in discussed the Culture and Worldview competencies section in the last summer's edition.

Counselor Awareness is the next section that will be reviewed. It states:

3. The professional counselor actively explores his or her own attitudes, beliefs, and values about spirituality and/or religion.
4. The professional counselor continuously evaluates the influence of his or her own spiritual and/or religious beliefs and values on the client and the counseling process.
5. The professional counselor can identify the limits of his or her understanding of the client's spiritual and/or religious perspective and is acquainted with [religious and spiritual resources and leaders](#) who can be avenues for consultation and to whom the counselor can refer.

Active exploration implies that the counselor seeks to know and identify his own "attitudes, beliefs and values concerning spirituality and/or religion". With an increased knowledge base of what you hold as part of the "personal" you, the counselor can precede to assess how these attitudes, beliefs and values impact your professional life which the client and the delicate counseling process that requires intentionality and the utmost respect. The counselor must differentiate his attitudes, beliefs, and values from the client. Differences are expected, however, during times of higher levels of divergence between client and counselor values often results in conflict. If this values conflict continues, it can become a hinderance to the counselor, if there is a lack of awareness or an inability to bracket them. Ethical bracketing, according to Kocet and Herlihy (2014) is the "the intentional separating of a counselor's personal values from his or her professional values or the intentional setting aside of the counselor's personal values in order to provide ethical and appropriate counseling to all clients, especially those whose worldviews, values, belief systems, and decisions differ significantly from those of the counselor." Counselors are expected to be aware of their own attitudes, beliefs, and values and to "avoid imposing values that are inconsistent with counseling goals" (Standard A.4.b.) The ACA's Code of Ethics reflect our profession's collective values and moral principles (Francis & Dugger, 2014). Certainly, the establishment of a code of ethics, communicates a normative orientation and therefore sets the expectation that the counselor resolves conflicts as they emerge. Knowledge of the available next steps is not only ethical but can result in counselor professional and personal growth.

Our values as counselors shine through for better or for worse. Our spiritual and religious values in counseling are tied into the work we do every day in our profession. Consideration to how we use our religious and spiritual values in counseling is certainly a prerequisite. How does this influence our level of tolerance or acceptance? As counselors, we can face a spiritual bypass where by "one's spirituality, spiritual beliefs, spiritual practices, and spiritual life can contribute to avoidance of experiencing the emotional pain of working through the consequence of decisions and/or psychological issues" (Clarke et al., 2013). The potential for our spiritual and religious values to influence how we view our client's values, and their choices and decisions is highly inevitable as our values color our perception. Inadvertently, we may assign our values to their decisions and risk going down the path of assigning value to those decisions. What lens do we see their choices through? Victimhood, resilience or both? Do we consider clients as perpetrators or product of their environment or somewhere in between? As counselors, we can have flexible or rigid thinking and can be tempted to fall into simplistic judgment of others or place clients into categories more often than not, when the client's life choices strike a note with our own values. Choices in life matter, choices in the lives of our clients have the potential to challenge in places where we lacked awareness or uncertainty how to handle this conflict. Stances on social justice, politics, the economy, race, gender, abortion, sexual orientation, are among some of the topics that can present internal conflict for the counselor. We wrestle with these conflicts in silence.



It is beneficial and necessary to actively consider a multitude of options. One option is to broach the conflict with another professional counselor colleague much like “iron sharpens iron,” which is almost universally seen as positive due to people posing questions, encouraging, coaching, and challenging each other on difficult topics. Another option is to seek out clinical supervision that permits further processing and discussion. There is also the possibility for a consultation as states in the C.2.e. Consultations on Ethical Obligations which writes that “Counselors take reasonable steps to consult with other counselors, the ACA Ethics and Professional Standards Department, or related professionals when they have questions regarding their ethical obligations or professional practice.” It is also advisable to consult religious and spiritual resources and leaders

“iron  
sharpens  
iron”

To view the ASERVIC competencies, please visit the website: <http://www.aservic.org/resources/spiritual-competencies/>

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Interested in submitting an article for the  
WINTER Issue of the

# *Interaction?*

The deadline is

FRIDAY, January 8, 2021

Please refer to **ASERVIC.org**  
for guidelines for publication  
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Joy Mwendwa,  
*Interaction* Editor, at  
jmmaweu@liberty.edu



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