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Challenge and Support: Worldview Champions Promote Spiritual Wellness

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Abstract

Extending research on encouraging students' spiritual explorations in ways that enhance their overall wellbeing, this study examined how faculty and staff provided support to college students dealing with challenges to their spiritual wellness. Findings suggest that common challenges to spiritual wellness, such as encountering spiritual dissonance or feeling spiritually stifled, can be ameliorated when faculty and staff function as worldview champions who provide support by promoting spiritual self-leadership, helping students find their place in a spiritual community, and advocating for spaces for spiritual engagement.

College student wellness has become an increasingly important topic in higher education because record numbers of students continue to seek access to physical and mental health services (Cereola et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2019). Many have argued that wellness should be conceptualized holistically to include spiritual in addition to physical and mental dimensions (Adams et al., 2000; Hammermeister & Peterson, 2001). Studies in higher education have responded to these calls for holistic wellness by investigating aspects of spiritual wellness, including life purpose, direction, and meaning (e.g., Lothes & Nanney, 2020). In addition to the proliferation of spiritually based wellness practices such as mindfulness and

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meditation (e.g., Crowley & Munk, 2017), some researchers approached wellness from the perspective of religious practices specific to a particular religious or nonreligious worldview (Hodge et al., 2016; Longman, 2020). Although spiritual wellness in general is no longer left out of holistic wellness, much remains unexplored with regards to how spiritual wellness can be cultivated on college campuses and where students find the spiritual guidance needed for a holistic sense of wellbeing. Given that spiritual wellness could be regarded as the foundation on which all other dimensions of wellness are built (Myers et al., 2000), how can colleges and universities nurture students' sense of spiritual wellness on campus?

Fostering spirituality and personal worldview development for college students is predicated on the efforts of people (e.g., faculty, staff, administrators, chaplains; see Morin et al., 2021) and places (e.g., offices, departments, religious spaces; see Mross & Riehman-Murphy, 2021; Rockenbach et al., 2020) that contribute to the spiritual, religious, and secular worldview needs of students. Importantly, students' spiritual life is not only supported by those who have a direct relationship with spiritual matters, but the term extends to include a wide range of faculty, staff, and administrators. In this study, this diverse group of institutional actors who are ready to contribute to students' development by encouraging their spiritual selves are termed *worldview champions*. Using Sanford's (1966) theory of challenge and support as a framework, we examined how worldview champions advance, nurture, and support students' spiritual wellness to help them overcome difficult challenges during their college experience. By analyzing data collected from case studies conducted at 18 campuses across the U.S., including interviews with faculty, staff, and administrators as well as student focus groups, we unearthed the dynamics of spiritual support offered to students by these worldview champions.

Review of Literature

Religiosity, spirituality, and worldview are intertwined, each reflecting, at their core, ways students "make meaning of their education and their lives, how they develop a sense of purpose, the value and belief dilemmas they experience as well as the role of religion, the sacred, and the mystical in their lives" (Astin et al., 2011, p. 40). In this article, we define *worldview* as "a guiding life philosophy, which may be based on a particular religious tradition, spiritual orientation, nonreligious perspective, or some combination of these" (Mayhew et al., 2016, p. 2). We use religiosity to refer specifically to practices associated with a particular worldview and spirituality to point at the systems of belief embedded in one's worldview (Nash, 2001).

To set the theoretical and empirical context for this study, we rely on two broad areas of academic inquiry. First, we present literature on the connection between spirituality and wellness in the college student population. Then, we shift to examining avenues for spiritual support that have been identified on college campuses.

Spirituality and Wellness for College Students

Scholars in counseling and counseling psychology have long emphasized the holistic nature of wellness, which led to the creation of numerous frameworks to represent and evaluate holistic wellness. For example, Myers et al. (2000) defined wellness as "a way of life oriented toward optimal health and wellbeing in which body, mind, and spirit are integrated by the individual to live more 60 fully within the human and natural community" (p. 252). These researchers presented a wheel of wellness counseling model that conceptualized wellness as a multidimensional construct focused on five life tasks: spirituality,

self-regulation, work, friendship, and love. By virtue of being a *life task*, spirituality—when understood as "an awareness of a being or a force that transcends the material aspects of living and gives a deep sense of wholeness or connectedness to the universe" (Myers et al., 2000, p. 252)—is unavoidable and universal (see Mosak & Maniacci, 2013). Spirituality in its broadest sense includes, but is not limited to, organized religion, non-religious or secular perspectives, philosophical worldviews, and life orientation, all of which become core elements of holistic wellness.

In line with the universality of spirituality as a life task, studies on college goers have shown the importance of spirituality and the connection between spiritual practices and numerous positive outcomes, contradicting the assumption that college students are not interested or oriented toward religion and spirituality (see Small, 2020). For example, practices of gratitude-based prayers have been associated with an increase in self-reported prosocial tendencies (Yonker et al., 2019), while faith maturity is associated with psychosocial growth (Reymann et al., 2015). Along the same lines, spiritual engagement leads to positive affective outcomes (Rennick et al., 2013), increased quality of life (Anye et al., 2013), helping combat the effects of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and other mental health concerns (e.g., Dein, 2006; Dew et al., 2008; Sorajjakool et al., 2008). Even in the academic sphere, there are indications of increased academic success associated with more grounding in a spiritual worldview and connections to faith communities (Cereola et al., 2014; Ekwonye & DeLauer, 2019). Spirituality as a protective factor against negative personal and academic outcomes might be even more pronounced for minoritized communities that face additional challenges related to prejudice, discrimination, and microaggressions (Hodge et al., 2016).

Across the studies noted earlier, discerning organized religious practice from spiritual connectedness and sense of purpose is challenging because these elements of spiritual wellness are intertwined. To illustrate the complexity and overlap, Pfund and Miller-Perrin (2019) studied the relationship between faith community involvement, interactions, life purpose, and loneliness and the wellbeing of college students. Findings suggested that one's harmony with a particular faith community, manifested through expressed belonging and a lack of conflicting values, along with participation in a faith community-based practice, predicted student wellbeing. Not only did the practice of faith engender wellbeing, but also faith community connections and participation seemed to mediate the relationship between life-purpose, wellbeing, and loneliness. Wellness is a function of complex interactions between attitudes (e.g., self-concept, relationships, life trajectory), characteristics (e.g., personality, social behavior, time management), and circumstances (e.g., income, economic environment; Dolan et al., 2008). Nurturing spiritual wellness should be at the forefront of wellness efforts, but how do college students find spiritual support on campus?

Sources of Spiritual Support on Campus

Students expect their campus environments to support the expression and exploration of their own and others' spirituality during their college years (Chickering et al., 2006). Students grow along several dimensions during college: searching for meaning and purpose; feeling peaceful and centered through hardship (equanimity); relating compassionately to others; and being open to others of different faiths and life philosophies (Astin et al., 2011). Astin et al. (2011) found that students who showed growth in equanimity experienced positive effects on their GPA, leadership skills, wellbeing, ability to get along with others, and satisfaction with college. Additionally, college student wellbeing can be linked to productive personal spirituality and supportive worldview climates. When the campus worldview climate is welcoming, interactions across religious, spiritual, and secular worldviews are common (Rockenbach,

Mayhew, et al., 2017). In a recent study, Mayhew et al. (2020) examined how the college environment contributes to students' development of their religious, spiritual, or secular worldviews and found that supportive spaces where students could engage their worldviews openly, safely, and freely allowed for greater exploration of and commitment to their beliefs.

Campuses have indeed taken measures to provide forms of spiritual support through hiring staff and/or establishing offices and departments tasked with supporting students' spiritual needs. Campus chaplains have recently increased their involvement on campus beyond a singular office or space, adding positive contribution to the campus community through relationships and community building (Barton et al., 2020). At institutions that do not have a chaplain per se, many rely on full- or part-time staff such as program coordinators, directors of spiritual engagement, or deans of religious life (Karlin-Neumann & Sanders, 2013). These campus representatives play a central role connecting students to resources such as campus ministries or other groups that align with their faith traditions where much of students' spiritual needs are nurtured (Pfund & Miller-Perrin, 2019). That said, dedicated staff and offices are not, and should not be, the sole providers of spiritual support, which has been indicated in some higher education literature (Nielsen & Small, 2019; Stewart et al., 2011).

Indeed, expanding the notion of spirituality beyond religious practices or faith-based guidance from campus ministries, chaplains, and offices of religious life, reveals numerous other sources for spiritual support that are broader in scope. For example, Dunlap (2018) examined how vocational advisors incorporate four different domains of spiritual wellness (i.e., personal, communal, transcendental, and environmental) into their career advising approach. This spiritually oriented approach to career advising becomes focused on students' sense of belonging, purpose, and direction. Dunlap (2018) characterized vocational discernment as an exploration of how the four domains of spiritual wellbeing are connected to meaning-making processes among the individuals, their communities, their environments, and their transcendent beliefs, and concluded that the best-fit vocational choice is the one with the most commonality among the domains. Another example would be centers, staff, and offices tasked with supporting student wellness, which can play a vital role in nurturing the spiritual aspects of wellness into wellness-oriented programs and initiatives (Robbins et al., 2021). That said, spiritual wellbeing should not be confined to those charged with students' wellness and those in charge of spiritual life but can be incorporated in students' lives in the academic realm as well. Faculty who "have the most regular contact with students" have opportunities to "incorporate elements of connection into each class, regardless of the subject matter" (DiLorenzo, 2015, p. 231). The college environment is fraught with psychological, physical, emotional, and spiritual challenges that affect students' wellbeing (Bishop, 2016), which should propel institutions to devise effective, multifaceted approaches to supporting student wellbeing within the various spaces that students occupy. In this study, this collective of individuals supporting students' spiritual wellness—both those specifically tasked with fostering student spirituality and those who engage students' spiritual selves in the course of their assigned work—are considered worldview champions.

So far, we have demonstrated through the review of literature that *spirituality*—a term broadly connected to religion, meaning, purpose, or faith—is a crucial component of student wellness, and that spiritual support is associated with a myriad of positive and desirable outcomes educators must consider in their campus efforts. We have also shown how students seek and receive spiritual support through various avenues on campus that include, but are not limited to, places and people tasked with spiritual engagement. This study adds to this body of research by taking a closer look at interactions that are connected or that contribute to students' spiritual wellness, seeking to answer the research question: How

are students' spiritual wellness efforts championed on college campuses? Our findings explore two facets of how worldview championing occurs: First, we identify the spiritually oriented challenges that students in this study encountered in their college environments, and second, we show the ways support was offered by worldview champions to ameliorate the negative impact of these challenges and allow students to develop their spiritual selves. We hope that this study encourages more institutional actors to exhibit supportive behaviors that may help students from diverse worldview backgrounds achieve and maintain their spiritual wellness.

Conceptual Framework

This study's conceptual framework draws from two developmental theories. First, we use Sanford's's (1966) concepts of readiness, challenge, and support to consider the ways in which college students, who are ready to engage in their own spiritual wellness efforts, encounter challenges and how those challenges may be transformed into developmental opportunities through support received from worldview champions. Sanford (1966) posited that, for any given outcome, a student who is developmentally ready to grow or learn will do so when they encounter challenges that result in meaningful dissonance while receiving a balanced level of support from their environment. In this theory, an excess of support or challenge impedes students from achieving the desired development. Additionally, it is unlikely development will occur unless students are "ready" to change, meaning they have the disposition, desire, and ability for growth related to the given outcome (Sanford, 1966).

Second, we use the Interfaith Learning and Development (ILD) framework (Mayhew & Rockenbach, 2021), a conceptual model designed to examine the interplay between the students' spiritual explorations, the campus environment, and the various faculty, staff, and administrators engaged in structuring developmental opportunities, to situate these interactions between students and faculty, staff, and administrators within the larger context of their institutions. The ILD framework includes the institutional context (climate, culture, organizational behaviors, and institutional conditions) and the relational context (supportive spaces, provocative experiences, coercive places, discriminatory practices, and unproductive environments) as relevant components for how the overall college environment affects student outcomes—like wellbeing—related to worldview development.

Bringing these two frameworks together offers a nuanced lens for examining the data. Some challenges to students' spiritual wellness—such as leaving home, forming friendships across difference, experiencing greater freedom—might occur within their own developmental processes. External environmental challenges, such as the increasing worldview diversity of the student population (Stolzenberg et al., 2019), the history of Christian privilege on college campuses (Seifert, 2007), a general inclination toward, and possible privileging of, secularism (Blumenfeld, 2006), the difficulties inherent in balancing religious expression with the separation of church and state (Fairchild, 2009), or the lack of opportunities for formal discussions about religion and spirituality among faculty, staff, and students (Rockenbach, Mayhew, et al., 2017), would fall within the ILD's institutional context. Both types of challenges may affect students' spiritual wellness and make the supportive interventions of worldview champions important for fostering growth and development.

Another layer of the ILD, the relational context, offers insights into the positive and negative interactions between members of the campus community that can manifest as either challenge or support for students' spiritual wellness efforts. Due to the environmental factors listed above, discussions about

faith, spirituality, and worldview may be difficult and possibly avoided by faculty and staff, presenting a challenge to students interested in exploring these topics (Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2014; Stamm, 2003; Stewart et al., 2011). However, as reviewed in the literature, there is a clear connection between supporting students' worldview explorations and their ability to maintain a foundation of spiritual wellness.

The developmental process of interest in this study is the life task of spirituality. Based on relevant literature, we know that students come to college ready to engage with their spiritual selves and that there are some challenges inherent to that engagement in the college environment (Astin et al., 2011; Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2014). The purpose of this study was to explore more closely the interactions between students, worldview champions, and the college environment to illuminate ways in which faculty and staff encourage spiritual wellness. Accordingly, using the structure of challenge and support offered through Sanford's's (1966) theory and the key contexts of institutional and relational interaction offered by the ILD (Mayhew & Rockenbach, 2021), we examined our data to discover how students perceived challenges to their spiritual wellness, and how worldview champions functioned as sources of support that balanced these challenges, thus allowing students to develop their spirituality and maintain their spiritual wellness.

Research Design

This study uses qualitative data gathered through the Interfaith Diversity Experiences and Attitudes Longitudinal Survey project (IDEALS; see IFYC, n.d.). IDEALS employed a mixed-method design to explore student growth and development trajectories as a result of exposure to and participation in collegiate contexts and experiences involving worldview diversity and interfaith engagement. In addition to surveying students at 122 institutions across three timepoints, the project included 18 in-depth case studies that provided critical context and nuance to the overall findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each case study took place over three days to allow researchers adequate time to collect primary and observational data about the climate for worldview diversity on each campus (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participant recruitment was coordinated by campus liaisons who identified faculty, staff, and administrators familiar with interfaith efforts at each institution and provided access to recruit students with a broad range of worldview identities, campus involvement, and interests in interfaith engagement. Data collection activities included hour-long, semi-structured interviews with faculty, staff, and administrators; 90-minute focus groups with 4–8 students each; observations of relevant activities, classes, and spaces; and review of pertinent institutional documents (e.g., syllabi, strategic plans, policies). Sample demographics including the number of participant and institutional characteristics are included in Table 1. The IDEALS team analyzed data from all 18 case studies using an *a priori* code structure aligned with the project's theoretical constructs, namely, campus worldview climate, and drawn from the quantitative survey component of the mixed-methods design.

Following recommendations outlined by Ruggiano and Perry (2019) on secondary qualitative data analysis, this study delves more deeply into themes that emerged from the IDEALS parent study about championing behaviors. During data analysis for the parent study, a specific *a priori* code for "interfaith champions" was applied to examples of offices or individuals that were instrumental in moving spiritual efforts forward. Peer debriefing sessions (Marshall & Rossman, 2014) among members of the research team revealed that there may have been a greater variety of championing behaviors demonstrated by students,

Table 1

Sample Demographics.

Institution	Region	IDEALS affiliation	Institution size	Selectivity	Participants	
					Students	**Staff**
Great Lakes College	Great Lakes	Protestant	<3,000	2	17	23
Heartland State	Plains	Public	3,000–12,000	4	12	11
Lakeview College	Great Lakes	Protestant	<3,000	4	6	12
Mid-South University	Southeast	Private, nonsectarian	3,000–12,000	2	14	14
Mideast College	Mideast	Private, nonsectarian	<3,000	1	14	15
Midwest State	Great Lakes	Public	>12,000	4	15	10
Mountain University	Rocky Mountains	Catholic	<3,000	4	16	10
New England College	New England	Private, nonsectarian	<3,000	1	20	10
Ohio River University	Southeast	Catholic	<3,000	3	16	11
Plains University	Plains	Catholic	3,000–12,000	3	13	14
Prairie College	Plains	Catholic	<3,000	3	24	12
River University	Southeast	Private, nonsectarian	3,000–12,000	1	14	14
South Western University	Southwest	Protestant	<3,000	3	18	12
Southeast State	Southeast	Public	>12,000	3	11	8
Southern State	Southeast	Public	>12,000	4	12	9
Southwest University	Southwest	Evangelical	<3,000	4	17	16
Upstate College	Mideast	Private, nonsectarian	<3,000	1	19	12
West State	Far West	Public	>12,000	3	10	10

IDEALS Affiliation is a study-specific control designation that combines institutional type, control, and religious affiliation. Selectivity is a measure of admissions competitiveness with five categories (i.e., 1 = most competitive, 2 = highly competitive, 3 = very competitive, 4 = competitive, and 5 = less competitive) determined using Barron's *Profiles of American Colleges* (Barron's Educational Series, 2015).

faculty, staff, and administrators than previously conceptualized, with evidence from the data showing how these individuals provided support within their specific campus context. Further discussion of these excerpts resulted in the research team positing that these championing behaviors may have contributed to supporting students' spiritual wellness, but the team determined that this line of inquiry was outside the scope of the parent study. To explore this question empirically, we engaged in a secondary analysis to examine the data for instances of *championing* where faculty, staff, and administrators supported students' spirituality and thus their efforts to foster spiritual wellness as part of their overall wellbeing.

To define the parameters of the dataset for the secondary analysis, we considered what sections of the qualitative data would allow us to examine the richest and broadest set of championing behaviors captured through the parent study. Based on our knowledge of the data, we decided to include data from all 18 case study institutions and specifically focused on three sets of excerpts coded during the parent study that were most likely to have captured examples of championing behaviors: interfaith champions (n = 445) because that was the code most aligned with our question; space for support or expression (n = 944) because this code often captured championing behaviors that were more focused on student-level interactions and not institutional

efforts; and, a cross-coded set of faculty and student experiences (n = 36) to capture any potentially rich interactions that did not fit neatly into the other two codes. This process produced a corpus of 1295 unique excerpts from the parent study and formed the initial dataset of excerpts for the present study.

For the secondary analysis, we reexamined all 1295 excerpts using four codes related to psychological wellbeing (hardiness, optimism, self-efficacy, and positive thoughts; see Lightsey, 1996; Myers et al., 2000), two codes related to supporting spiritual exploration (organized practice, reflection), and remained open to adding emergent codes that nuanced the data, resulting in the addition of four more codes related to spiritual exploration (creating spaces, role modeling, spiritual communities, training efforts). The total of coded excerpts was 245. After removing overlapping excerpts, we identified 206 instances where championing and spiritual wellness were connected. These excerpts included 33 students and 100 faculty, staff, or administrators across all 18 institutions.

As we analyzed, we determined that it was difficult to understand the psychological wellbeing concepts using our dataset; we triangulated this conclusion between the infrequency of these code applications, peer debriefing about the thin descriptions in the coded excerpts, and conversations with research team members from the parent study who were not engaged in this secondary analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Jones et al., 2014). We concluded that this data would not support a rigorous exploration of the psychological concepts but there was ample evidence of the connection between spiritual support and student wellbeing. Accordingly, we used our conceptual framework to understand how students' spiritual explorations were being challenged on campus and how championing within the institutional and relational contexts provided the support students needed to develop their spirituality.

Consistent with best practices in qualitative research methodologies (see Pasque et al., 2012), we want to acknowledge our positionality and our connection to the research project. Author one identifies as a cisgender woman who is a devout, progressive evangelical Christian from a white, middle-class, and highly educated family. The second author is a graduate student who identifies as a Muslim cisgender man and whose wellbeing has benefited immensely from his spiritual connection. The third author identifies as an Evangelical Christian, white, cisgender man who centers his faith for deriving meaning from all of his life's experiences. The fourth author is a white, queer, cisgender woman of the Christian faith who draws strength from spiritual practices and community. All researchers have been involved with the qualitative portion of the parent IDEALS project and have been involved with the IRB-approved procedures for data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting.

Findings

Our data offered many examples of ways worldview champions in this study engaged with students' spirituality. We first highlight the two prevalent challenges students encountered as they sought to explore their spirituality on campus. We then explore the strategies worldview champions used to address these challenges and provide appropriate support by intervening with individuals through one-on-one interactions and larger groups with advocacy and advising efforts.

Challenge: "Really Struggling" With Spiritual Dissonance

Transition to College

Students seemed to experience dissonance between their spiritual upbringing before college and their spiritual self-concept during college that required further exploration. For example, a Catholic student at Great Lakes College was concerned that when she came to college, she "would just stop going to church or praying or any other spiritual activities I used to do at home." Contrary to what she thought, meeting different people in college helped her adapt to the new environment and discuss her beliefs. She noted, "even though I met a lot of people that have different beliefs, my view opened much more, but I was still … what I believed; it's strengthened instead of losing it." For this student, it was the connection with her peers that helped her resolve some of the new dissonance she encountered. For another student at Southwest University, the dissonance was between his expectations of what a Catholic institution would be like and what he actually experienced, especially in the classroom. This student was "surprised at the progressive-ness at Southwest especially in the theology department … . Just hearing ideas without being forced to accept them … being able to understand that there are different ways of thinking out there." This openness to ideas came as a surprise to the student because he "didn't really expect that. I expected the straight, catholic [answers], organized over the same [biblical] stories that we've always gone over for the past 20 years."

A staff member at Mid-South University shared their encounter with a first-year Jewish student who "was struggling … really struggling" with the transition to college for a multitude of reasons. She was "in the process of breaking up with her first significant-time boyfriend and being away from home [was difficult because] … she has a very close relationship with her family," and the staff member noted the student seemed to crave deeper spiritual involvement. In this instance, the staff member operated as a worldview champion and offered "some of the resources Judaism provides for her … she didn't know there was something called Jewish meditation … and while she was not interested in prayer, per se, she was very interested in Jewish meditation." This example demonstrates how some educators were perceiving experiences of spiritual transition in the students with whom they interacted.

Sexuality

Some students experienced spiritual dissonance at the intersection of their social identities, most notably spirituality and sexual orientation. A student at a Midwest State "grew up in a very conservative Christian household" and struggled with being gay. Coming to college allowed him to open up and express his sexuality more freely. Similarly, at River University, a private Southern institution, a Christian student considering conversion to Islam grappled with being gay and sought out the Muslim campus chaplain, who affirmed to the student that "being gay doesn't take you outside of Islam." However, the chaplain reported thinking, "It's probably better that they just stay with their church family anyway. I don't know how supportive the average mosque would be there … . It's probably better that they ask me that question than the imam at the mosque." To navigate this identity intersection, some students used LGBT resource centers to connect with others and make sense of their spirituality, but these spaces were not available on every campus. At Southwest University, a counseling services staff member tried to start an LGBTQ student group but was told the group would not move forward because it was "not in line with our identity and our mission." Her efforts to start a less public support group through counseling services also met with institutional resistance.

Gender

The intersection of gender and spirituality seemed to create dissonance for students, specifically women. A staff member who advised the Muslim student group at Great Lakes College shared that while the hijab-wearing women were prepared for the challenges of being Muslim at a Christian institution, they

were surprised by how different their campus experiences were compared to Muslim men. At Plains University, a faculty member shared that students did not have "language to talk about the patriarchy that they experience as Catholic women in the church" and benefitted from reflecting about "feeling like second class citizens in the Catholic Church." He perceived that students were yearning for more opportunities to have deep spiritual conversations that would allow them to explore and ground their spirituality.

Challenge: "They Don't Feel Comfortable Sharing."

Feeling Stifled or Silenced

Another challenge was the perceived campus climate for religious and spiritual expression, which seemed to feel stifling and silencing to students in our study, even those who identified with dominant ideologies. An evangelical Christian student at New England College shared, "If [students] do associate with Christianity, they want to keep it hidden a little because you don't want to be too religious here." Another evangelical student at Ohio River University, a Catholic institution, indicated she felt "uncomfortable" expressing her worldview outside of close friend groups because these views did not align with the prevailing Catholic identity of the institution.

Students holding minority worldviews seemed to find spiritual expression additionally challenging, likely because most participants recognized the presence of religious diversity in the student body but concurrently noted a significant Christian majority. For example, an atheist student at Southwest University chose to tell others that he is Christian because he "didn't want to be preached to or evangelized or get into that very long conversation." Another Southwest student, who used to be Christian but identified as spiritual at the time of the focus group, was frustrated with the pressure to convert or attend a particular church noting that the institution was "not super accepting of religions outside of Christianity." Although the student expected that at an Evangelical institution, he still found it "frustrating when someone asks you, 'What church do you go to?,' and the simple answer is 'I just don't attend church' turns into this long religious conversation."

From the perspectives of faculty, staff, and administrators, the experiences of students feeling stifled from sharing minoritized views were palpable. At Southeast State, a student life administrator commented that "students of other [non-Christian] faiths … they don't feel comfortable sharing … because maybe they feel like they're the minority." In the same region, a Jewish staff member from Ohio River University recognized that students who "are not Christian are pretty quiet." She told a story about learning a student worker was also Jewish, saying, "We had worked together for six months before we even knew it because you kind of assume everyone's … it's not something most people talk about regularly."

Resource Disparities

At some institutions, efforts to engage diverse worldview communities fell short of being truly inclusive. At Midwest State, an affiliated campus minister said he was "discouraged" because other spiritual leaders were not recognizing important practical differences when supporting students from diverse traditions. In a similar vein, some campuses had established spaces for spiritual practice but their usefulness to the community was limited because staff members were unable to help students access them. At Mideast College, one staff member shared, "We have this prayer and meditation room that our office runs, but I can't even tell you where it is. I don't know if students actually know it exists." Taken together, these

data highlight ways the campus environment could be perceived as difficult or uncomfortable and underscore the challenges students may encounter in engaging their spirituality.

Support: "What Is Your Method of Centering Yourself?"

The data revealed many successful efforts by worldview champions to engage and support students' spirituality, driven by the perceived desire of students to engage in profound conversations. For example, one staff member at River University, a nonsectarian private institution in the South, encountered students who "come seeking to talk to someone about meaning" because they were not getting these types of conversations in academic environments that are "very focused on academics and not so much on who I am or sort of the essence of me."

As a response to students' perceived needs for reflection, worldview champions engaged students in self-reflection various ways. Several institutions embedded mindfulness practices into aspects of campus life while others actively incorporated spirituality into their counseling approach. A faculty member at Mideast College relied on open-ended questioning to understand first-year students' existing support systems including family members, therapists, religious leaders, or on-campus communities. There were many examples where staff, especially those housed in spiritual life, demonstrated an ability to assess students' need for support beyond their spiritual explorations and would refer them to professional counseling appropriately. One staff member in the counseling department at New England College explained that counselors follow the students' lead and allow them to determine how integral spirituality is in their lives. She said the counselors might ask, "What does [faith] mean to you? What type of a faith practice, if any, were you raised in? Is that still something that's relevant for you?" In addition to making referrals, staff and faculty helped students through difficult situations by building rapport and encouraging spiritual self-leadership. At a nonsectarian Southeastern institution, one staff member said, "I let them take the lead … try to build a relationship with them … I'm not going to judge them where they fall on the spectrum of practicing their faith or questioning their faith." These staff guided students to use their spiritual foundations as sources of emotional and psychological support. A chaplain at Mideast College reminded a student during an emotional crisis of spiritual practices that bring her peace:

> I said to her [the student], "Well how do you calm down? How do you relax, what is your method of centering yourself?" And she said, "Well I pray." … I said, "Do you pray daily?" … And so, she [the student] started talking a little bit about that.

Worldview champions also role-modeled ownership of their spiritual identities. For example, at Great Lakes College, a sectarian institution, one faculty member shared that he "came out publicly as an Atheist" to provide students with an alternate narrative as they wrestled with their own spirituality. University staff, faculty, and administrators across our data seemed to positively support students' engagement with their spirituality to address difficult situations, allowing it to serve as a protective factor that helped them overcome a variety of challenges.

Support: "We Absolutely Want to Make Sure That They Find Their Place."

Faculty and staff across the interviews shared many stories of helping students find spiritual communities. For example, at South Western University, the formal Protestant campus ministry's efforts resulted in the formation of a Muslim student group despite the sectarian identity of the institution. At West State,

a public university, a staff member connected students with community religious organizations as a way to provide a sense of belonging for a diverse incoming first-year class:

> Some new students feel a sense of belonging in the church, and so, we absolutely want to make sure that they find their place, find their home and their community. Some feel really uncomfortable or somewhat, even, repelled by the church ... so there's a sense that I have to [help] those students find a different sense of belonging, different clubs and organizations.

Many university officials were eager to support student initiatives related to spiritual engagement. At a nonsectarian institution in the South, a staff member stated, "If the students want it, then that is what we will throw our resources behind." Student-driven events like dialogs on the "so-called Muslim Ban" or an instructive "Hijab Day" helped students engage their spiritualty. At Mountain University, a faculty unofficially advising a religious minority group said, "I have tried, without imposing something, to support students who are either interested in doing interfaith things on campus and supporting religious minorities, particularly Jews and Muslims." These examples show successful and thoughtful partnerships between students and institutional actors to create and encourage productive spaces for support and spiritual expression.

Spiritual communities were often foregrounded as another avenue for exploring spirituality. Some communities brought diverse spiritual perspectives together for students to learn from one another and "find a place to be who they are in their own space with others," in the words of a faculty member at New England College. At Prairie College, one student mentioned the diversity of worldview communities promoted on campus:

> [The] spiritual life [office] provides a lot of different opportunities, whether it's like service trips or ... where we have a speaker come in and talk about some faith related subject. And it's usually down in the pub, and anybody is welcome ... to come in and kind of explore their faith.

While communities designed for engagement with a specific spiritual practice were commonly components of students' spiritual involvements, faculty and staff were often behind the scenes ensuring the available options represented the worldview diversity of their campuses. For example, at Lakeview College, a faculty member shared that Muslim and Pagan students had practice-specific communities and could "find a lot of acceptance" due to work of the staff in the chaplain's office, indicating intentional and concerted efforts to ensure that students find places of belonging for their religious, spiritual, and worldview needs.

Support: "Could We Have a Space?"

Many institutional actors were interested in improving the spiritual opportunities available to students and were considering how changing worldview demographics might affect the future campus population. A key resource discussed across the data was physical space for spiritual expression. Some campuses, like Southern State, had established spaces that were well-known "by a variety of faculty, staff, and students as a resource for students that are facing some kind of challenge in terms of religious identity," according to a spiritual life staff member.

However, many campuses either did not have physical spaces or they were not well-integrated into the campus environment. Establishing prayer or meditation spaces seemed to require student interest to move forward and staff support to navigate logistics. The process described by an administrator at an urban Mideastern institution is an instructive example:

Students had been using staircases and places that they felt were sort of out of the way, and they came forward and said, "Could we have a space?" ... So, the Muslim students on campus really sort of initiated. And then, Jewish students came along and ... when we actually had the sit down, there were five religions represented. But then, we also wanted to be clear to call it a meditation space so that, again, we were clear that anybody could use it.

Similarly, Midwest State created a prayer space as the result of a proactive administrator. The head of the commission who oversaw the project shared, "The dean of the library actually identified that [space] as a need. She was seeing students go into storage rooms and book aisles to pray during the day and approached us with creating a reflection space." A public university in the South, Southeast State, has yet to create such a space, though one staff member shared, "I have suggested an interfaith prayer and meditation room. We'll see if that happens." While hopeful, he anticipated logistical challenges with identifying a space, questions about funding, and hesitation to do anything new on campus—especially related to religion.

Worldview champions brought up accommodations for religiously observant students numerous times. A staff member at River University stated, "We've been really intentional about getting more kosher food options and halal food options for our Jewish and Muslim students, respectively, in the dining halls." At Midsouth University, a faculty member mentioned advocating for time accommodations, saying, "If you say you value religious diversity, and you have Jewish students who keep Shabbat and don't work on Saturdays, but you continue to hold exams on Saturdays, what does that communicate to your Jewish community ... ?" New England College incorporated spiritual topics into a training program on inclusivity, and two staff members from different departments worked together to support "the holistic wellness approach ... , which is mind, body and spirit" by intentionally "doing things that promote a sense of calm, a sense of wellbeing in the mind that's different from mental health." Many worldview champions across our data mentioned their efforts during planning meetings or direct work with departments to increase understanding of spiritual accommodations.

Discussion

The college campus can be a difficult place for students to explore their spiritual selves as part of their own wellbeing efforts. The data showed how students encounter spiritual dissonance and spiritual stifling on campus and the impact on these students' spiritual wellness. Consistent with the literature, students expressed interest in developing their belief systems (Stamm, 2003), engaging in conversations about meaning and purpose (Astin et al., 2011), and understanding their multiple identities alongside their spirituality (Hodge et al., 2016). These types of dissonance-inducing challenges are common among college students and can be seen in numerous domains beyond spirituality (Bowman et al., 2020). The findings speak to a particular form of dissonance that happens when students begin to explore spirituality beyond the boundaries of their home environments (Mayhew et al., 2020). Similarly, tension with sexuality exploration is common among the college student population (Hughes & Hurtado, 2018). Our findings add to this knowledge by highlighting the religious and spiritual component of this dissonant tension which requires interventions that are sensitive to the intricacies of faith and belief. Certainly, we are only able to represent a fraction of the perspectives that exist on college campuses, and it is safe to assume that the students who participated in our research were those who have already addressed some of these challenges with dissonance. Our findings constitute an entry point for future research to explore

more in-depth the nature and characteristics of spiritual transition and spiritual identity dissonance in college to illuminate what makes interventions most helpful and useful for students.

Findings from this study also illuminated three types of support worldview champions can offer students that will enhance their spiritual wellness: encouraging spiritual self-leadership, promoting spiritual communities, and advocating for physical spaces. These findings align with previous studies that showed a positive link between spiritual or religious engagement and college student well-being (e.g., Bowman & Small, 2012; Ozmen et al., 2018; Riggers-Piehl & Sax, 2018), and extend these studies through the qualitative method that offers specific supportive actions.

Encouraging self-leadership took a variety of forms, but instead of imposing their own beliefs on students, champions generally intervened by helping individuals reflect on how their established beliefs and worldview knowledge could help them through a present adversity. Reflection conversations helped students access internal tools and meaningful actions that they could integrate into their spiritual practice going forward. These examples are instructive especially because they include examples both from inside and outside of the work of spiritual life student affairs staff including first-year transition programs, gender and sexuality centers, multicultural affairs, and counseling and psychiatry. The findings thus reaffirm previous calls for a more holistic approach to spiritual support beyond a single office or department (e.g., Astin et al., 2011; Durant, 2017; Rockenbach et al., 2020). Counseling services are especially poised to provide spiritual support given the confidential nature of their work (at most institutions; Meilman, 2016; Xiao et al., 2017). Perhaps counseling services could offer needed support on religiously affiliated campus where students may fear sharing spiritual struggles. Are college psychiatry and counseling providers equipped with the tools for spiritually supporting students? Is the capacity for supporting spiritual challenges through counseling different between sectarian and nonsectarian institutions? How do students at sectarian institutions perceive counseling services when they struggle in their beliefs? These are rich questions for future research to elaborate and explore.

Worldview champions also promoted students' involvement with spiritual communities on their campuses by encouraging practice-specific communities, creating places for spiritual exploration, assisting students with spiritual celebrations, and encouraging students to plan events that showcased their worldviews. While it was unsurprising that LGBTQ students shared about difficulties navigating their identity while maintaining an engaged spiritual life (Rockenbach, Lo, et al., 2017; Wolff et al., 2016), our study demonstrated how worldview champions and welcoming communities can provide LGBTQ students places they can be authentic as both sexual and spiritual people. Aligned with previous research on favorable worldview climates (Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2014), champions in this study reported that they understood that visible worldview representation and supportive networks helped students experience a sense of belonging on campus and maintain their spiritual wellness.

Students also expressed the need for spaces on campus that could be used to center their personal and communal efforts. Their requests for space align with Mayhew's et al. (2020) finding that students' deep questioning and ultimately spiritual commitment are less likely to occur without spaces dedicated to spiritual connection and exploration. By advocating for physical space on campus, these faculty and staff members are helping students engage meaningfully with their spiritual wellness. On most campuses, securing dedicated space will require the work of worldview champions to accomplish because students on their own will may lack the logistical or political knowledge, or simple longevity, needed to organize the effort (see Stewart et al., 2011). Additionally, while everyone on campus benefits from having space dedicated to spiritual practice, our data demonstrated that the students who often need these spaces most

were members of minority religious groups who might have been unlikely to ask for the space themselves.

Encouraging spiritual self-leadership, promoting spiritual communities, and advocating for physical spaces are possible for any institutional actor on campus. Many studies have established the connection between spirituality and psychosocial wellness (Cereola et al., 2014; Dew et al., 2008; Hammermeister & Peterson, 2001; Reymann et al., 2015), and we continued to see spirituality emerge as a protective factor. However, while both students and worldview champions shared stories of engaging in spiritual conversations, the data show that those types of interactions are not the only way to support students' spiritual wellness. In this study, those who described fruitful or profound interactions that supported students' wellness were often allowing the students to direct the conversation, were involved in a community that allowed those topics to resurface, or spent time in a physical space geared toward spiritual matters, championing behaviors for all institutional actors.

Limitations

The primary limitation to this study is that the data examined were not collected with a spiritual wellness as the focus. This tension was most notable when trying to explore the aspects of psychological wellness embedded in the life task of spiritual wellness. While the interactions of students and worldview champions were aligned with the design of the parent study, the data were not nuanced enough to differentiate the psychological concepts. Another limitation was the inability to member-check directly with participants; despite familiarity with these data, it is possible we missed nuances about the participants' experiences with the analytical shift to a wellness paradigm.

Implications

Students are grappling with spiritual matters while on our college campuses, which makes supporting their spiritual wellness relevant to all institutions of higher education. This study highlights several key implications for practice. First, students will tend to approach the campus stakeholders with whom they have already established rapport, so knowledge of the spiritual resources on campus must be broadly known and easily accessible. Many meaningful conversations about spirituality happened during one-on-one settings that are not unique to pastors, chaplains, or spiritual life directors. Relatedly, campuses should find ways to include the staff of affiliated religious organizations (e.g., Hillel, Chabad, CRU, Intervarsity) in trainings and communication efforts related to student wellness because these advisors are likely to establish meaningful relationships with students. Additionally, given the pressure that counseling centers face due to the increased demand for services in volume, breadth, and delivery (Meilman, 2016; Xiao et al., 2017), there may be a creative opportunity to innovate how support student wellness. In our data, we saw campus ministers, student life staff, faculty, and administrators to support students' spiritual wellness regardless of shared religious traditions. We in higher education should anticipate that these trends will only continue and should evaluate how to increase the readiness of faculty and staff to be worldview champions who can offer productive encounters that help students maintain their spiritual wellness as a firm foundation for overall wellbeing.

Second, students tend to reach out when in crisis, but many long-term solutions require campus spaces specifically designed to support their spiritual needs. Institutions should consider conducting an

evaluation of the spaces currently available for spiritual purposes and critically examine who those spaces are serving (see Small, 2020). Third, when hiring staff dedicated to spiritual life, institutions should attempt to determine whether they have the openness and the skills to be fluent in supporting students from diverse spiritual traditions and social identities. While the unique history and structural environment of each campus informs how spiritual resources are provided, our findings show that students may need an institutional actor they trust to be a worldview champion regardless of their office or position. Future research should have a primary design focused on supporting the spiritual wellness of college students and should specifically examine how students connect the dimensions of psychological wellness (i.e., self-efficacy, hardiness, optimism, and positive thoughts) to their spiritual wellness.

Conclusion

Our campuses already have many potential worldview champions in the faculty and staff who are currently working with students. Our study shows that these institutional actors are who we need to provide support for students as they navigate challenges that affect their spiritual wellness. Worldview champions can positively impact students' overall wellbeing by accepting that students are ready to engage with their own spiritual explorations and being ready to offer meaningful, individualized support that promotes their spiritual wellness.

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