The Impact of Curiosity on Counselors' Social Justice Identity

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Abstract

The role of counselors has expanded to emphasize social justice principles and community action, encouraging social justice to become infused with counselor's professional identity. As a result, counselor educators are examining strategies for promoting the social justice identity of students and new professionals. Curiosity has been positioned as theoretically related to the concept of social justice. The current study investigated the relationship between counselor curiosity with social justice identity across three domains (self-efficacy, interest, and commitment) in a sample of 124 counselors and counselor trainees. Results indicated that three types of curiosity (specific, diversive, and competence) predicted each domain of social justice identity. Strategies to incorporate counselor curiosity into social justice pedagogy are discussed.

The Impact of Curiosity on Counselors' Social Justice Identity

Community-based action and social justice advocacy approaches are growing as critical elements of a counselor's role (Constantine et al., 2007). Mental health professionals recognized the growing need for counselors to advocate for diverse clientele through social action, which called for an extension beyond the previously established Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC; Sue, Arrendondo, McDavis, 1992). The updated Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) outlines a multilevel framework on attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills, and a newly added competency in action (Ratts, et al., 2015). Thus, social justice has become a distinct responsibility and a required competency in the counseling profession (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001; Ratts, 2009; Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016; Sue & Sue, 2013), and has been recognized as the "fifth force" of counseling (Ratts, 2009, p. 161).

Consequently, scholars seek to examine the factors that promote social justice interest and action. Several research studies have identified factors that predict social justice attitudes or identity, including political ideology (Parikh, Ceballos, & Post, 2012), problem-solving skills (Nilsson & Schmidt, 2005), spirituality (Prior & Quinn, 2012), collectivistic attitudes (Autin, Duffy, & Allan, 2017), and confidence (Briodo & Reason, 2005). These factors can influence how counselor educators identify and implement social justice pedagogy and training into coursework and experiences. Additionally, Caldwell and Vera (2010) identified critical incidents for cultivating a social justice orientation that included social justice training, immersive or experiential exercises, mentorship, and exposure to injustice. Thus, strategies for enhancing social justice training in counselor education can incorporate both individual predictors and training factors. More than 50 years ago, philosopher-educator Paulo Freire argued that critical curiosity, which he conceptualized as an eagerness to learn about and develop an understanding of the world, was related to developing a deeper understanding of social issues (Freire, 1970). Despite these historical connections between these two constructs, the relationship between curiosity and social justice identity within the field of counseling has not been investigated. Therefore, the current study seeks to understand how the specific characteristic of curiosity might predict and inform social justice identity of counselors.

Social Justice Identity

Social justice identity is described as the fusion or internalization of social justice principles with one's own life (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964). Social justice identity goes beyond a general understanding of social justice; counselors prioritize social justice domains as an important part of one's personal and professional identities (Dollarhide, Clevenger, Dogan, & Edwards, 2016). Domains of social justice identity include self-efficacy, interest, and commitment to social justice (Miller et al., 2009). Miller and colleagues (2009) defined social justice self-efficacy as a specific set of beliefs regarding one's perceived ability to perform social justice tasks across domains. Social justice interest refers to the pattern of likes or dislikes that a person holds toward social justice activities, while social justice commitment is related to the domain-specific social justice goals that one intends to pursue (Lent & Brown, 2006). Counselors with a social justice identity not only understand fundamental components of social justice, they infuse social justice principles with their personal and professional values.

The development of social justice identity requires having the tools necessary to critically examine and act within oppressive systems (Adams & Bell, 2016). The skills needed to identify and examine social justice issues can be cognitively complex (Reason & Davis, 2005) and require students to be able to engage in a high level of perspective taking, self-reflection, and critical thinking (Rios, Trent, & Castaneda, 2003). Bishop (2002) outlined a six-step process for social justice identity development that starts with recognizing oppression in society prior to acquiring the skills for action. Each step is characterized by recognizing and filling the current gaps in knowledge, perspectives, and worldviews to infuse social justice into one's identity.

Social Justice Identity in Counselor Education

Counselor educators have developed pedagogical approaches that support this identity development. For instance, Dollarhide and colleagues (2016) suggested incorporating experiences in affective, behavioral, cognitive, and contextual domains, rather than focusing on specific cultural competencies, to promote social justice identity development. Further, the underlying motivations may be particularly important for fostering social justice identity in the classroom. Thus, the inclusion of specific motivational factors included in social justice training is linked to increased participation and interest in social justice activities, such as highlighting connections with the oppressed, self-interest, moral foundations, responsibility, and passion (Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Edwards, 2006). These motivational factors emphasize students' individual purpose, meaning, and reasons for engaging in social justice work, rather than maintaining fixed training or lecturing based in standardized knowledge and competencies (Broido & Reason, 2005). Additionally, counselor educators incorporate social justice into their pedagogy by challenging limited perspectives, incorporating experiential exercises, and increasing students' interest and self-efficacy in advocacy through discussion, self-reflection, sociological context, and exposure to injustices (Constantine et al., 2007; Mayhew & Fernandez, 2007; Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011; Odegard & Vereen, 2010; Vera & Speight, 2003). However, many counselor education programs only address social justice in specific courses or trainings (Pieterse et al., 2009), and social justice can become an ascribed lesson or desired competency with barriers for growth and infusion into one's identity.

Despite an emergence of guidelines, programming, and training opportunities in social justice education, additional focused research may expand the understanding of why some students are more apt to become effective social justice advocates. Such research can inform strategies for counselor educators to infuse social justice more holistically into the program and incorporating facilitators of social justice identity into classroom environments. As a strengths-based profession, one strategy of interest is identifying and honing specific counselor characteristics that promote the development of social justice identity. Most counselors join the profession with a sense of compassion, a desire to help others, and genuine curiosity about others' stories (Allan, Owens, & Douglass, 2019; Ding, Laux, Salyers, & Kozelka, 2017). Research has yet to address how fostering students' curiosity may motivate counselors to engage in social justice during and after their education. Curiosity motivates people to explore and learn new ideas and new topics. Therefore, curiosity may also be a key motivational element of counselors exploring, learning, and engaging in new worldviews, systems, and social justice action.

Curiosity

Curiosity has been broadly defined as the desire to acquire new information and knowledge (Litman & Spielberger, 2003). Philosopher and psychologist Williams James (1899) described curiosity as the deep desire to understand what you do not. Curiosity stimulates exploratory behavior, discovery, and problem-solving that allows individuals to adapt and grow in new and unique situations (Litman & Spielberger, 2003). Curiosity has a role in development, learning, decision-making, motivation, and social interactions (Kang et al., 2009; Renner, 2006), impacting nearly all domains of human functioning (Reio, Petrosko, Wiswell, & Thongsukmag, 2006). Since curiosity is conceptualized in numerous ways, research has given way to various dimensions of curiosity, including perceptual or sensory (curiosity of stimuli), epistemic (curiosity of knowledge), diversive (intellectual exploration of novel stimuli), competence (a need to seek information in order to feel competent), problem solving or feelings of deprivation (not having access to information and having the desire to answer a question), that describe the different ways curiosity can manifest (Reio et al., 2006).

Everyone experiences moments of curiosity, but the frequency and intensity of such moments may denote a character trait that is a stable component of one's personality (Litman & Silva, 2006). Curiosity has been conceptualized as both a personality trait and a motivational or emotional state (Litman, 2005). Although curiosity can vary in intensity based on situational stimuli, many people have a dispositional tendency to engage in exploration regardless of the stimulus (Grossnickle, 2016). Thus, curiosity can be an individual strength to

be harnessed, as well as a state that can be encouraged and stimulated (Litman, 2005; Reio & Callahan, 2004).

Curiosity and Counseling

Kashdan and Roberts' (2004) research on interpersonal curiosity provides several insights into how curiosity fits in the counseling field. Curiosity promotes exploration and approach behaviors, in response to unfamiliar and meaningful environmental cues. This is particularly useful in social interactions, where curiosity can broaden one's attention of verbal and nonverbal patterns and stimulate a desire to learn more about the person and their perspectives (Kashdan & Roberts, 2004). In fact, curious people tend to readily observe and be more attentive to the people with whom they interact (Kashdan et al., 2012), and are more willing to tolerate deviations from the expected (Langer, 1992). Thus, curious people have greater sensitivity to the context and are more likely to effectively regulate their emotions and sustain resilience (Kashdan et al., 2012). Curious people are more likely to capitalize on opportunities and situations that foster intimacy and closeness, create conversations that are more interesting and enjoyable (Kashdan, McKnight, Fincham, & Rose, 2011), and have nondefensive and nonjudgmental attitudes (Kashdan et al., 2012). Further, curious individuals' preference for growth over safety, openness over closure, and complexity over simplicity (Vitterso, Soholt, Hetland, Thoreson, & Roysamb, 2010) aligns well with the mission of social justice.

Freire's beliefs about curiosity fit with this conceptualization. He hypothesized that when individuals adopt a stance of "critical curiosity" (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 385) about the world around them, it helps raise their critical consciousness. They begin to engage in the problems of the world around them in ways that become personally meaningful. Freire believed that curiosity helps people both gain an understanding of and ultimately challenge the systems of oppression (Freire, 1998). Importantly, he believed that although some types of curiosity are innate to the individual, this critical curiosity, which he likened to an epistemic or universal curiosity (simply put, the urge to know more about the world around the self), could be fostered through specific, intentional educational strategies (Freire, 1998).

Counselors may be naturally curious, but they also receive extensive training in developing a stance of unconditional positive regard and respectful curiosity (Dyche & Zayas, 1995). This curious stance is the foundation for the formation of the unique counseling relationship and enhances rapport and trust within this relationship (McEvoy, Baker, Plant, Hylton, & Mansell, 2013). One of the central aims of counseling is to create a space that allows new types of conversations to take place (Mason, 1993), and this is possible when counselors adopt a humble, curious, and respectful approach (Roy-Chowdhury, 2006). Further, an attitude of curiosity facilitates the breakdown of assumptions and demonstrates a willingness and interest to understand the individual and their unique perspective (Bansal, 2016). This has important implications in the development of counselor's social justice identity. Research has demonstrated that curiosity is linked to other pertinent traits, including openness to experience (Woo et al., 2014), tolerance of uncertainty (Litman, 2010), intrinsic motivation (Kashdan et al., 2018), and taking initiative (Kashdan & Silva, 2008), all of which are associated with multicultural and social justice counseling. In fact, the less curious we are, the more likely we are to jump to conclusions and reach premature certainty about situations and people (Stewart et al., 1991). Kashdan and colleagues (2013) found that certain types of curious people, described as the problem-solvers and the fascinated, were less likely to engage in relational or interpersonal aggression. Curiosity, then, is a tool for practicing cultural humility (Mosher et al., 2017) and engaging in culturally responsive conversations (Bansal, 2016).

Curiosity in Counselor Education

Counselor educators already use curiosity to facilitate epistemological development (Granello, 2002). Encouraging counselors-in-training to embrace uncertainty, explore topics of interest, and identify multiple perspectives assists in moving students out of a dualistic mindset (Wilkinson & Dewell, 2019). In fact, research shows that when people are genuinely curious about something, they learn more and better (Engel, 2013), and curiosity enhances learning by motivating individuals to engage in deeper critical thinking (Pluck & Johnson,

2011). Lowenstein's (1994) information gap theory posits that students' curiosity increases as students get closer to resolving a gap in information. The examination of information gaps paired with a supportive, stimulating environment is the driving force behind student curiosity (Pluck & Johnson, 2011). Counselor educators can harness this curiosity by probing, communicating the value of knowledge, and breaking information gaps into smaller, manageable learning tasks, where research suggests that curiosity is maximized (Reio et al., 2006).

Curiosity can be nurtured in a similar manner to enhance social justice identity development. Following Bishop's (2002) social justice identity development process, curiosity about social justice may be stimulated through identifying informational gaps in worldviews, knowledge, and skills, and providing students flexibility to explore such gaps in the classroom. Curiosity is both a learnable skill and disciplined habit (Jacobs, 2015), but curiosity should be cultivated in a purposeful manner. That is, curiosity towards specific topics or goals can promote more sustained interest and attention to such topics. For social justice awareness and orientation, Jacobs (2015) posits that student curiosity can be stimulated through providing challenges, purpose, and/or variety in the classroom and should not be bound by course designation or subject matter. Despite these suggestions, there is no current research that examines curiosity as a predictor of counselors' social justice self-efficacy, interest, and commitment. Further, it is unclear what form of curiosity (e.g., diverse, epistemic, competence, problem solving) is stimulated in the suggested various pedagogical strategies, and what dimensions of curiosity might be most useful in promoting counselor social justice interest and identity. Curiosity has clear benefits to classroom learning through increasing engagement and motivation in the classroom, however it is unclear if the impact of curiosity expands to predict the elements of sustained social justice identity.

The Present Study

The current study arose from a desire to understand potential strategies that can help foster social justice identity development in counselor education programs and social justice trainings. As a strengths-based profession, we sought to understand how curiosity is related to social justice identity. This study examined the association between various dimensions of curiosity and the components of social justice identity. We sought to answer the following research questions:

1) Does curiosity predict social justice identity?
2) What components of curiosity (e.g., specific to counseling, diverse, competence, intolerance, and problem solving) predict social justice identity?
3) What components of social justice identity (self-efficacy, interest, and commitment) are most influenced by curiosity?

We hypothesize that all five domains of curiosity positively predict social justice self-efficacy, interest, and commitment.

Method

Data Collection

The university's Institutional Review Board approved the present study. Members of the research team provided physical copies of the survey for interested participants at national clinical mental health and school counseling conferences. A member of the research team approached potential participants in an area of the conference reserved for conversing and networking. The researcher recited a prewritten script regarding the study to inform conference attendees of the study. Surveys took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Upon completion, participants returned completed surveys to a member of the research team, where surveys were stored in a file case.

Participants

The research team recruited from two national clinical mental health and school counseling conferences

that had a total of over 4,000 attendees. Eligibility criteria for this study included (1) 18 years of age or older, and (2) association with the counseling field (e.g., Counselor Educator, professional counselor, masters or doctoral student, retired from counseling profession). Surveys were distributed to approximately 140 participants at both conferences. Although 4,000 attendees were at these conferences, the research team was physically unable to meet every person at the conferences. Therefore, the research team recruited from a common area of the conference reserved for networking to identify potential participants. Of the 140 surveys distributed, 124 completed surveys were returned to the research team. A total sample size of 124 participants returned completed surveys to the research team and were used for analysis, which was appropriate for the current study, post-hoc power $(1-\beta$ error prob) = 0.92.

Instrument

Curiosity. Participants were administered two curiosity measures: the Epistemic Curiosity Scale (ECS; Litman & Spielberger, 2003) and the Curiosity as a Feeling of Deprivation Scale (CFDS; Litman & Jimerson, 2004). The content of the 10-item ECS inquired about interest in acquiring new knowledge and in cognitively processing information related to a variety of stimuli. The content of the 15-item CFDS reflects feelings of uncertainty and tension that motivates information-seeking and problem-solving behavior. These two measures are often used together because one (ECS) frames curiosity as the desire to obtain new information to stimulate positive feelings or interests while the other (CFDS) frames curiosity as the desire to reduce the undesirable state of information deprivation (Litman, Crowson, & Kolinski, 2010). Together, these scales resulted in a 25-item curiosity instrument used for the present study.

ECS subscales. The ECS included two subscales, which were ECS-Specific (ECS-S) and ECS-Diverse (ECS-D). The ECS-S included 5 items that measure curiosity about a particular stimulus (Litman & Spielberger, 2003). In the original scale, the items had primarily mathematical or mechanical concerns. For the present study, this specific stimulus was modified to focus on curiosity in counseling. In the original ECS, ECS-S items included "I enjoy new kinds of arithmetic problems and imagining solutions" and "I am interested in discovering how things work." The research team modified the language to represent curiosity specific to the field of counseling. These were transformed to "I enjoy facing new kinds of problems or challenges in counseling and imagining solutions" and "I am interested in discovering why and how change happens in counseling." Participants rated their agreement with these items on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*). Because of the modifications to the original instrument, the researchers ran a pilot of the entire instrument with the original ECS-S scale as well as the modified ECS-S to determine internal consistency. The pilot study had 28 cases. For the ECS-S pilot, with the original (mechanical/mathematical) questions, $\alpha = 0.52$. With the modified (counseling) questions, $\alpha = 0.62$. In addition to determining overall subscale internal consistency, individual items were assessed to determine whether the Cronbach's alpha of the subscale increased if an individual item was deleted from the subscale. In no case did the alpha coefficient increase with the removal of one of the scale items. The present study suggested internal consistency for ECS-S to be $\alpha = 0.69$.

The ECS-D included 5 items that involved general exploration of one's experiences or surroundings related to curiosity (Litman & Spielberger, 2003). ECS-D items included "I enjoy learning about subjects which are unfamiliar to me" and "It is fascinating to learn new information." Participants rated their agreement with these items on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*). The present study suggested internal consistency for ECS-D to be $\alpha = 0.73$ ($\alpha = 0.84$ for the pilot study).

CFDS subscales. The CFDS consists of three subscales, which are 5-items each. The three subscales include (1) the need to feel Competent (CFDS-C), (2) Intolerance experienced when information is inaccessible or inadequate (CFDS-I), and (3) a sense of urgency to Problem Solve (CFDS-PS). CFDS-C items included "If I read something that puzzles or confuses me, I keep reading or learning until I understand it better" and "I do not like the feeling of not knowing, which helps motivate me to try and learn about complex topics." CFDS-I items included "It troubles me if there doesn't seem to be a reasonable solution to a problem" and "I

enjoy carefully analyzing and evaluating ideas and theories, looking for other ways of seeing things." CFDS-PS items included "I can spend hours on a problem, and I sometimes can't rest until I come up with an answer or solution" and "I become frustrated if I can't figure out a problem, so I work harder to solve it." Participants rated their agreement with these items on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*). Internal consistency in the original article was reported for each subscale, CFDS-C α = 0.64, CFDS-I α = 0.68, CFDS-PS α = 0.78. The present study suggested internal consistency for the subscales, CFDS-C α = 0.56, CFDS-I α = 0.65, CFDS-PS α = 0.70. (For the pilot study, CFDS-C α = 0.77, CFDS-I α = 0.69, CFDS-PS α = 0.79).

Social justice identity. Participants completed the Social Inquiry Questionnaire (SIQ; Miller et al., 2009). The SIQ is an instrument designed to measure people's social justice identities as defined by five constructs. The present study utilized three of the social justice identity constructs: self-efficacy, interest, and commitment, which amounts to a total of 33 items.

Self-efficacy. This domain is measured using a subscale of 20 items. Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's perceived ability to engage in social justice advocacy behaviors across a variety of domains (e.g., inter/intrapersonal, community). Items for self-efficacy were prompted with the statement "How much confidence do you have in your ability to" and items included "respond to social injustice (e.g., discrimination, racism, religious intolerance) with nonviolent actions" and "examine your own worldview, biases, and prejudicial attitudes after witnessing or hearing about social injustice." Participants rated these items on a 10-point Likert scale (0 = *no confidence at all*, 9 = *complete confidence*).

Interest. This domain is measured using a subscale of 9 items. Interest is defined as the pattern of likes, dislikes, and indifferences regarding social justice advocacy activities. Items for interest were prompted with the statement "How much interest do you have in" and items included "volunteering your time at a community agency (e.g., Big Brother/Big Sister, volunteering at a homeless shelter)" and "reading about social issues (e.g., racism, oppression, inequality)." Participants rated these items on a 10-point Likert scale (0 = *very low interest*, 9 = *very high interest*).

Commitment. This domain is measured using a subscale of 4 items. Commitment is defined as an individual's choice-content goals or intentions to engage in social justice advocacy in the future. Items for commitment were prompted with the statement "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements" and items included "In the future, I intend to engage in social justice activities" and "I think engaging in social justice activities is a realistic goal for me." Participants rated these items on a 10-point Likert scale (0 = *strongly disagree*, 9 = *strongly agree*).

The internal consistency was calculated for each subscale of the SIQ in the current sample. Results indicated acceptable to high reliability (Kline, 2000) for self-efficacy (α = 0.95), interest (α = 0.83), and commitment (α =0.92). These alpha scores are comparable to the original study with the SIQ that included undergraduate students as participants: self-efficacy (α =0.94), interest (α =0.90), and commitment (α =0.93).

Data Analysis

The research team manually entered responses into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 25 (SPSS; IBM Corp, 2017) for analysis. Linear regression was used to determine if five curiosity factors (e.g., specific to counseling, diversive, competence, intolerance, and problem solving) were significant predictors of three social justice identity components (e.g., self-efficacy, interest, commitment). Several linear regressions were performed; predictors and outcomes were added separately into fifteen (five predictors, three outcomes) linear regressions to determine the unique variance that each curiosity subscale added into the model. The research team was interested to determine which unique factors of curiosity were significant in predicting specific factors of social justice identity. Thus, several regression analyses were used rather than analyses that would consider each variable set as defined by these multiple variables (e.g., canonical correlation analysis). As explained previously, curiosity and social justice identity are defined by multiple constructs. To answer the study's research question, the researchers considered how these variables contribute separately to a significant association between curiosity and social justice identity rather than identify which variables defined "curiosity"

and "social justice identity" as done previously. Future research may consider the use of data analyses that aim to define curiosity and social justice identity as unique variable sets.

Results

Sample Characteristics

Participants identified as female (83.7%, $n = 103$), male (15.4%, $n = 19$), and trans male/trans man (0.8%, $n = 1$). Most participants identified as Caucasian (65.3%, $n = 81$), with 19.4% ($n = 24$) identifying as Black or African American, 7.3% ($n = 9$) identifying as Latinx, 3.2% ($n = 4$) identifying as Asian or Asian American, 2.4% ($n = 3$) identifying as bi/multiracial, and 2.4% ($n = 3$) indicating that their identity was not listed. Participants were on average 38.36 years of age ($SD = 11.15$, range = 22-72). Most participants indicated that they held a current counseling license or certification (78.9%, $n = 97$). Participants primarily specialized in school counseling (65.8%, $n = 77$), with 27.4% ($n = 32$) in clinical or community mental health, 2.6% ($n = 3$) in marriage and family therapy, 1.7% ($n = 2$) rehabilitation counseling, and 2.6% ($n = 3$) indicating that their specialization was not listed as an option.

Participants were able to indicate two current areas of practice in counseling. Most participants reported that their primary practice was as a practicing counselor (58.6%, $n = 72$), with 14.6% ($n = 18$) in a counseling masters program, 13% ($n = 16$) working as a Counselor Educator, 5.7% ($n = 7$) in a counseling doctoral program, 1.6% ($n = 2$) retired from counseling work, and 6.5% ($n = 8$) indicating their practice was not listed. Most commonly, participants reported their second area of practice to be as a practicing counselor (40%, $n = 18$), 15.6% ($n = 7$) in a counseling masters program, 15.6% ($n = 7$) working as a Counselor Educator, 13.3% ($n = 6$) in a counseling doctoral program, and 15.6% ($n = 7$) indicating that their area of practice was not listed as an option.

Table 1. Correlations

	Diversive	Specific	Problem Solve	Competence	Intolerance	SJ Self Efficacy	SJ Interest
Diversive	—						
Specific	.57**	—					
Problem Solve	.37**	.27**	—				
Competence	.50**	.41**	.43**	—			
Intolerance	.18	.24**	.62**	.56**	—		
SJ Self Efficacy	.32**	.30**	.15	.21*	.12	—	
SJ Interest	.43**	.37**	.11	.23*	.07	.53**	—
SJ Commitment	.29**	.36**	.08	.27**	.08	.56**	.71**

Note: **$p < 0.01$, *$p < .05$

Curiosity as a Predictor of Social Justice Identity

Intercorrelations for variables of interest are reported in Table 1 Measures of curiosity significantly predicted social justice identity concepts (see Table 2). The regression model with ECS-Specific as a predictor was statistically significant for social justice self-efficacy, $R^2 = 0.09$, $F(1,114) = 11.03$, $p = .001$, interest, $R^2 = 0.13$, $F(1,115) = 17.80$, $p < .001$, and commitment, $R^2 = 0.13$, $F(1,120) = 18.13$, $p < .001$. Effect sizes were calculated for the significant predictions (Cohen, 1988). ECS-Specific resulted in a small to medium effect size for self-efficacy (Cohen's $F^2 = 0.10$), a medium effect size for interest (Cohen's $F^2 = 0.15$), and a medium effect size for commitment (Cohen's $F^2 = 0.15$). For every one-point increase in ECS-Specific curiosity, participants were expected to have higher social justice self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.80$, $p = .001$), interest ($\beta = 0.98$, $p < .001$), and commitment ($\beta = 1.28$, p

< .001). Thus, as curiosity of counseling increased, participants were expected to have higher social justice self-efficacy, interest, and commitment.

The regression model with ECS-Diversive as a predictor was statistically significant for social justice self-efficacy, $R^2 = 0.10$, $F(1,113) = 13.05$, $p < .001$, interest, $R^2 = 0.18$, $F(1,114) = 25.21$, $p < .001$, and commitment, $R^2 = 0.08$, $F(1,119) = 10.97$, $p = .001$. Effect sizes were calculated for the significant predictions (Cohen, 1988). ECS-Diversive resulted in a small to medium effect size for self-efficacy (Cohen's $F^2 = 0.12$), a medium to large effect size for interest (Cohen's $F^2 = 0.22$), and a small to medium effect size for commitment (Cohen's $F^2 = 0.09$). For every one-point increase in ECS-Diversive curiosity, participants were expected to have higher social justice self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.82$, $p < .001$), interest ($\beta = 1.09$, $p < .001$), and commitment ($\beta = 0.99$, $p = .001$). Thus, as general curiosity of experiences and surroundings increased, participants were expected to have higher social justice self-efficacy, interest, and commitment.

The regression model with CFDS-Competence as a predictor was statistically significant for social justice self-efficacy, $R^2 = 0.04$, $F(1,112) = 4.94$, $p = .028$, interest, $R^2 = 0.06$, $F(1,113) = 6.53$, $p = .012$, and commitment, $R^2 = 0.07$, $F(1,118) = 9.49$, $p = .003$. Effect sizes were calculated for the significant predictions (Cohen, 1988). CFDS-C resulted in a small effect size for self-efficacy (Cohen's $F^2 = 0.04$), a small effect size for interest (Cohen's $F^2 = 0.06$), and a small to medium effect size for commitment (Cohen's $F^2 = 0.08$). For every one-point increase in CFDS-C curiosity, participants were expected to have higher social justice self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.47$, $p = .028$), interest ($\beta = 0.53$, $p = .012$), and commitment ($\beta = 0.84$, $p = .003$). Thus, as the need to feel competent as a motivator of curiosity increased, participants were expected to have higher social justice self-efficacy, interest, and commitment.

Table 2. Curiosity as a significant predictor of social justice identity

	R^2	F^2	β
ECS-S			
Self-efficacy	0.09	0.10	0.80***
Interest	0.13	0.15	0.98****
Commitment	0.13	0.15	1.28****
ECS-D			
Self-efficacy	0.10	0.12	0.82****
Interest	0.18	0.22	1.09****
Commitment	0.08	0.09	0.99***
CFDS-Competence			
Self-efficacy	0.04	0.04	0.47*
Interest	0.06	0.06	0.53*
Commitment	0.07	0.08	0.84**

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p = .001$, **** $p < .001$

There were two curiosity variables that did not yield statistically significant results for any of the outcome variables. The first was intolerance [self-efficacy $R^2 = 0.014$, $p = .207$; interest $R^2 = -0.004$, $p = .467$; commitment $R^2 = -0.002$, $p = .395$]. The second was problem solving [self-efficacy $R^2 = 0.014$, $p = .106$; interest $R^2 = 0.004$, $p = .221$; commitment $R^2 = -0.001$, $p = .365$].

Discussion and Implications

The results provided support for our hypothesis that greater curiosity would predict stronger social justice identity, although only certain types of curiosity were statistically associated with social justice identity. Three of the five subscales within the two curiosity measures were significant predictors of all three subcomponents of social justice identity (self-efficacy, interest, and commitment). Specifically, both subscales of the ECS, Specific and Diverse curiosity, were associated with higher self-efficacy, interest, and commitment to social justice principles. That is, counselors with both a generalized sense of curiosity and individuals motivated by a specific, detailed exploration of counseling predicted higher levels of social justice identity. Only the Competence subscale of the CFDS positively predicted social justice identity. The need to feel competent, and thus seek information, increased one's level of social justice identity. These significant predictors align easily with the multicultural and social justice counseling competencies already taught in counselor education, placing curiosity as a potential contender for improving pedagogical strategies of social justice education.

The intolerance and problem-solving subscales of curiosity did not predict any dimension of social justice identity. Intolerance to lack of access to information and a sense of urgency to problem-solve are not characteristics that typically occur in counseling process; however it was predicted that these dimensions aligned with the leadership and action orientation of social justice work. Although we thought these dimensions of curiosity would predict social justice identity, it may be that people who cannot tolerate a lack of information and are urgent to problem-solve are less likely for social justice motivation to be sustained. Social justice advocacy requires endurance and sustained effort despite barriers, and people who are intolerant to not having all of the information or need to solve problems quickly may be burned out easily and not have social justice fully incorporated into one's identity. Additionally, the lack of significant results for these predictors may be due to the limited diversity of the sample. Future research should explore these constructs further to determine if the results are replicated in more diverse samples.

Counselor educators are tasked with training new professionals in advocacy and social action through increasing students' self-efficacy, interest, and commitment to social justice work. As counselors expand their roles, new and innovative strategies for fostering social justice identity must be explored and incorporated into counselor education pedagogy. This study demonstrates that counselors' curiosity helps predict social justice identity, suggesting the possibility that including strategies that stimulate counselors' curiosity may enhance social justice training and education. Curiosity is linked to improved learning more broadly, but this study suggests that it may be beneficial to intentionally select pedagogical strategies for social justice education that enhance student or counselor curiosity. The three predictive subcomponents of curiosity align easily with common characteristics of counseling professionals (Allan, Owens, & Douglass, 2019), and curiosity is likely a common strength present in counseling training programs. Counselor educators, and more generally graduate instructors, already use effective strategies to foster epistemological development by modeling and scaffolding student curiosity (Sinha, Bai, & Cassel, 2017), but counselor educators may promote social justice identity development by using strategies that foster purposeful curiosity in social justice issues. Further, these strategies can be readily fused with various social justice pedagogical strategies, allowing student curiosity to be applied to case studies, self and group reflection, sociological and power discussions, and service-learning and immersion projects (Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Goodman et al., 2004; Kumagai & Lypson, 2009; Mayhew & Fernandez, 2007). Thus, using strategies found to increase student curiosity generally or towards social justice issues may assist students in perceiving the value, purpose, and/or relatedness of social justice more than other pedagogical approaches (Jacobs, 2015).

Previous research on curiosity demonstrated curiosity's influence on learning, motivation, and social interactions (e.g., Kang et al., 2009; Renner, 2006). This research extends the importance of harnessing students' curiosity in counseling work and facilitating culturally responsive conversations and relationships (Bansal, 2016), making it of keen interest to counselor educators and trainers of social justice. It appears that fostering

curiosity in the classroom not only assists in the development of students' epistemological development but may also influence the development of students' social justice identity. Using pedagogical theories and strategies that increase curiosity in targeted topics, such as Lowenstein's (1994) information gap theory, Jacobs' (2015) use of challenge, purpose, or variety in curiosity-based exercises, and Pluck and colleagues' (2011) suggestion of inquiry-based teaching approaches, may be useful in the context of social justice education. Creating a classroom environment that fosters curiosity through student-directed engagement, scaffolding, and topic flexibility may be more useful in in combination with critical incidents and training exercises previously found to be effective in developing social justice identity. These strategies foster both critical and creative thinking skills that are associated to student curiosity by examining and addressing social justice issues while using strategies that enhance curiosity (Seymour, Kinn, & Sutherland, 2003).

Further, the specific dimensions of curiosity found to be significant predictors in this study can be tailored in pedagogical strategies to increase effectiveness. The specific and diverse curiosity of students can be fostered specifically by encouraging multiple perspectives and identifying information gaps across the affective, cognitive, behavioral, and contextual domains of social justice identity development (Dollarhide et al., 2016). These specific types of curiosity can be further enhanced by introducing variety in the discussion topic, the perspectives used, and the manner in which discussions are facilitated (Jacobs, 2014; Kashdan & Fincham, 2004). On the other hand, competence-focused curiosity may be fostered through intentional and individualized student goal setting. Students who develop goals that challenge their interest and skill level in social justice are more likely to sustain their curiosity for longer periods of time (Jacobs, 2015). Kumagai and Lypson (2009) suggest that the development of pragmatic goals can maintain continued engagement in social justice classrooms, as long as the established goals promote genuine curiosity and challenge in students.

A focus on curiosity may be particularly helpful for students struggling to understand and adopt social justice principles during a counseling education program. Although most new counselors enter their training programs in a dualistic mindset (Granello, 2002; Granello, 2010), some students struggle to move out of dualistic thinking even with the help of counselor educators. In terms of social justice identity development, these students may maintain belief systems that fail to acknowledge worldviews outside of their own, making it difficult to recognize and take action in the face of societal inequities and oppression. Students struggling to manage conflicting belief systems may benefit from less focus on learning the specifics of multiculturalism initially and more on strategies and interventions that foster any type of curiosity that promotes social justice identity.

Lastly, social justice identity is developed over the course of a career (Adams & Bell, 2016), yet social justice education still typically occurs within the confines of a multicultural counseling course (Collins et al., 2015). As students and new professionals expand their roles to include social justice and advocacy work, counselor educators must also expand the breadth and depth of social justice training. As counselors graduate and enter the workforce, intentional goals, opportunities for continued education, and maintaining a curious stance may sustain interest and commitment to social justice issues outside of the training environment (Jacobs, 2015), making it more likely for counselors to adopt social justice into their identity.

This study has limitations to consider. Most notably, there is potential for reverse relationship between curiosity and social justice identity. Although this study provides evidence that certain dimensions of curiosity predict social justice identity, previous research has identified that discussing the importance of a specific topic, like social justice work, maintains curiosity (Jacobs, 2014; Kashdan & Fincham, 2004). As people with social justice identities will be more likely to discuss the importance of social justice, sustained curiosity may be a byproduct of stronger social justice identity. Further, curiosity and social justice identity may have a bidirectional or feedback relationship not explored in this study. Regardless of the directionality of the variables, counselor educators know that it can be difficult to teach difficult and challenging social justice concepts. Freire (1998) believed that epistemic curiosity, which was related to social justice identity in this study, could be taught through intentional and specific strategies. Thus, it may be that intentionally enhancing this type of curiosity among counseling students could help raise their willingness to engage in a social justice identity, although this was

not investigated in this research study. Future research should confirm the relationships through experimental research designs or the inclusion of more covariates that potentially influence the direction and strength of the relationships.

A second limitation was that the sample size consisted of mostly White female counseling professionals attending two different conferences. Although both conferences where data was collected are widely attended by counseling professionals, the cost of conference attendance and travel may limit a large range of counselors from attending and thus participating in the study. Further, the lack of diversity in the sample may impact the generalizability of the results. This study's participants may not have the same contributing factors to the development of social justice identity. For example, lived experiences of injustice may not predict social justice identity for White counselors but may for counselors of color. For White female counselors, curiosity predicted social justice identity, but future research should replicate this study with a diverse sample. Third, social justice is a frequent topic of discussion and research area for counselors; therefore, there is a high potential for social desirability in participants' answers of their self-efficacy, interest, and commitment of social justice identity. Lastly, curiosity that measured curiosity of counseling specifically (ECS-S) was measured using a piloted instrument that combined multiple subscales related to different forms of curiosity. Although the ECS-S curiosity subscale was piloted with a group of counseling students and found acceptable internal consistency, this scale with the use of counseling language has not been validated in larger samples.

Conclusion

As counselors' roles expand and incorporate social justice and community-based action, the training and education must also expand. The social justice identity development of counselors may start in the classroom, but the pedagogical strategies utilized by counselor educators are critical in fostering lifelong self-efficacy, interest, and commitment to social justice. Among other counselor strengths, curiosity can be harnessed in counseling session, counselor education classrooms, and within communities to motivate counselors for the social justice work that is crucial to the field and the clientele we serve.

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