

Tugging at the root of oppression: Infusing social justice across doctoral level clinical psychology curriculum

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Abstract

Most professional associations and accrediting bodies in psychology and counseling make the aspirational call to graduate training programs to integrate social justice throughout their curriculum. Although a laudable goal, there appear to be no clear guidelines or best practices for cultivating this aspiration in psychology trainees preparing for entry-level practice. This case study will summarize a comprehensive process of integrating social justice principles into a doctoral program in clinical psychology accredited by the American Psychological Association. This programmatic, descriptive case study will describe specific program revisions to internal curriculum components and reorganization of the program trajectory, which were implemented to assist students in the reconciliation process. Modified curriculum components included lecture topics, readings and empirical research, in-class activities, and assignments in the core classes. The result was a more coherent and sequential program that infuses social justice concepts across all aspects of learning and training. The goal of this investigation was to (1) inspire other programs to engage in the important work of moving the exploration of social justice from one mandatory class to a concept that permeates all training aspects, and (2) cultivate a new generation of psychologists that know not just how to effectively treat people from different cultural perspectives, but to dismantle the oppressive systems that cause psychological suffering.

Keywords: social justice; decolonization; curriculum; graduate education; pedagogy; oppression; social privilege

Introduction

The fields of psychology and counseling have been historic pioneers in the areas of social justice from eras of diversity, multiculturalism, and cultural competency (Sue et al., 1992). During the diversity era, we began to acknowledge issues of race as a significant factor in human services. Multiculturalism brought an expansion of identity to include domains of race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability, national origin, indigenous origins, etc. Our most recent era of cultural competency placed the emphasis on the quality of our service delivery and asked us to begin evaluating outcomes according to the consumers. The commonalities shared during these past eras include a focus on individual and cultural differences, contextualized within the clinical interpersonal dyad, as well as the assumption that the clinician was usually part of the dominant group. During these eras, mental health training programs adopted affirmative language and made explicit commitments to pursue these important values. This was usually accomplished in a program by adding a mandatory class or classes with some kind of exposure component, while also adding the topic of “diversity” into clinical skill courses and supervision topics (Adams & Bell, 2016).

The evolution of social justice has changed, especially in light of recent events, and our field continues to push the boundaries of this work. The term “social justice” has become more utilized in our academic discourse, suggesting that we may be moving beyond the realm of individual and cultural differences to something more comprehensive. A useful definition of social justice that differentiates it from other forms of justice is as follows, “social justice is the full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure” (Bell, 2007, p. 1-2). Social justice can, and usually does, mean different things to each of us. Yet, themes of the common good and equity, despite identity, continue to endure and become ever more relevant (Bergkamp, Olson, & Martin, 2019).

The concept of social justice infers not just cultural knowledge, skills, and awareness, but a deeper understanding of the larger societal systems that permeate the lives of our clients. Gorski and Goodwin (2015) distinguished social justice from other common terms like multiculturalism, cultural competency, and cross-cultural psychology. Specifically, they voiced concern that the use of the word culture, in all its forms, can imply that oppression is a cultural phenomenon versus a dynamic of power through “purposeful societal arrangements” (p. 3). Thus, social justice also requires us to be knowledgeable of issues of power, privilege, and oppression in which culture can sometimes serve as a convenient proxy. This points to the clarified goal of targeting the root of oppression versus the manifestations of culture. Moreover, to embody social justice principles, scholars call on psychologists to expand their professional activities of their individual caseloads and move into the realms of community, legal, and social policy (Goodman et al., 2004). There are some precedent efforts in integrating these principles through training models that foster advocacy and activism (Mallinckrodt, Miles, & Levy, 2014; Melton, 2018).

In the past few years most of our professional associations, such as the American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Counseling Association (ACA), have made aspirational calls for our field to pursue not just cultural competency, but social justice principles that include issues of power and privilege. For example, the APA (2017) recently published an update to the Multicultural Guidelines in which they call on psychologists to “aspire to recognize and understand historical and contemporary experiences with power, privilege, and oppression. As such, they seek to address institutional barriers and related inequities, disproportionalities, and disparities of law enforcement, administration of criminal justice, educational, mental health, and other systems as they seek to promote justice, human rights, and access to quality and equitable mental and behavioral health services” (Guideline 5, p. 4). The ACA’s Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies calls out social justice specifically in the title and provides a model involving the privileged counselor and client as well as the marginalized counselor and client, depicting a four-way directional dynamic

of power. In addition, the model consistently emphasizes a historical and systemic perspective regarding power, privilege, and oppression (ACA, 2016). Our training programs are thus called to move beyond interpersonal cultural differences to explore issues of socially-conferred privilege, widening social disparities, and the historical colonization of not just our country but of the field of psychology itself (Suzuki, 2019).

Further, there are calls from the margins of our field to critically examine the role of coloniality in Western psychology (Adams et al, 2017; Adams et al, 2018, Adams & Salter, 2019; Blanche, 2020; Bhatia, 2020; Pillay, 2017). This country was founded in a colonial lineage that still defines our hegemonic views of human behavior, relationships, morals, values, health, pathology and normality (APA, 2021). In line, psychology has moved from its corroboration with eugenics to its role in ending educational segregation. The colonial system of hegemony has permeated our field to such an extent, that it's difficult to differentiate the art and science of psychology from its contextual worldview.

The underlying struggle of moving beyond the interpersonal and acknowledging the systemic is really one of liberating our field from the colonial gaze (Fanon, 1952). The decolonial turn calls us to interrogate our own field, it's historical legacy and lineage, the supporting philosophical assumptions, and our normal way of service delivery. Traditionally, our services have been conducted behind closed-doors, in private, and usually one-on-one. While useful, this context of individual change is not enough to alleviate the suffering of oppression from historical and institutionalized oppression (Goodman et al, 2004). The decolonial turn also implies that we expand our efforts to address larger systemic sources of hegemony that include schools, communities, media, politics, and law.

With the increasing discourse and demand for social justice integration and associated decolonization, it is also important to acknowledge that this is a relatively new dynamic without a clear set of best practices or guidelines to support these needed changes. Some literature reviews indicate that, over the past decade, there has been some attention paid to social justice integration into clinical training, psychological research, and the training of new clinical supervisors (Burnes & Christensen, 2020). Most examples of social justice application to the existing graduate training models in the literature involve service-learning activities, exposure to difference interactions, and efforts to work with marginalized populations in clinical training (Sanabria & DeLorenzi, 2019; Dollarhide et al. 2016; Motulsky et al., 2014). Yet, there is still little addressing doctoral level, clinical psychology academic curriculum. Most programs, while in agreement with the principles of social justice integration do not have clear models of implementation in action. Most training councils have only recently included social justice into conference programming and resources. That is not to say that there are no resources available, but that curricular integration is not the norm for our programs.

Professional training councils, like the National Council of Schools & Programs of Professional Psychology (NCSPP) and others, have anchored their training models and curricular design on social justice principles over the decades. For example, NCSPP stated, "...issues relevant to ethnic and racial diversity and to women demand systemic focus, attention, and the responsible use of and education about power, oppression, authority, and sociopolitical structures (Peterson, R., n.d.). Thus, while resources and conceptual frameworks exist, there still appears to be a dearth of real-life examples of curricular integration.

This aspirational call from our professional associations must be balanced with the myriad of other demands of our training programs with the goal of forging competent entry-level clinicians and researchers. Our programs are tasked to provide empirical and evidence-based education that strives to position ourselves within the sciences. We need to ingrain the highest ethical principles in students to ensure public safety and replicate certain aspects of the medical model. We strive to instill a practice of life-long learning and appreciation of research to evolve our field towards continued improvement and efficacy. All the while, many of our programs must adhere to important accreditation standards. Thus, it could seem that the call towards

social justice integration is just one more demand on top of the difficult endeavor of designing, implementing, and maintaining quality clinical training programs.

While most of our field is in general agreement, it is possible that program leaders, faculty, and staff feel the social justice call as an additional burden to an already difficult job that involve the increasing pressures and burdens that plague our higher education system as a whole. The demands of our daily professional lives leave little room for the kind of innovation and risks that social justice integration presents. There are no clear roadmaps toward integration and many programs are in a quandary in which they continue to have an older model of the mandatory diversity course while voicing commitment to social justice principles. The following case study is just one program's struggle with this problem and provides a window into the journey to liberate a training program in the pursuit of social justice curricular integration.

Specifically, this case study provides a roadmap to move academic programs from the add-on strategy of a siloed mandatory class to a truly integrated vision, mission, and curricular approach to training students in cultural competency and social justice. It is one attempt to meet the recent aspirational goals of our accrediting bodies. As this was an APA-accredited doctoral program in clinical psychology, the Discipline-Specific Knowledge domains and Profession-Wide Competencies were both addressed (APA, 2017). The case study addresses issues around faculty readiness for change, workload demands, pragmatic steps for revision, sabotaging factors, student involvement, and sustainability. The hope is that this case study can provide inspiration to program faculty and administration to engage in the struggle of instilling social justice principles into their graduates, thus influencing our field as a whole.

Case Study

Method

A case study is a means of investigating complex social variables in a real-life context, that offers a rich and holistic account of the phenomena that can lend towards hypothesis generation (Merriam, 2009). A programmatic and descriptive case study approach was used to define, track, evaluate, and reflect on the programmatic process of integrating social justice into doctoral-level curriculum over the course of approximately 2 years (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The case study structure allowed for clarity of individual efforts and resultant insights, but also the retrospective evaluation of the developmental arch over time. Programmatic case studies have established value for teaching developmental functions and are an integral part of administrative change (Yin, 2018). Descriptive case studies are utilized when the phenomena has not been extensively studied and the process used is innovative and new in some aspect (Anderson et al., 2005). Further, this case study is structured by chronology in order to depict process tracing, as well as the cumulative results (Bennett & Checkel, 2015).

Program Description & Participants

This case study involves a small, private, non-profit clinical psychology doctoral program in the Pacific Northwest. The faculty consisted of licensed clinical psychologists and the students were doctoral students in clinical psychology in a program accredited by the American Psychological Association. Founded more than 15 years ago, the program was anchored in explicit principles of social justice, attracting both faculty and students who were passionate about the mission. For many years, faculty would integrate their individual understandings of social justice into their teaching, supervision, and research that inspired critical consciousness, liberation insights, feminism, and critical race theory, along with the natural incorporation into clinical practice and research. Resultant dissertations resoundingly centered on social justice themes and topics with a heavy reliance on participatory action, grounded theory, and phenomenological qualitative projects.

A natural consequence of critical consciousness was the critique of psychology itself, along with the medical model, our role in the health services, and our striving to be considered a STEM discipline. It was common for students to be simultaneously introduced to clinical competencies in parallel with alternative frameworks that questioned the same competencies. For example, students might take Psychopathology, in which they developed their clinical diagnosis skills based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) while at the same time learning about cultural psychology that might posit that the DSM-5 is but another psychological and ontological centric system that should not be generalized across cultures. Another example included students taking Intelligence Assessment in which they might learn the psychometric properties, appropriate clinical use, and effective administration of assessment measures, while concurrently learning about the eugenic origins of these measures and the legacy of oppressive positions psychology took in the context of immigration, military selection, psychiatric hospitalization, and other governmental policy.

As matriculation developed, students exposed to the aforementioned theories, and previous professor's interpretation of said theories, would often apply these frameworks in the more core science courses of the program, such as Quantitative Research, Cognition and Affect, and Biological Bases of Behavior. While cultivating lively discussion and valuable debate, it also appeared to possibly hinder the student's ability to fully learn and master the core science content and impair certain requisite competency development. In other words, there was a bit of a flip in the order of learn first and critique from an informed perspective afterwards. This dynamic also manifested in some of the clinical courses, such as interventions and assessment, in which students would refer to the historical atrocities involving psychology, or the over-generalization of Western-born theory embolden by positivism, to question or outright reject the requisite competencies. Further consequences of this dynamic included students reluctantly conducting psychological assessments and being hesitant to utilize psychodiagnostics.

In summary, the result of instilling a sense of critical consciousness early in the curriculum was a type of barrier or hesitancy when obtaining the requisite clinical and professional competencies, including research and some clinical practice. Yet, it also produced a powerful parallel learning experience for students that would provide a valuable lens throughout their matriculation and later on, as a practicing psychologist. The efforts addressed in the next sections involve exploring how the program balanced the important needs of critical thinking and competency acquisition.

Author Positionality

In the spirit of qualitative foregrounding and the important decolonial practice of acknowledging positionality, the following is a brief overview of the author's rank and status (Nieto et al., 2010). Using the ADDRESSING model (Hays, 2016) as a guide, I hold socially-conferred privilege in the domains of age, disability, religion, social class, sexual orientation, indigenous background, national origin, and gender. I am bi-racial, East Indian and White, and appear externally brown. Regarding status, I began in the program as faculty and moved into the Chair role a few years afterwards. I began by teaching the psychological assessment and qualitative research classes, then moved to teaching the multicultural classes focusing on social justice and decolonial frameworks.

I believe my experience as a bi-racial person of color and my study of multiculturalism and decoloniality provided an understanding of both privilege and oppression, the flip sides of the same coin (Goodman, 2015). The "me"search involved in reconciling my own identity prompted me to further commit to principles of social justice. I adhere to a developmental perspective and am deeply committed to explore social privilege. As program chair, I've called the program to simultaneously learn traditional psychology as well as move towards decolonization of the field. This influenced my role of Chair and the push to further integrate social justice into the curriculum.

As one of two BIPOC faculty in the program, this also brought the challenge of asserting the importance of integration while still staying aligned with the role of psychologist and professor. In addition, through teaching the social justice classes, I began to see the lack of true integration across the program curriculum as a whole which drove my initiative with the faculty.

Procedures & Data

The specific program decided to undertake this curricular revision in early 2018. At which time, faculty suggested that since this effort was somewhat new to the field, it would be beneficial to document the process in hopes the results may support other graduate programs with the same goal. The majority of this integration process took place within the context of programmatic meetings, held on a weekly, monthly, and annual basis. Meeting minutes and individual faculty notes were reviewed to ensure the chronological order and accuracy of the material, process, and results. These documents included in vivo developments as well as reflective evaluation and process improvement. Two academic presentations were produced in order to communicate the project to other faculty and administrators in similar graduate programs. These presentations were completed after the first and second years respectively. These included further planning meetings, faculty notes, the formal presentation slides, and feedback notes and presentation evaluations from the audience. In addition, faculty discussions, both during and after the process, also informed this case study.

Results

Systematic Curricular Review of Social Justice Components

The inspiration of this process arose after discussion regarding the explicit programmatic mission of social justice. Specifically, accreditation required a clear articulation of what social justice meant for the program and how the faculty was instilling it into the curriculum, clinical training, and research. This also led to the need to clarify the envisioned goal of social justice efforts. Naturally, the final question addressed steps taken to assess and review the effectiveness of these efforts. While the faculty could confirm that social justice was important and efforts were occurring, there was not a clear and agreed upon articulation of what was meant by social justice, what the specific efforts were, what the desired outcome was, or how the assessment of effectiveness should take place. The main goal was to heed the calls from the profession and truly attempt to integrate social justice throughout the curriculum.

To begin, the faculty engaged a series of discussions, under the guidance of the Chair, around what social justice meant to them in order to discern the similarities and differences. Emphasis on academic freedom and faculty discretion was initially established within the frame of our agreed goal to attempt to include some applied and congruent aspect of social justice into each course. The discussions began without a pre-emptive definition of the term in order to pull from the idiosyncratic aspects of the concept. Each faculty member would explain what the term meant to them and their pedagogical understanding. This did, in fact, reveal important variances in faculty understanding, resulting in the faculty group considering how these variations might impact the student's experience and learning process. As the process took on a life of its own, faculty inevitably began sharing social justice resources they found useful. The conclusion of these preliminary discussions was the program's commitment toward integration using the following question as a guide: What does the ideal graduate with a competency in social justice applied psychology embody? What are the associated reflective practices they utilize? What does their service delivery look like? And how do we assist in its development?

The next step was conducting a comprehensive review of the curriculum with specific attention to social justice components of each course. The review followed the student's sequential matriculation through the curriculum, starting from the first class taken in Fall term and progressing through the rest of the Fall term courses, then moving through each of the subsequent terms and years in succession. During this review,

each course professor would present specific social justice related components including readings, lectures, discussions, assignments, and evaluations. In doing so, this systematic review provided a comprehensive picture of the student's experience, including various theories and readings, organized didactics, and applied assignments and presentations. This was an invaluable exercise that provided the faculty a clearer understanding of the content and the sequence of social justice pedagogy. Places of possible contradiction and redundancy became evident and questions of developmental appropriateness arose. Faculty began reflecting on where their course fell within the curricular trajectory and the synergy, or lack thereof, between and within courses.

Inevitably, there were some courses that did not include social justice components, as there were no apparent applications or fit. These included some core science courses, but clinical classes as well. Implications that social justice does not directly relate to the subject matter in some courses were also expressed. Some professors naturally were concerned that they may not have the requisite training, experience, and expertise to address social justice issues. Further, there was some reliance on the required multicultural courses to cover these topics for students. Some trepidation was expressed regarding the possibility that too much focus on social justice, especially in classes in which there is a lack of face validity, would appear political in nature and serve as a distraction from the course content. Additional concerns included the fact that courses were already full of necessary subject content that left little room, both regarding time and faculty capacity, to add or integrate social justice.

The following discussions attempted to distill the insights learned from the systematic course review, as well as attempt to address some of the above concerns. This naturally led to some disagreement among faculty, in which there were varying levels of commitment and understanding regarding social justice principles, as well as good-intentioned professors who were trying to teach their ideas of the best courses possible. One valuable move during moments of tension was to center on our overall goal and ask ourselves the guiding question regarding the envisioned social justice graduate.

One of the most impactful insights garnered from the systematic review was the classification of our efforts of either disruption or reconciliation and mapping them across matriculation. Disruption efforts involved any curricular components that offered a framework for critique of psychology and related competencies within the context of power, privilege, and oppression. This included the previous examples of the cultural boundaries of psychopathology and the eugenic origins of psychological testing. Specifically, students of named program were introduced to theories of critical race theory, social privilege, implicit bias, feminist psychology, and decolonization and liberation psychology early in their first year. Faculty questioned the appropriateness of the content and its placement in the developmental trajectory.

The faculty concretized this insight using a typography that clarified the intention of the disruptive components and the possible negative consequence for learners. The initial disruptive components sought to ignite or kindle intrapersonal awareness of power and privilege, usually done with readings and activities around social positioning and privilege. A natural consequence for some students was an end to societal and relational innocence, a kind of disillusionment, in which they cannot undo what has been revealed.

Another kind of disruption effort focused on the systemic nature of oppression, widening the usually clinical scope of interpersonal relationship and therapeutic alliance to the social, political, economic, and environmental spheres of influence on the individual. This was done through historical accounts of colonization, marginalization, and disfranchisement. The consequence for some students was an erosion of previously held beliefs in the beneficence of societal institutions and traditions, a kind of disillusionment with what was. This caused some students to question aspects of their citizenship, national pride, past and present relationships, and even their own personal narrative. There was an associated feeling of hopelessness when students considered the legacy of oppression, having a difficult time conceptualizing how their relatively small efforts could make a considerable impact on their communities. We termed this phenomenon "iconoclastic nihilism."

The final type of disruption component intended to stoke the student's desire to dismantle systems of oppression towards the goal of equity and inclusion. To gain this momentum, students would be exposed to liberation psychology thinkers who have laid out a path towards decolonization originating with our own internal world to wider society. For most students, the combination of these efforts resulted in a strong social justice motivation that included an energy to do something but with no clear roadmap to follow. Thus, there was a disruption of inertia along with an uncertainty of where to go.

Reconciliation components represent learning activities that assisted students in pragmatically applying social justice considerations and principles directly into clinical and professional competencies. Examples of reconciliation components included didactics on practical steps taken in psychological assessment to avoid pathologizing cultural differences, cultural adaptations to manualized interventions, and use of qualitative research methods when addressing culture-bound concepts. More nuanced reconciliation steps included faculty discussing areas in which they themselves struggle with social justice issues in their own clinical practice and their journeys of reconciliation. In addition, social justice considerations were actively and routinely addressed in clinical supervision across all cases, not just those in which issues of power and privilege are obvious.

While the curricular review revealed some reconciliation components, they occurred more spontaneously and without clear strategy. This was in contrast with the numerous disruption components that appeared to leave some students confused as to how to incorporate a conceptual understanding of power, privilege, and oppression into their applied clinical work. The resultant dissonance that some students may have experienced could lead to a dichotomous rejection of psychological assessment, diagnosis, or other sources of possible discrimination in clinical practice. Thus, the resounding insight garnered from this systematic review was the need to balance disruptive and reconciliation components in a strategic manner across the curriculum. Further, a developmental framework was taking shape in which faculty would intentionally attempt to incorporate the disruptive concepts, introduced early in the curriculum, to the applied clinical and core science courses with the goal to assist students in social justice integration as well as competency acquisition.

The faculty began to conceptualize a developmental framework within the program that began with knowledge acquisition in the first year, then gradually blended in specific skill-building in the second year, and moved cumulatively to direct application (both clinical and research), finally integrating into practice. This framework included all the academic courses, clinical training activities, the clinical competency exam for internship eligibility, and the dissertation process. Faculty then were able to understand how their courses were positioned, not just within the arc of the curriculum, but also in terms of student competency development. In addition, once we identified where disruption and reconciliation components were located across this developmental trajectory, the better we were able to gauge their effectiveness.

At the latter part of the systematic review, some faculty also brought forward models of social justice that could guide the program in this work. Specifically, the model of teaching social justice by Sinacore and Enns (2005) resonated with some of the faculty. This model introduced four broad domains, each with elements of emphasis. The first is Individual Empowerment and Social Change emphasizing resilience, self-efficacy, collaboration, and autonomy. Second is Knowledge and the Knower that focuses on valuing perspectives, diversity of ideas, multiple forms of knowing, and social constructionism. Third is Oppression and Privilege with a lens of social positioning, social barriers, and principles of equity. And Fourth is Reflexivity and Self-Awareness that calls for continuous self-reflection on one's identity and positionality in relation to the other or the task at hand. This model served to guide some of the resultant course revisions that naturally developed after the systematic review.

Curricular Revisions

With the above insights in mind, the faculty began a process of revisions to individual courses within the larger developmental framework. They were careful not just to add a perfunctory social justice reading or

lecture, but instead, to apply disruptive concepts to the core competencies and topics of the course with balance and reconciliation in mind. Faculty took extra effort to refresh and refine their own understanding of social justice towards effective application. Clinical and core science courses were chosen for revision, starting with those faculty who displayed the most enthusiasm. Faculty were asked to review the topics, readings, teaching style, and assignments for these courses. One faculty developed the acronym of BeFAIR (M. Sakuma, personal communication, 2018) to guide the revisions:

1. Encourage students to actively question assumptions of “truth” and Beliefs.
2. Choose topics of Focus highlighting social justice related themes.
3. Choose Assignments that foster critical thinking around power, privilege, and active student reflection.
4. Choose methods of Information sharing aimed at minimizing power differentials in the classroom.
5. Choose Readings highlighting social justice issues including amplifying the voices of the oppressed.

The first round of course revisions included History and Systems of Psychology, Personality Assessment, Evidence-Based Interventions, and Qualitative Research. Each professor reviewed said course within the developmental framework and program sequence, as well as used a model like Sinacore and Enns’s model (2005) to analyze specific course content and process. The most common starting point was to add readings that emphasized social justice within the course content, when possible. This revealed a dearth in the literature for course-specific research regarding social justice principles. Professors routinely consulted with colleagues and shared discovered sources. After adding additional readings, or revising the reading list, professors began to clearly define social justice topics to be covered in class once supported by empirical sources. Then most professors moved to exploring innovative and intentional ways to teach social justice concepts and creating applied assignments that moved towards reconciliation.

This first round of revisions did not develop without challenges. One of the main challenges was the fact that most courses are asked to cover a wide breadth and depth of content to ensure competency acquisition. Despite inspired and committed professors, most voiced the difficulty of how to fit social justice into already full courses without information overload for both the professor and students. Some professors voiced the added concern of appearing like they simply added a social justice reading or topic to the class, which could seem more like lip-service or just “checking the box” of an important and delicate topic. The resolution to this was the importance of developing a truly integrated assignment, one that brought social justice alive within the context of the course. This allowed the professors to teach from a place of experience and expertise in their field, while simultaneously applying social justice in a way that assists in reconciliation. An example of this was an assignment in History and Systems of Psychology that addressed psychology’s role in government-sanctioned torture and the resulting Hoffman report that emerged from its inquiry (Hoffman, 2015).

After the individual professors completed their course-specific revisions, the faculty came together to review the changes. From this, they began to identify common struggles and share possible solutions. The collegial sharing of new ideas and the bonding over challenges brought increased clarity of the overall goal, all with the student’s development at the forefront. The group of first round revision professors then decided to present their work at a conference of similar doctoral programs. This was to help synthesize the changes in a more formal manner and receive valuable external feedback from other colleagues.

The presentation was well received, especially as it was in pursuit of an aspirational goal of our shared professional associations and accrediting bodies. The group presented in a way that emphasized the humble beginnings and the lack of clear and established best practices regarding social justice infusion. Yet, they also conveyed their excitement in the internal innovation along with hopes that students will appreciate the more integrated approach. The faculty received valuable feedback and resources, as well as inspired a lively discussion

among conference attendees. The rest of the program faculty were debriefed on presentation feedback, which in turn seemed to add more energy to another round of revisions.

The second round of revisions, mostly driven by the inspiration provided from professors of the first round, included the more core clinical- and science- related courses that usually did not include social justice elements. These courses included Psychometrics, Quantitative Research, and Biological Bases of Behavior. Professors replicated the process of previous course revisions. The biggest challenge in these classes was the lack of empirical literature on applied social justice regarding course subjects. Hence, professors who wanted to integrate social justice must draw inferences from social justice sources and independently apply them to the course content, or create original sources, topics, and assignments. With collegial support and encouragement, all professors designed integrated assignments based on their own clinical and academic expertise and any related literature available. An example from Biological Bases of Behavior was a Biopsychosocial Research Paper that included evaluation rubric domains for addressing social, political, economic, and cultural factors associated with the medical condition, along with a discussion of the barriers and stigmas and how psychologists could advocate for access and treatment.

This second cycle of revisions resulted in a follow-up presentation at a subsequent annual conference, in which the professors shared the course changes and pragmatic applied assignment ideas. The professors were also able to synthesize the process of course revisions and encourage other professors to do the same. After presenting all the individual course changes, the presentation also provided a retrospective account of all the course revisions taken together and compare the new sequence of courses with what was before. Here, the faculty was able to see that small changes to each individual course resulted in a major shift within the curriculum as a whole. In a before-and-after comparison, faculty determined that there was a more coordinated and strategic approach to social justice infusion and was able to clearly articulate the results to presentation attendees.

After these two revision cycles, the professors began to implement the changes in their courses and report back how the students were responding. This process was not particularly formal, but more of a continuation of the revision process in which faculty were sharing ideas and resources. From this, the conversation began to shift to considering the similarities and differences between the constructs of social justice and cultural competency/humility. In addition, there was continued vigilance for how components of disruption and reconciliation were working together to achieve the vision of an ideal social justice graduate. The students were also involved in the revision process through a series of presentations and discussions to understand their experience, opinions, and reactions to the changes. The emphasis was on making sure the disruptive components did not interfere with competency attainment, while also ensuring an additional sophistication of social justice knowledge, commitment, and application.

Distinct Social Justice Competency

Soon after the second round of revisions, the program began working on its routine accreditation cycle. An essential part of the accreditation process is ensuring that all graduates achieve the requisite discipline-specific knowledge areas and profession-wide competencies (APA, 2017). One of the standard competencies involves individual and cultural differences. Based on multiple anecdotal conversations, most programs include social justice aspects into this competency, and the program in this case study was no different. This provided the program with an interesting opportunity for the faculty to discuss the explicit interaction between cultural competency and social justice.

Specifically, APA requires a profession-wide competency entitled Individual and Cultural Differences (ICD) that requires doctoral graduates to recognize their own individual identity and accompanying biases, accumulate a base of theoretical and empirical knowledge, and be able to work with diverse populations (APA, 2017). While laudable and important, the competency appears restrained to the interpersonal relationship and

focused on differences in individual identities. Social justice, as aforementioned, is the explicit acknowledgment of historical colonization, contemporary power structures, and the resultant social privilege for some and not others. In addition, the push towards systemic and institutional change is a stretch of the domain of advocacy towards allyship and activism (Melton, 2018).

Based on the previous revision work, the faculty decided that the two domains were distinct enough to require a separate program-specific competency to address social justice. Thus, the faculty began working to clearly articulate the essential elements of the competency that was aligned with the curricular revisions. An example of some of the specific competency language is as follows:

- Communicates an awareness of historical, institutional, and systemic structures of power, privilege, and oppression and their effect on research and clinical training. This includes a critical understanding of how the psychological profession has at times contributed to a history of oppression and the change that can arise out of a social justice approach.
- Applies knowledge and awareness of their historically-situated social location and privileged social domains/identities in order to confront the dynamics of power and privilege in interpersonal and institutional settings. This includes identifying and working to avoid further oppression of marginalized and underserved persons and refraining from acts of aggression.
- Embodies the role of a change agent by engaging in advocacy at the individual or institutional levels. This includes conscientiously empowering underserved groups through clinical and professional work or promoting community-based change to address systemic barriers.

These elements were further developed to include the required training and experiential activities that were used to meet each element, defined outcome and outcome measurement, along with the minimal level of achievement. These included most of the course revision made in the two aforementioned cycles, so that the program was well-positioned to make this important addition to the program structure. In fact, without these previous curricular adjustments, the creation of this specific social justice competency would not have been possible. The program now will begin the task of collecting data, including student input, and evaluating how these changes are working and making ongoing modifications.

Limitations

Aside from the general limitations of the qualitative case study method in comparison to the quantitative, positivist frame, this section will address specific issues to consider. The case study is mediated by the sensitivity and integrity of the investigator, as they are the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. In this case, the investigator and author was also an active participant in this case study. Thus, the issue of researcher bias is heightened due to limitations of memory and perception. At the time of report writing, Stake (2005) pointed out that the case study researcher must decide how much to make the report into a story, how much to formalize generalizations or leave it up to the reader, how much description and content to include, and how to protect the degree of anonymity. Use of archival meeting minutes, notes, and academic presentation slides and evaluation feedback were all utilized in the construction of this report, providing external material and verification.

Discussion

Many programs in the field of psychology and counseling are presented with the challenge of infusing social justice principles into their curriculum. Professional associations and accrediting bodies are making aspirational calls for social justice infusion versus a single required course and supporting didactics. While most individual programs, faculty, and administration are in agreement with social justice integration, there are multiple challenges at play. These include over-taxed curricula struggling just to ensure accreditation demands,

probable faculty conflict and resistance, and a dearth of models and best practices for guidance (Motulsky et al., 2014).

The program in this case study began this process with a re-affirmation of programmatic commitment to social justice with humility, by acknowledging areas of improvement and growth. The faculty made efforts to independently revise their curriculum despite the inevitable challenges. The approach was to find a commonly agreed image of the desired social justice psychology graduate that aligned with the program mission and aims. Then the faculty analyzed the curriculum in a sequential manner, taking the perspective of the student matriculating through each course in order to understand places of congruence, incompatibility, and redundancy. A conceptual framework that categorized class components as either disruptive or reconciliatory guided the faculty to revise their courses. The acronym of “BeFAIR” was used to infuse the course with applied social justice activities and concepts. The important point here was to not just add social justice as a side-note, but to truly integrate it into the course content, providing relevant examples of application to the students. After revisions, with motivation to understand social justice as distinct from cultural competency, the faculty constructed a specific professional competency for its students that included defined elements, activities, outcomes, and evaluation measures to promote applied social justice for graduates.

Developmental Perspective

In retrospect, one of the strengths of this case study was the emphasis on development. As a bedrock concept in psychology, a developmental perspective is essential to acknowledge our accomplishments, understand the tasks to progress, and cultivate realistic expectations along the way. Regarding social justice integration, a developmental framework allowed for each faculty to enter the effort where they were at, not demanding a type of Woke/Not Woke dichotomy, but instead understanding we are each at our own stage of development (Bergkamp, Olson, & Martin, 2019).

Expanding on the developmental frame, a retrospective review of this case study reveals correlations with well-known racial identity developmental models (Atkinson et al., 1979; Cross, 1971; Helms, 1995; Quintana, 1994). Considering the mostly White faculty, Helm’s (1995) White Racial Identity Development Model appeared to have the most relevance. Specifically, the case study process is reminiscent of the first few status moves under the second phase of Defining a Nonracist White Identity, that of moving from Pseudo-Independent status to Immersion/Emersion status.

According to the model, White individuals move into the second phase once they formally acknowledge racism and abandon an essentially racist identity. With this, they move into the Pseudo-Independent Status which is characterized by the individual actively questioning the pervasive proposition of BIPOC inferiority. Yet, while conscious thought may abandon this belief, socialized and habitual behavior may perpetuate the belief system. In addition, they may still expect BIPOC individuals to explain racism and assume that inclusion of BIPOC voices in academia is the penultimate goal.

In order to move to the subsequent Immersion/Emersion status, the individual must allow some change to their own identity. While the previous status involves questioning and modifying beliefs, this status involves coming to term with Whiteness and defining themselves as White within a wider historical context. Here Helms (1995) asserted that the individual move beyond considering BIPOC individual as equals, to a more internal identity revision in which they come to terms with the legacy of Whiteness in the United States and reconciling their identity moving forward. This involves experiencing emotions that were denied or distorted, addressing contradictory relationships, and learning to speak openly regarding their identity. More recently, this revision to our own identity narrative has been framed within the concept of social privilege integration (Bergkamp, Olson, & Martin, in submission).

In the case study, the faculty began with a predominate anti-racist belief, asserting their agreement with the explicit programmatic social justice mission. With this, came associated inferences that inclusion of

BIPOC voices into the syllabi and addressing the BIPOC experience in clinical work was adequate, reflecting the Pseudo-Independent status. This relates to the belief that explicit statements of social justice and general inclusion equates to true equity.

With further learning, exploration, sharing, and curricular revision, the faculty was able to move from the additive approach to a more personalized, sophisticated, and integrated method of infusing social justice into their courses. This was indicated by incorporating social justice principles into the main assignments and requiring various components into the evaluation process. These components included applying a historical and structural lens to the class topics and challenging students to explore the advocate-ally-activist spectrum (Melton, 2018). This process required the faculty to move beyond the additive approach to more of an integrative approach, providing the essential message that social justice is involved in all aspects of psychology, whether marginalized populations are directly involved or not. This harkens to the Immersion/Emersion status in which the understanding of racism, or other forms of oppression in the case of generalized social justice, requires infusion into our privileged identities and the understanding of the mechanisms of oppression and privilege versus an “us helping them” savior modality.

The effort to integrate social justice into the curriculum occurs on the individual (faculty), group (program or department as a whole), and organizational level (institutional/university) (Argyris, 1993). While psychology usually focuses on the individual level, the group and organization levels also require consistent assessment and intervention at all stages of the integration process. The *Continuum on becoming an anti-racist multicultural organization* (Crossroad Ministry) offers a useful framework to apply a developmental perspective to the group and organizational levels (Crossroad Ministry, n.d.). Apply this to the case study, the program appeared to move from symbolic change that includes official policy pronouncements and inclusion efforts to identity change, which engages in the analysis of systemic oppression and an acknowledgment of inevitable bias.

The application of developmental models also involves the important step of faculty readiness for change. While this was not formally identified as a distinct stage in this case study, aspects of faculty readiness manifested throughout the process. Just this past year, the Council of Chairs of Training Councils (CCTC) concluded rigorous workgroups that developed the *Social Responsiveness in Health Service Psychology Education and Training Toolkit* (CCTC, 2020). This publication includes sections on liberating and transforming the curriculum, socially responsive ethics and professionalism, and a new vision of how to evaluate students, faculty, and supervisors. Of specific relevance to this case study, there is a helpful section regarding assessment and intervention of faculty readiness to change. A common theme in the curricular change workgroups was the sabotaging factor in which faculty might express overt support or agreement with curricular change, but then experience some reticence or resistance with the intensity or frequency of said change. Common hotspots include admissions deliberations, student remediation and discipline, and policy changes (Brady-Amoon et al., 2012).

Conclusion

The hope of this case study is to inspire other programs to take the initiative in social justice integration, despite the lack of a clear path forward. While this topic inevitably involves confusion and conflict, it is also imperative to train clinicians in our current age. Our shared goal is to forge a new generation of clinicians that are poised to not only competently practice psychology and counseling, but to artfully advocate for their clients through wider efforts that tug at the root of oppression in our society.

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