

Waking Up in Critical Incidents Within the Cycle of Liberation: A Review of the Literature and a Call to Action to the Field of Counseling

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Abstract

There has been a growing movement in counselor education to expand the counseling role from its traditional emphasis on solely psychological issues and concerns to a broader focus on social justice and the systemic circumstance that can affect one's intellectual, social, and psychological development (Ratts et al., 2007; Singh et al., 2010; Sue et al., 1992). However, there is empirical evidence that candidates entering counselor education programs have limited knowledge about multiculturalism, social justice, and advocacy. This article provides an overview of the historical development of multicultural and social justice competence in counseling as well as how multiculturalism, social justice, and liberation are linked in counseling. Further, the article will provide suggestions for training future counselors in the state of Florida and implications for further research.

Keywords: counseling, counselor education, counselor trainees, multicultural and social justice competence, liberation, liberation psychology, ally identity development

Introduction

Social inequities, such as access to educational opportunities, healthcare, housing, employment, and salary, exist based on individual differences in socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, age, religion, immigration status, sex, physical and mental ability or disability, and sexual orientation. These injustices continue to be pervasive in the United States (U.S.) and create further mental health disparities (Lee & Waltz, 1998; Linnemeyer et al., 2018; Toporek et al., 2006). As the third most populous state in the U.S., Florida is not exempt from these pervasive injustices, particularly the continued acts of racial violence against Black and African-American citizens. In a Florida suburban neighborhood, the death of Trayvon Martin catalyzed the modern-day racial justice movement. The impacts of his murder now undergird the present-day racial justice movement for the lives of those such as Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, two recent murders that have highlighted horrific acts of police brutality. To respond to these injustices, Florida counselor educators and mental health professionals are urged to develop strategies directed toward changing the deep, systemic causes of injustice, and to align their practice with social justice advocacy principles and techniques (Goodman et al., 2004; Linnemeyer et al., 2018; Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2003; Vera & Speight, 2003).

Graduate preparation programs have a responsibility to train and develop multiculturally competent and socially just counselors. Graduate curriculums should encourage conscious reflection and self-understanding with counselor trainees (Wilson & Meyer, 2011). The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCCs) provides counselor educators with guidelines to transform how counseling is taught and practiced (Ratts, 2017). The MSJCCs suggests that becoming a self-aware counselor is critical to the first step in becoming a culturally competent counselor. A self-aware counselor takes action to learn about their assumptions, biases, privileged identities, values, and beliefs (Ratts et al., 2016).

Additionally, the construct of liberation plays a critical role in social justice counseling, as liberation is defined as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970, p. 79). Social justice counseling should be centered in advocacy and creating liberating spaces for clients. While social justice advocacy and liberation are considered separate constructs, both overlap in many ways. Most importantly, the primary goals of these two constructs is the actualization of clients and creating empowering spaces for individuals to create or re-create their own realities (Linnemeyer et al., 2018). These constructs are also inseparable because marginalization is the main process by which social injustice is maintained, and both constructs are deeply rooted in combating oppressive structures (Motulsky et al., 2014; Vera & Speight, 2003). In order for counselors to be effective at social justice counseling, they must develop a critical consciousness, a principle of liberation psychology, to become aware of and involved in an action related to understanding truth (Martín-Baró, 1994).

The cycle of liberation is a framework and tool counselor educators can use to help master’s level counseling students understand their own experiences of liberation, specifically what it means to “wake up” within a critical incident. Typically, an individual enters the pathway to liberation through a critical incident in which an individual begins to see themselves differently in the world than they have before (Harro, 2013). Harro (2013) defined waking up as an intrapersonal change in the core of someone about what they believe about themselves and the world. The cycle of liberation teaches an individual how they can play a role in liberation and social justice advocacy. This understanding connects the importance of self-awareness, critical consciousness, and social justice advocacy in counseling.

This conceptual article uses an integrated theoretical framework that highlights principles of liberation psychology and the cycle of liberation as a perspective from which counselor trainees are developing their multicultural and social justice competence within their counselor identity. More specifically, liberation psychology draws attention to the systemic issues within society and their impacts on mental health. The cycle of liberation provides an organized approach for an individual to map their own liberation process. Finally, this article provides recommendations for Florida counselor educators and related professionals who wish to support the exploration of waking up within critical incidents by providing guidance for concepts, practices, and teachings.

The Sociopolitical Landscape of Counseling and Counselor Education

Currently, leaders at the highest level of the U.S. government are openly expressing hateful speech in a manner that has created great tension and fear in the educational system (Freedom du Lac, 2016; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2017). The previous (Trump) White House administration held extremist and right-wing views towards marginalized groups (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2017). Therefore, historically marginalized communities are experiencing additional minority stress, and counselors can play an important role in alleviating this stress in the counseling environment (Brubaker et al., 2011; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2017). For example, in summer 2020, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) issued guidance indicating that international students must take in-person classes to remain in the U.S. while many colleges and universities had already announced their plans to have courses fully or mostly online for the Fall 2020 semester. Because of legal injunctions from several top universities, ICE reversed this decision, but not without leaving thousands of international students in distress. Considering the historical context of, and the current U.S. sociopolitical environment, there is an urgent need for counselors to be prepared to become strong multicultural and social justice advocates. However, most counseling professionals have not been trained to work with anyone other than dominant culture individuals and communities (e.g., White, straight, Christian, cisgender, able-bodied) and the

historical origins of counselor education have strong roots in Euro-American and Western cultures (Arredondo et al., 2014).

According to the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (2014), “honoring diversity and embracing a multicultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural contexts” (p. 3) is a core professional value of members of the counseling profession. Based on the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) statistics and the ACA Code of Ethics, it is reasonable to assert that counselors should possess at the very least strong multicultural counseling competency (Minton, 2017). For instance, between 2003 and 2013, the percentage of students enrolled in U.S. public elementary and secondary schools decreased for students who were White and Black. In contrast, the percentage of students enrolled in public schools increased for students who were Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, and Multiracial (USDE, 2017). According to the USDE website and National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), between fall 2013 and fall 2025, the percentage of students enrolled in public schools is projected to continue to decrease for students who are White and Black. The percentage is projected to increase for students who are Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Multiracial (USDE, 2017). Florida is on trend with national statistics. In 2017, almost 60% of Florida students in K–12 were from underrepresented communities. Nearly 59% of K–12 students were also eligible for free and reduced lunch. About 13% were students with disabilities, and a little over 9% were English language learners (Education Week, 2017). These statistics illustrate the current and growing presence of traditionally underrepresented groups in the U.S. educational system.

Although the numbers of students of color are increasing in the P–12 educational system, White students continue to make up the majority of graduate students in programs accredited by the Council of Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) in the majority of counseling fields. Ethnic minorities represent just over 40% of students in CACREP accredited programs (CACREP, 2017). Additionally, in 2016, most full-time faculty members in CACREP-accredited programs were White, and ethnic minority groups made up around 26% percent of full-time faculty (CACREP, 2017). Given these racial/ethnic demographics, it is necessary to examine how graduate programs are training master’s level counseling students to engage across difference, as it is critical students understand their own view of multicultural and social justice counseling competence (Minton, 2017). With over 30 counseling graduate programs in Florida, counselor educators have a responsibility in developing socially just courses and curriculums to meet the needs of diverse clientele and students.

Liberation, Multicultural, and Social Justice Counseling

Counselor trainees need to engage in ongoing self-evaluation because it is critical to discover strongly-held values different from those of the community members they serve and determine how they navigate those differences (Goodman et al., 2004). Using course curriculum as an opportunity to explore counselor trainees’ experiences of waking up within critical incidents will help students better understand and become self-aware of their own marginalized and privileged identities and how their experiences may shape interactions with clients. Teaching the cycle of liberation will help them understand their motivations to be social justice advocates in counseling and contribute to the development of their counselor identities and identities as a scholar-advocate-practitioner.

Counselor educators have a critical role in helping students understand the importance of their personal experiences and how they shape their counselor identity and development as counselors in training. In Wilson and Meyer’s (2011) study, participants struggled to identify when an individual realized they had an understanding of social justice. This reinforces the need for

counselor educators to teach the cycle of liberation and explore students' experiences of waking up within critical incidents.

While there is a growing amount of research on social justice advocacy in counseling, more research is needed to understand how liberation interacts with this construct. Research has not addressed the importance of exploring the experiences of waking up within a critical incident and the impact it has on counselor trainees' competency skill building and counselor identity development. Within exploring a student's experiences of waking up within a critical incident, it is also important to explore privilege, for example, particularly for White people. Kendall (2006) suggests that White school counselors may ignore their White identity because they see it as not salient to their own identity. Privilege is not granted by earning it but by unearned qualities given to us, such as race and gender. White counselor trainees cannot ignore their White identity and how their privilege interacts with the systems around them.

The experiences counselor trainees have within their various systems both in and outside of P-16 school settings may also play a role in their critical incident and motivation to become counselors, but the literature does not discuss this either. Ally identity development may have something to do with counselor trainee motivation to strive for multicultural and social justice competence. Ally identity development is connected to liberation as a social justice approach to counseling as both allyship and liberation have the best interest of all members of society, not just those who are from marginalized groups and the direct targets of the system of oppression (Edwards, 2006). Social justice allies are defined as "members of dominant social groups who are working to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based on their social-group membership" (Brodio, 2000, p. 3; see also Edwards, 2006). Students who want to be social justice change agents must first acknowledge and attend to their own worldviews and biases combined with an aspiration to become culturally competent in order to effectively promote empowerment and liberation with their students and clients (Ratts et al., 2007).

Liberation Psychology

The roots of liberation psychology are often traced back to the work of Ignacio Martín-Baró (1991), who posited several foundational components of a new branch of psychology, which was intended to be of, and for, the oppressed. To understand his initial construction of liberation psychology, it is helpful to understand his theological roots in the broader framework of social action within the Christian church. Many theologians in the twentieth century rediscovered the liberatory themes of the Bible and its focus on the poor and oppressed (Tate et al., 2013). During this time, there was a growing sense that theologians should not just be academics serving the institutional church, but also agents of theological reflection and action in service of the oppressed (Tate et al., 2013).

Martín-Baró (1994) argued that Western psychology had very little to offer in terms of the South American region's severe and oppressive circumstances. He argued that in order for psychology to be relevant to the mental health concerns it seeks to address, it must be reoriented toward the lived experience of those who experience the most extreme conditions of poverty and oppression. Martín-Baró highlighted that history is often written from the perspective of the oppressor. This is a critical component of liberation psychology in that, without an understanding of the actual etiology of oppression and subsequent conditions, true understandings from the oppressed cannot be attained. He stated a key step in achieving a socially just and mentally healthy context for oppressed groups was to investigate the dominant messages and embrace the lived experiences of the oppressed. Martín-Baró pointed out it is crucial to utilize the virtues of oppressed people when working to improve their lived experiences; this strength-based approach allows the social scientist to depend on those who are oppressed to produce the tools and energy that may lead to liberation. Additionally, he considered problematization a critical aspect of his theory, which is

best described as a method for understanding a particular issue faced by oppressed populations from their own perspective (Martín-Baró, 1994).

The primary goal of liberation psychology is the awakening of critical consciousness in a person or group (Tate et al., 2013). Martín-Baró (1994) credited Paulo Freire (1996) with creating the notion of critical consciousness. Martín-Baró (1991) suggested that critical consciousness “is not simply becoming aware of a certain fact but rather it is a process of change” (p. 227). To become conscious of reality is to become aware of, and involved in, a process of continual discovery and action related to “truth.” Through rediscovering historical memory, de-ideologizing understandings of cultural truths, discovering the virtues of the people, and applying this knowledge to specific contexts and lived experiences through problematization, the process of critical consciousness emerges and is maintained (Martín-Baró, 1991). Praxis is another core foundation of liberation psychology; i.e., the confluence of theory and action (Tate et al., 2013). The critical consciousness that arises from reclaiming one’s history, de-ideologizing understandings of cultural truths, discovering the virtues of the people, and using it as a method for making sense of current oppressive circumstances is only made “real” when it is applied in action to current lived experiences in an effort to liberate an individual and others from oppressive circumstances (Tate et. al, 2013).

Lastly, underlying all of these principles of liberation psychology is the call, and necessity, for the psychologist, counselor, or other social scientists to be engaged in these liberating processes on a personal level. This requires the researcher’s role to become that of a witness, co-participant, and a mirror for process through those who have been oppressed so they may discover their own capacities for historical memory, critical analysis, and transformative social action (Tate et al., 2013). Researchers operating from a liberation psychology perspective are primarily focused on the participants and the transformation of themselves and their communities. Martín-Baró (1991) suggested that social scientists and practitioners critically reflect and act on the oppressive set of higher education structures and norms that prioritize building credentials over pursuing liberatory change for oppressed populations.

Multicultural Counseling Theory

To understand the evolution of social justice counseling and how multiculturalism, social justice, and liberation are connected, it is important to understand the historical contexts of the theories. Multicultural counseling theory/therapy (MCT) is seen as the fourth force, and the social justice counseling perspective is seen as the fifth force in mental health counseling (Ratts 2011). MCT is a foundational theory that aided the development of the original MSJCCs (Kiselica, 2005). MCT is an approach that encourages counselors to see culture deeply imbedded in the consciousness of all human beings and is basic to all human functioning (Jones-Smith, 2012).

MCT has six primary tenets and asserts that a counselor or client’s racial/cultural identity influences how problems are defined and dictates or defines appropriate counseling goals or processes (Sue et al., 1996). The tenets provide a rationale for the importance of understanding one’s own racial and cultural identity as a counselor. Additionally, an important tenet of MCT discusses the importance of the client-counselor experience and how the counselor-client relationship must become the focus of the treatment (Sue et al., 1996).

Lastly, MCT states that each Western and non-Western theory represents a different worldview (Sue et al., 1996). Worldviews are critically important to understand from both the counselor and client perspectives. Worldviews are the ways people construct meanings about their worlds, which they develop because of cultural and historical upbringings (Sue et al., 1996). It is often challenging for counselors who are not culturally aware to learn how to view a client’s issues

apart from their own worldviews; counselors often assume that a client shares a similar worldview (Sue et al., 1996).

Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies

To understand how liberation can be actualized in social justice counseling, counselors must be familiar with and utilize the MSJCCs. The MSJCCs are aspirational standards for the mental health profession, and they provide a framework that acknowledges the different ways identity, marginalization, and privilege intersect. At the core of the competencies are multicultural and social justice praxis; the assumption that counselors should use strategies and techniques that align with clients' cultural backgrounds and that their work should promote social justice (Ratts, 2017).

New language was introduced in the 2016 revision, particularly related to intersectionality and action (Ratts et al., 2016). Within the framework, quadrants represent the interactive nature of power, privilege, and oppression between the counselor and client (Ratts, 2017). Domains signify the developmental sequence needed to understand intersectionality: counselor self-awareness, client worldview, counseling relationship, and counseling/advocacy interventions (Ratts, 2017). Additionally, a new competency of action was developed for the MSJCCs. Aspirational competencies are highlighted in the domains identified above: Attitudes and Beliefs, Knowledge, Skills and Action (AKSA). These competencies build upon one another, ultimately leading to action (Ratts, 2017). These aspirational standards and competencies are for all levels of experience and identities. A counselor with privileged or marginalized identities will interpret and practice these standards differently yet with equal importance.

Counselor Self-Awareness

A self-aware counselor takes action to learn about their assumptions, biases, privileged identities, values, and beliefs (Ratts et al., 2016). Counselor trainees must engage in ongoing self-evaluation because it is critical to discover strongly held values different from those of the community members we serve and determine how we navigate those differences (Goodman et al., 2004). Psychological oppression ensues from practices that result in various forms of injustice typically inflicted unintentionally by counselors who are genuinely interested in helping clients from diverse groups and backgrounds (Duran et al., 2008). Therefore, counselors should always remain cognizant of power differentials that exist when working with individuals from disenfranchised groups (Goodman et al., 2004).

Client Worldview

Counselors must seek to understand clients' worldviews and how they influence their interactions with society. One common thread that multicultural, feminist, and social justice counselors share is that clients exist within and are constantly affected by environmental systems (Crethar et al., 2008). It is important that counselors understand how history affects the present mental well-being of persons from marginalized racial/cultural groups in general and how intrusions by the counseling profession, if not done with cultural competence and respect, will predictably contribute to the soul suffering that is already pervasive in societies across the world (Duran et al., 2008). An important goal is to validate the experiences of clients of color and other marginalized groups to help them cope successfully with racism and microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2014).

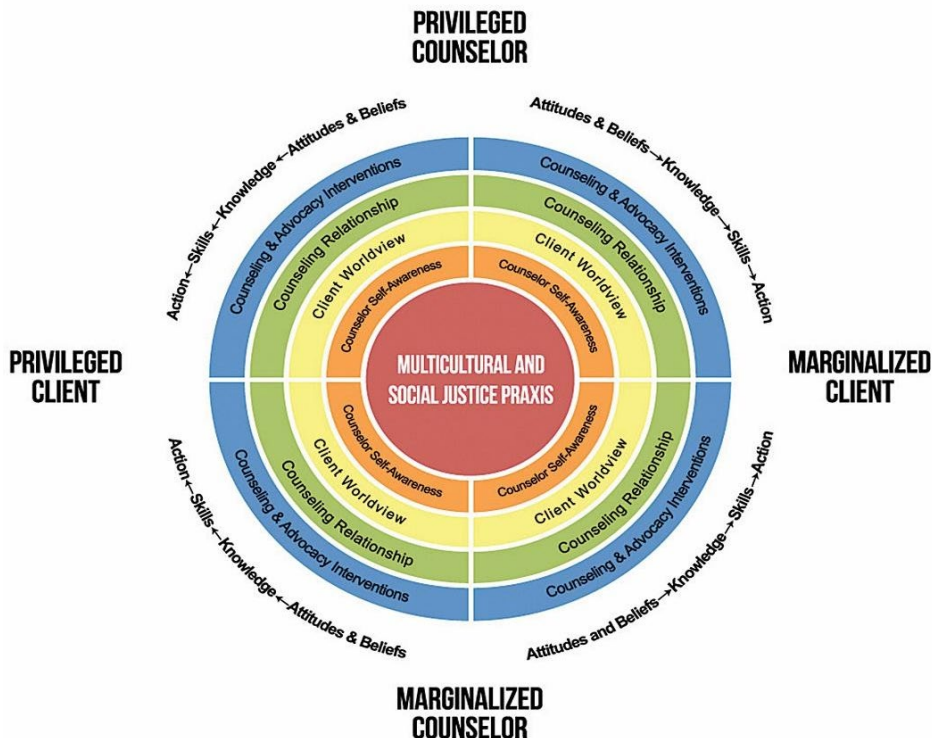
Counseling Relationship

Counselors with privileged and/or marginalized identities take action to increase their understanding of how client and counselor worldviews, values, beliefs, identities, and oppression influence the counseling relationship (Ratts et al., 2016). Individuals who are able to have effective relationships with people from various backgrounds might be better equipped to make sound and equitable interpersonal, social, and policy decisions as they participate in an increasingly diverse world (Banks et al., 2014). Discussing multicultural issues in the counseling relationship can be challenging and bring up many strong emotions, for both counselor and client, which may be enhanced by the similarities and differences between them in the therapeutic relationship (MacLeod, 2013). Counselors engaging in honest dialogues about racial microaggressions and racial dynamics with students of color may demonstrate that practitioners are addressing a component of multicultural competence that will lead to an effective counseling relationship (Nadal et al., 2014).

Counseling and Advocacy Interventions

Privileged and marginalized counselors intervene with, and on behalf of, clients at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, public policy, and international/global levels (Ratts et al., 2016). Social justice counselors use the counseling relationship to support clients' empowerment (Crethar et al., 2008). They assist clients in becoming more empowered by helping them develop specific skills necessary to gain control over their lives and life context within the constraints of their environments (Crethar et al., 2008). When successfully developing advocacy and counseling interventions, counselors and clients freely and respectfully come to a mutual agreement about the intervention strategies that are likely to promote the sort of counseling outcomes that are consonant with culturally different clients' worldviews, beliefs, and values (Comstock et al., 2008). See Figure 1 for a visual representation of the MSJCCs.

Figure 1. *The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (Ratts et al., 2016)*



Allyship and Ally Identity Development

Allyship and ally identity development help to understand how liberation is important in social justice counseling as counselors must be committed to understanding and advocating with and for clients who share different identities. Edwards' (2006) ally identity development model builds on Broido's (2000) definition of social justice allies as "members of dominant social groups who are working to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based on their social group membership" (p. 3). This model provides three stages for practitioners seeking to develop effective, consistent, and sustainable allies in themselves and students. First, the ally for self-interest is primarily motivated to protect those they care about from being hurt and typically ally with an individual with whom they have a personal connection rather than to a group or issue. In the second stage, aspiring ally of altruism, an awareness of privilege begins to develop; seeking to engage in ally behavior as a means of dealing with the guilt becomes a primary underlying, often unconscious, motivator. Lastly, the ally for social justice works with those from the oppressed group in collaboration and partnership to end the system of oppression (Edwards, 2006).

The three stages align with the MSJCCs and can be used together to develop an ally identity in the liberation process. A component of ally development is understanding that allies seek out critique, are open to feedback, and know they will make mistakes (Edwards, 2006). The MSJCCs call for counselors to become aware of their own knowledge and attitudes about their own privilege and groups who are different from them (Ratts et al., 2016). They also have a dimension that allows helpers to work with their clients rather than on their behalf at the individual, community, and systems levels (Ratts et al., 2016). These are similarities between liberation, the Ally Identity Development Model, and the MSJCCs, as counselors must take similar steps to become allies and multicultural and socially just counselors to create liberating spaces for clients in counseling. Within their experiences of waking up, graduate students might find themselves in one of the three stages of the Ally Identity Development Model. Strategies to incorporate and infuse these concepts including the MCSJCCs, allyship, and liberation are discussed in the next section.

Recommendations for Counselor Educators

Liberation psychology, and multicultural and social justice counseling, all take a holistic approach and contextual perspective where meaning, purpose, values, choice, spirituality, self-acceptance, and self-actualization help form the entire person who is able to take action (Chávez et al., 2016). A major objective of actualizing the counseling profession's commitment to social justice entails educating and training graduate students to become social justice advocates (Arredondo & Perez, 2003; Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Goodman et al., 2004; Helms, 2003; Ivey & Collins, 2003; Speight & Vera, 2004; Vera & Speight, 2003). Counselor educators play a critical role in the development of master's level counseling students and counselor trainees, yet there is very little literature on pedagogical approaches to incorporating social justice awareness or competencies across graduate curriculums (Motulsky et al., 2014). Additionally, classroom teaching is a key component of transforming the counseling curriculum and developing a student's awareness of social justice perspectives (Llera et al., 2009; Motulsky et al., 2014).

Counselor educators must create a space in their curriculum and within classroom settings for students to explore their identities, motivations, and worldviews that play an integral role in developing their counselor identity. Burnes and Singh (2010) suggested three effective teaching strategies: (a) examination of social justice issues in the literature and course readings, (b) self-examination and reflection exercises, and (c) experiential learning activities around system. This conceptual work specifically calls for a focus on self-examination and reflection exercises.

Counselor educators must create spaces for students to explore their racial and cultural identities so they may understand how their racial and cultural lens will influence how they view and interact with clients. Until students understand themselves, they may not be successful in the relationships they attempt to build with clients, particularly clients who are different from them.

Within and across differences, liberation is connected. Counselor educators have a responsibility to help counselor trainees understand how their liberation is connected to the liberation of their clients within and outside of counseling. Within the classroom, students must connect their own liberation experiences to the reasons they work with their clients. This is accomplished through knowledge, application of their clients' identities, and advocacy skills (Singh, 2016). Faculty must capitalize on all opportunities within the classroom to connect liberation across differences.

As some traditional theories of psychotherapy tend to view the counselor as the expert, counselor educators must create a learning environment in which students understand the importance of the counseling relationship in relation to their diverse clients. Viewing the counseling relationship as central to treatment is critical. Students must be able to view themselves as the expert of their own experiences which will in turn help them understand their clients' experiences.

Classrooms must create spaces of critical thinking and reflection to allow students to understand, decipher, critique, and explore their own worldviews. Students need to understand their liberatory experiences and how they can become liberated in the process of liberating others. This begins with exploring the cycle of liberation, including where, how, and why they entered. By creating opportunities for learning within the classroom and curriculum, counselor educators can expect that master's level counseling students will better understand themselves, their worldviews, and how who they are and their experiences shape their counselor identities in hopes they will be better counselors and advocates for their clients. Counselor educators can lead the way in developing both liberating and affirmative environments by creating spaces for students to explore critical incidents and liberatory motivations and processes. There are several strategies counselor educators may find helpful when working with counselor trainees to explore their critical incident and liberatory processes.

First, counselor educators can use liberation psychology as a framework and approach for students to recover their historical memories about their critical incidents surrounding their experiences. A key aspect of recovering historical memory is a deep self-reflection on personal experiences of oppression and on systems of oppression in general (Singh, 2016). This is accomplished by using a reflection process and asking students questions to explore deep personal experiences. Examples of reflection questions include: When did I first become aware of my race? When did I first learn my own gender? What has been lost and found in the development of your identities (both privileged and marginalized)? Students can then use the cycle of liberation to understand and narrow down their experiences of waking up with their critical incidents.

Second, opportunities for self-reflections on the system of oppression are necessary. New perspectives expand a counselor's ability to identify necessary action as well as understand how these actions relate to their own experiences (Lewis et al., 2011). Students must look at the roots of systems of oppression that exist within Florida, and around the world. Additionally, they must concurrently explore their own beliefs, norms, and structures of oppression that exist within and outside of their own communities. Doing so allows students to weave their understandings of their own experiences and systemic structures. This may be achieved by having students explore each other's stories, stories of those who have been disadvantaged by oppressive systems over time, and counter narratives of people and marginalized groups (Singh, 2016). Counselor educators should ask students to consider how their practice could change as a result of

understanding the stories and counter narratives of people rather than have their approach be driven by dominant narratives (Singh, 2016).

Third, using another principle of liberation psychology, counselor educators must create consciousness-raising experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. Part of the course requirements could be completing a community advocacy project or volunteering with an organization that serves marginalized populations in Florida. One graduate program requires students to participate in “stepping out” experiences where students write a reflective response to attending a public event in a setting markedly different from their own experiences (Motulsky et al., 2014). This strategy allows counselors to create new ways of acting towards their own liberation and the liberation of others (Singh, 2016).

Fourth, students need to practice how to name oppressive structures and systems within our society. Students must be comfortable with broaching and naming power differentials, societal barriers and other dynamics that may create hesitancy for clients to fully engage in the therapeutic process (Motulsky et al., 2014). Using role playing as a part of courses gives students an opportunity to practice and receive feedback from faculty and peers. For example, a White counselor who works with a client of color will need to name the power structures that exist around racial injustices in society and how they play out in counseling. One strategy used in a graduate program included encouraging students to reflect on their personal histories as they relate to the clients in the role-play; they are asked to focus reflectively on their reactions to the salient aspects of the client’s identity such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, class background, sexual orientation, religion/spirituality, physical ability/challenge, and experiences of privilege and oppression (Motulsky et al., 2014). Faculty must create spaces to safely debrief role-plays; unpacking the experiential exercise may allow the students access to understanding their areas of development and growth differently (Motulsky et al., 2014). Students must be able to communicate their commitment to countering injustices and how they wish to work alongside their client(s).

Lastly, using the MSJCCs with students is a helpful tool to promote consciousness-raising experiences and name what knowledge, awareness, and skills are needed to create liberating spaces for clients. Through this, students can begin to name existing oppressive structures and possible affirming structures. Students will learn to discuss and re-frame what their clients’ futures may look like (Singh, 2016). Ratts (2017) developed an assessment form, the MSJCC-AF, to help chart counselor and client identities. Additionally, this form charts marginalized and privileged statuses and helps frame interventions (Ratts, 2017). While this form is intended to be used with clients, counselor educators can use this form with students by asking students to chart their own identity and the identities of their peers. The form can provide a means for students to practice initiating discussion with clients regarding the salience of identity, marginalization, and privilege (Ratts, 2017). This dialogue is important to understanding how power, privilege, and oppression dynamics influence the counseling and advocacy relationship (Ratts, 2017). Before using this form, students should have a firm grasp and understanding of the new competencies (Ratts, 2017). Additional integration of the MSJCCs course requirements can include an advocacy project or a culminating experience in which students must choose a setting to apply an intervention through the lens of the competencies.

Conclusion

Liberation and social justice counseling are principles of counseling that were developed in two distinct geographic regions (Chávez et al., 2016). Despite these different developments, they all share the vision that mental health should focus on human potential and growth (Chávez et al., 2016). While these constructs have frequently been studied separately, it is still not well known how the combination of liberation and social justice counseling and counselor trainees’

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experiences of waking up within critical incidents influence counselor identity development in relation to their multicultural and social justice counseling competence.

While scholars and counselor educators have begun to unpack the topic of self-awareness in the field of counseling in general, they have not thoroughly considered the implications of waking up within critical incidents and the influence on multicultural and social justice counseling competence. Counselor trainees may wish to take actions to increase their self-awareness around their own experiences of liberation, consider how these experiences of liberation influence the counselor-client relationship, understand how their experiences help them understand the broader context of the sociopolitical world we live in, and find reason to work toward the liberation of their clients. Through further research and analysis, researchers may begin to piece together more structured recommendations for counselor educators who aspire to teach counselor trainees the importance of understanding one's liberation experience in order to best serve clients and actualize liberation practices in social justice counseling.

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