

Amidst the Chaos: Developing a Counseling Psychologist Identity during Ongoing Social Unrest

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Abstract

In this reflection paper we discuss the complex challenge of undergoing Counseling Psychology doctoral training as gender expansive women of color during times of great sociopolitical unrest in the United States (U.S.). We consider how via insider status, we are uniquely impacted by engagement in clinical and research work with diverse communities that face ongoing threats to their social and psychological well-being. However, our insider positions are rarely considered in our training experiences. We argue that the field of Counseling Psychology must make a concerted effort to center the voices of students with minoritized identities or runs the risk of engaging in White supremacist practices. We end with recommendations for how Counseling Psychology can better consider and address the needs of doctoral students with minoritized identities.

Keywords: counseling psychology, professional psychology, clinical training, research training, social justice

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In 2020, the American Psychological Association (APA) released its 13th annual *Stress in America* survey, comprised of a national U.S. adult sample. The survey illuminated the heavy toll of the U.S. sociopolitical climate on life stress. When asked about major sources of life stress, 56% of respondents endorsed the 2020 presidential election. The following year, APA released *Stress in the Time of Covid-19*, another national survey of life stress among U.S. adults. In this survey, 68% of adults endorsed the current political climate and 59% endorsed police violence toward communities of color as significant sources of life stress.

The increasingly charged sociopolitical climate characterizing 2020 and 2021 has resulted in elevated levels of stress across the U.S. As argued by scholars, the recent climate has fueled discriminatory treatment against many diverse communities across race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity (Flaskerud & Lesser, 2018; Paluck & Chwe, 2017) Krupenkin et al., 2019) with syndemic disparities taking center stage during the Coronavirus pandemic (Azar et al., 2020; Garcini et al., 2021). It is during times of sociopolitical and economic unrest that psychologists must intervene at the individual, social, and community levels; these interventions must be grounded in principles of social justice to bring about critical change (Grzanka et al., 2017).

According to APA's (2017) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, "psychologists are committed to increasing scientific and professional knowledge of behavior and people's understanding of themselves and others and to use such knowledge to improve the condition of the individual, organization, and society." The ethics code highlights that as part of this responsibility, psychologists are expected to respect and protect human rights (APA, 2017). Thus, psychologists have an ethical duty to contribute to the well-being of the most vulnerable populations, including neutralizing the ill effects of hostile sociopolitical climates (see Harzem, 1987; Council of Counseling Psychology Training Programs, Association of Counseling Center Training Agencies, & Society of Counseling Psychology, 2009).

A long-standing history shows that Counseling Psychology has long been invested in creating necessary social justice change (DeBlaere et al., 2019; Vera & Speight, 2003). The Society of Counseling Psychology (2020) emphasizes that the practice of Counseling Psychologists spans a broad range of culturally attuned practices that promote well-being, alleviate distress, resolve crises, and increase individuals' ability to function better in their lives. Counseling Psychologists are trained to consider cultural and environmental factors that uniquely impact diverse groups and to provide psychological relief through research, clinical, and advocacy efforts. For these reasons, Counseling Psychology is in an ideal position to train the next generation of social justice driven psychologists who can respond to the uniquely negative sociopolitical climate that has characterized the U.S. in recent year. However, we assert that Counseling Psychology training programs must be more proactive in supporting trainees with minoritized identities by helping trainees leverage their own cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) to shape the future of the field.

Gazzola et al. (2011) found that Counseling Psychology graduate students reported disappointment with the training experiences they received to develop their professional identities, leaving some feeling unprepared for professional work. Participants noted that the training they received left them unclear about what a Counseling Psychologist identity truly encompasses (i.e., theoretical perspectives, paradigms) and how this translates into practice for social change. For instance, respondents reported an internal struggle between choosing an "expert" stance versus endorsing an "egalitarian perspective." A growing movement within the profession has called for Counseling Psychology to infuse a social justice perspective to counseling theories, paradigms, the ethics code, and clinical practice (Pope et al., 2021; Ratts, 2009; Singh et al., 2010). As noted by Scheel et al. (2018), "counseling psychology's emphasis on diversity and social justice has emerged with a level of clarity and vigor unsurpassed in its history" (p. 9). Yet, scholars continue to call on training programs

to adequately address systems of oppression (Beer et al., 2012; DeBlaere et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2010)
The Implications of Political Divisiveness on Psychologist Training

In 2016, shortly after the 45th presidential election, a national poll of K-12 educators found that 67% had witnessed specific incidents of student-initiated bigotry, racial slurs, and harassment towards diverse groups (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2019). Educators also described student aggressors as more emboldened to freely express negative views towards others. Further, 80% of educators expressed that they were highly concerned about the worry and fear expressed by students to widespread anti-immigrant rhetoric and federal policies, which created heightened levels of anxiety and stress among students of diverse backgrounds (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2019). More recently, misinformation related to the use of facemasks and the COVID-19 vaccine has unearthed new threats to daily life in the U.S. (Ayers et al., 2021). Reports of serious physical violence toward Asians has skyrocketed during the Coronavirus pandemic (Gover et al., 2020) and there have also been ongoing violent uprisings, some within U.S. federal buildings (Zarkov, 2021), that demonstrate ongoing sociopolitical unrest.

In 2018, Crandall et al. sampled 388 U.S. adults and found that participants perceived a shift in the acceptability of prejudice toward certain social groups targeted by former President Trump post-election. Namely, participants reported that prejudices were becoming more acceptable in the general social landscape around them. Similarly, a national survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2019 found that 65% of U.S. adults believed that a culture of overt racism was more socially common and acceptable following the election of former President Trump.

Mental health providers have reported that recent policies targeting diverse groups (e.g., separation of families, discriminatory policies, racial profiling, etc.) has added to and/or exacerbated clients' mental health stressors. Consoli et al. (2018) and Krupenkin et al., (2019) found that immigrant adults described persistent fear of persecution related to being detained, banned, or deported. The Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (2019) found increased serious mental health challenges across all ages of Black/African American individuals in recent years. In the context of COVID-19, Black Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) have seen disproportionately high numbers of coronavirus incidence, hospitalization and death compared to White adults (Gold et al., 2020), as well as higher rates of unemployment and economic stress (Pew Research Center, 2020). COVID-19 has had, and will continue to have, detrimental impacts on the well-being of BIPOC communities for generations to come.

Counseling Psychology doctoral students face unique challenges in today's sociopolitical climate (Galan et al., 2020). Students are forging their own professional identity as social justice advocates while also learning how to navigate serving clients and carrying out research among communities that have been under persistent threat from federal policies. For example, students conducting research with Latinx immigrants will have to consider how heightened fear and political uncertainty of the future plays a significant role in mental health symptomatology (Chavez-Deñás et al., 2019; Consoli et al., 2018). Additionally, doctoral students with minoritized identities have to navigate these same concerns while in the midst of a pandemic. In a recent study exploring the experiences of Counseling Psychology doctoral students during COVID-19 (Pasyk et al., 2021), an emergent theme was a sense of needing to negotiate personal and professional identities while also feeling an inherent sense of loss (e.g., loss of training plans, purpose, structure and routine, community). Further, the authors noted that undergoing training during a pandemic brought to light inherent power differentials between doctoral student trainees, supervisors, and program administrators.

In clinical training, many critical opportunities are missed to train students in how to discuss and respond to sociopolitical issues with clients, including, clients' rights and ability to resist discriminatory treatment at the individual, community, state, and federal levels. Indeed, scholars have called attention to the discrepancy that exists between the commitment that the field of Counseling Psychology has made to social justice and the actual preparation that individuals receive to fully learn how to become active social change agents (Olle, 2018). DeBlaere et al. (2019) noted that training programs centered around social justice may intentionally or unconsciously

uphold and recreate systems of oppression when failing to consider a system-level focus on the conceptualization of individual problems. We argue that when training programs do not explicitly address how the sociopolitical climate in the U.S. has fostered a rise in state-sanctioned discrimination and violence toward diverse groups, they are inherently upholding deeply embedded foundations of White supremacy in training practice (Liu 2017; DeBlaere et al., 2019; Speight & Vera, 2004). In simple terms, when training programs do not account for minoritized students' unique needs—how they are disparately negatively impacted by sociopolitical unrest and/or the Coronavirus pandemic—they are upholding a status quo that centers non-minoritized students' experiences and needs.

By 2060, BIPOC will comprise the majority of U.S. residents (United States Census Bureau, 2015). It is imperative that psychologists be ready and able to address how an increasingly hostile sociopolitical climate fuels mental health disparities among minoritized communities in an effort to prepare the next generation of social justice change agents. Counseling Psychologists are called on to engage in actions that will challenge inequity and create larger systemic change (Prilleltensky, 2003; Singh, 2020). In her recent 2020 Society of Counseling Psychology presidential address, Dr. Anneliese Singh called on Counseling Psychologists to move towards a framework of liberation. She noted the need to decolonize and re-Indigenize Counseling Psychology, to center Black liberation, to unlearn internalized Whiteness in Counseling Psychology, and to uplift the liberation of Black and Brown trans women and nonbinary communities. Dr. Singh called for a transformative process within the Counseling Psychology field, including the need to reconsider training programs and how we become active agents of liberation (Singh, 2020).

According to Goodman et al. (2004), social justice within Counseling Psychology is defined as “scholarship and professional action designed to change societal values, structures, policies, and practices, such that disadvantaged or marginalized groups gain increased access to these tools of self-determination, empowerment, and change” (p. 793). In line with this definition, Goodman et al. (2004) discuss six principles for engagement in social justice that include (a) ongoing self-examination, (b) sharing power, (c) giving voice, (d) facilitating consciousness raising, (e) building on strengths, and (f) providing clients with the necessary tools to create social change. Vera and Speight (2003), borrowing from Bell's (1997) definition of social justice, assert that the goal of social justice is, “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, 1997, p.3). Ratts, (2009) notes that in practice, a social justice paradigm “uses social advocacy and activism as a means to address inequitable social, political, and economic conditions that impede the academic, career, and personal/social development of individuals, families, and communities.” While social justice definitions, frameworks, and paradigms have been well circulated in the Counseling Psychology literature, researchers argue that remains a severe gap in how social justice is infused in doctoral students' training experiences (Goodman et al., 2004; Ratts & Pederson, 2014; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018; Vera & Speight, 2003). -

Researchers have examined how Counseling Psychology training programs are preparing doctoral students to develop as social change agents (Beer et al., 2012; Singh et al., 2010). In a mixed methods study of Counseling Psychology trainees, Beer et al. (2012) found that participants perceived significantly less integration of social justice training than they desired, reporting a strong desire for additional social justice training. Singh et al. (2010) sampled 66 Counseling Psychology trainees and found that participants expressed the desire for social justice to be infused in all aspects of training as well as for training opportunities outside of Counseling Psychology programs. Yeo et al. (2017) examined how webpages communicated multicultural information to prospective students via a random sample of 90 APA accredited doctoral health service psychology programs. In their review, the authors found that Counseling Psychology programs had a greater amount of multicultural information on their webpages for prospective students compared to Clinical and School Psychology programs. The authors stated that while multicultural visibility in websites served to attract a more diverse student body in Counseling Psychology,

resistance to change within organizational cultures and within programs continued to impede representation and recruitment of Counseling Psychology students with minoritized identities.

Many graduate programs have pivoted in response to social justice concerns among students and faculty by integrating social justice into the very framework of their program. The Counseling Psychology Model Training Program was revised in 2018 (Scheel et al., 2018) to respond to the changing climate in which Counseling Psychologists work. Similarly, Ratts and Greenleaf (2018) developed the Counselor-Advocate-Scholar (CAS) model to delineate the different roles that counselors can assume when engaging in social justice advocacy. The CAS model considers how counselors ought to assume multiple roles such as the counselor, advocate, and scholar when addressing issues of social justice and inequality. Most importantly, the conceptual framework is centered on a multicultural-social justice praxis which acknowledges a multicultural society and the critical role a social justice change agent has in creating effective change in the lives of all individuals and society. Furthermore, Ratts and Pederson (2014) note that counselors committed to integrating social justice in their work must expand dominant discourse in counseling by recognizing an individuals' cultural background when working with clients and communities, resist the value of neutrality, and acknowledge the issue of oppression and other external influencing factors on clients' lives. While the field of Counseling Psychology has generated suggested guidelines in the provision of training to respond to an increasingly hostile sociopolitical climate, the larger body of literature has yet to center the perspectives of students from minoritized backgrounds who are the forefront of addressing health disparities within their communities of origin. It is critical that students from minoritized backgrounds, who are not often in positions of power, raise their voices about how Counseling Psychology programs are preparing us to be agents of social change.

Reflections on the Inclusion of Minoritized Students in Counseling Psychology Training

The current paper began as a culminating group project in a Counseling Psychology seminar in winter 2019. We are part of a combined Counseling, Clinical and School Psychology doctoral psychology program on the West-Coast. Each year, the program admits a cohort of about 10 to 12 students of diverse backgrounds and whose research interests align with those of the departmental faculty. Some of the research conducted by faculty include multicultural supervision, psychotherapy integration and training, interventions supporting the mental health and well-being of sexual and gender minorities, and resilience and thriving among BIPOC communities with a strong emphasis on Latinx, immigrant and Spanish-speaking persons.

A specific requirement for Counseling Psychology doctoral students in the program is that they take two counseling seminar courses. The specific seminar from which this paper developed served to orient doctoral trainees to the field by introducing theories that are foundational to the field. In this course we discussed intersectionality, prevention, minority stress, and critical race theory and together applied these theories to significant socio-political issues like the Black Lives Matter movement and immigration policies under the 45th presidential administration.

During the course of the winter quarter, the topic of what it meant to begin and continue training during severe political unrest was a constant theme throughout class discussions. We came to realize that while our training opportunities were rooted in cultural humility, multiculturalism and social justice, the field as a whole was not yet prepared to address what it meant for trainees with minoritized identities to come into their professional identities as Counseling Psychologists during an especially volatile sociopolitical climate. Further, as a class comprised of gender expansive women of color (both students and instructor), it was even more evident that our personal experiences and professional needs as members of diverse groups targeted by the 45th presidential administration were not fully considered by the field, nor in our clinical and research training.

In the next section we discuss our experiences of undergoing Counseling Psychology doctoral training as gender expansive women of color with diverse intersectional identities during a time of intense social unrest. We share our stories to call attention to important structural shifts needed to help us—and other minoritized students—better navigate training programs. It is our aim to collectively raise awareness about some of the

challenges we have faced in developing our professional identities as well as to highlight factors that have positively shaped our development.

“La Lucha Sigue:” *The Fight Continues* by Iliana Flores

I am a cisgender Latina raised by a single immigrant mother who came to the U.S. to pursue the “American Dream.” My mother did not speak English, nor had any formal education. She had to work multiple low-wage jobs to support me and my siblings. This meant I had first-hand experiences with poverty that often exists in underserved communities. At a young age, I became aware of how a lack of resources to prevent or address issues of mental health, domestic violence and substance abuse in the community often led to negative outcomes and consequences. These experiences allowed me to bear witness to and understand how it was crucial for individuals in our society to provide families with resources that could provide hope and relief.

As a bicultural (Mexican American) and bilingual (Spanish-English) Counseling Psychologist-in-training, I am often made aware of the impact that systemic oppression and inequity have on individuals from marginalized communities. As such, my role as a clinician has been largely informed by a social-justice lens. For instance, I find it crucial to consider how different forms of oppression within the current sociopolitical climate interact (i.e., xenophobia, racism/prejudice, white supremacy, patriarchy) to impact the lives of many people, particularly those from less privileged backgrounds. I strive to be intentional about using a strengths-based approach to highlight clients’ resilience and to formulate a treatment plan that is congruent with their needs and cultural identity—values that are especially critical during this period of political unrest and the Coronavirus pandemic. Indeed, developing a psychologist identity as a woman of color and working closely with community members has been rewarding, yet challenging.

As a first-generation college student, I have learned to cope with a persistent feeling of imposter syndrome that was exacerbated during the presidential election of 2020, feeling “othered” at times while attending a historically white serving institution, or becoming discouraged by the lack of BIPOC representation in academia. Moreover, these issues have been compounded when my training does not cover how to provide effective clinical services to BIPOC that are impacted by racism and prejudice, threatened with detainment and deportation, and/or consumed by fear for their safety and wellbeing in our current U.S. climate. In many of these moments, I look to my colleagues and the many mentors in my life that work tirelessly to challenge the status quo for guidance and direction. It is through many private discussions that I have found my ability to heal and find radical hope. This has included showing up to a mentor’s office and expressing my frustration for the social inequalities I observe in and outside of clinical work and being validated for how I feel, as well as reminded that *la lucha sigue* (the fight continues) and our struggles are not in vain because they are helping to create important changes that are for the good of society. At times it is the simple act of others acknowledging my lived experience; that as a first-generation college student of color, navigating academia is no simple task. In fact, my survival is a testament to my strengths, abilities, and tenacity to persevere. These moments encourage me and remind me to keep moving forward so that one day I can be in a position where I can extend hope to other students that also face institutional disillusionment. I am hopeful that the field of Counseling Psychology will continue to name the systemic issues that affect individuals. And moreover, I hope that our field will provide adequate training opportunities that build on the inherent strengths of students with minoritized identities.

प्रेरणा (*Prerana*): *Inspired by Being the Other* by Himadhari Sharma

While I identify as a second-generation, multilingual, Asian Indian American, cis-woman, eldest daughter of immigrants, the weight given to each aspect my identity has often had to be negotiated. Being raised in a predominately white suburb in the Midwest, my family’s “otherness” was always apparent and at times not welcomed. Which aspect of my identity took lead was often determined by the needs, situation, and environment. In many settings, my responsibilities and expectations went beyond my role reinforcing the societal expectation to quietly work hard. As witness to my immigrant parents’ struggles and sacrifices, a pressure to achieve became

interwoven into my self-definition. My experiences ignited a passion to serve a community of American “misfits” and “others,” while also trying to balance my duty to honor my family expectations.

I am privileged to have had the support to change fields, leaving a paid job to pursue a doctoral degree in Counseling Psychology. I am aware that my born citizen status and middle-class socioeconomic background have allowed me to focus on my career. At a young age, I was introduced to the challenges faced by non-white and culturally diverse individuals in accessing relevant mental health support. This became the motivation for my graduate studies, influenced by my desire to serve marginalized communities. While my ambitious professional goals may be encouraged, I must acknowledge the effect of, and invisible pressure placed by an internalized model minority myth on my pursuits.

Developing my identity as a future South Asian American woman psychologist has been challenging. With the support of my advisor, I have sought opportunities to access resources, mentorship, and professional environments that validate my identities, such as the Asian American Psychological Association and the Division of South Asian Americans. I have had the privilege to collaborate on projects that quench my thirst to serve and build community. My personal and professional experiences fuel my commitment to social justice within my work, both clinical and research. I continue to find ways to challenge the status quo, as I understand not fitting into it, by pursuing research focused on my and other minoritized communities. I place emphasis on utilizing strengths-based culturally humble approaches (e.g., Relational Cultural Therapy; Jordan, 2017) with clients to honor their diverse paths to culturally salient healing. I am committed to going beyond traditional white psychology, in effort to serve those often ignored, encourage radical healing, and use my power and privilege to aid in righting the wrongs of society and our field.

***Bienestar, Alegria, y Conosimeinto: Well-being, Joy, and Knowledge* by Veronica Franco**

My experiences as a Latinx, bilingual, first-generation cisgender woman have guided my commitment towards social justice, liberation, and guide how I engage in cultural humility, growth, and critical consciousness. I have learned to actively seek spaces outside of academia that center and uplift communities and work towards disrupting the status quo. As I approach the later part of my training, I find myself centered and grounded in my commitment towards social justice and the liberation of BIPOC individuals. Growing up as a second-generation daughter of immigrant parents from Mexico in a predominately low-income Latinx community, I witnessed the constant juxtaposition between survival and wellbeing. Often informed by the large disparities that exist among communities of color and the hostile social political climate; these direct experiences as a Latinx, particularly Mexican American, bilingual (Spanish and English), low-income woman has informed the ways in which I navigate academia and the lens through which I view healing, social justice, and advocacy.

Having received my Master of Counseling Psychology in a predominately White institution in the Midwest exacerbated feelings of otherness and not belonging. I often felt the pressure to “push through” feelings of not belonging and not being “smart enough” in order to meet milestones. The most difficult challenge as a trainee has been learning to navigate through a system that forces students to separate their personal experiences from their professional world, when they intersect at all aspects. As a graduate student, I constantly grapple with the disconnect I experience in training as if systematic racism and disproportion of access and resources are experiences faced by “other” communities that I do not belong to. The experience of learning of disparities, inequities, and discrimination that communities and diverse groups face as if us doctoral students were removed has only exacerbated feelings of not belonging and not being seen.

My pursuit of a graduate degree is a direct reminder of the constant juxtaposition my parents experienced between survival and wellbeing. Graduate school has symbolized that there is no time to attend to my own needs despite fatigue, sadness and anger, but rather that I must “push through.” However, as I progress in my professional and personal growth, I choose to disrupt the narrative of merely surviving by centering the importance of *mi bienestar, alegria, y conosimeinto* (my well-being, joy, and knowledge). I recognize that academia promotes values

that I personally do not agree with, and I am reminded of the commitment I have towards BIPOC liberation and the immense impact my social support and mentors have had on my own process towards liberation. Through my relationships, I have been able to build academic families that are fostered and fueled by values of liberation, love, community, collective care, and mentorship.

Am I Enough? by Adrian M. Valadez

Describing the complexities surrounding my intersectional identities is a feat that is not easily accomplished in a concise manner. My salient identities implicitly come with caveats whenever I speak about them. For example, it is not enough for me to acknowledge the fact that I am a third-generation Mexican American because it comes with disclaimer that my experiences are impacted by the fact that I am also half-White and phenotypically White. It is not enough to acknowledge my Queerness because it must also be paired with discussions about Questioning identities and my hesitation to come out in spaces other than academia. And while my identity as a cis-woman and the privileges associated with it are protective in some ways, I must also acknowledge the ways in which my status as a first-generation college student further isolates me in a system that was not built with communities like mine in mind.

Through my academic career, mentorship has proven to be vitally important in my retention and success. Receiving mentorship from various advisors who have shared some semblance of my experiences have helped to validate my nuanced identities and protect me from the imposter syndrome that I am so often ailed by. However, academia for a first-generation student is an alienating system. This isolation that I experience is further exacerbated by the fact that education, as much as it was an escape for me, is also the catalyst that has distanced me from my “roots.” As a result, there has always been contending views residing inside of me that I no longer belong to the places that I come from nor do I belong in the spaces in which I currently reside- an experience that is jarringly similar to feeling out of place as a biracial Queer woman.

I have often found myself attempting to navigate my place in academic via pure “brute force.” I have carried the mentality that if I “keep my head down” and work hard, good things will come to me. But this myth of meritocracy has not been sustainable. I have received food stamps and federal aid, applied for emergency grants in order to afford rent during the time of COVID-19, and have largely survived through the overextension of myself. While I hold a great deal of pride for my grit and resilience, I have to acknowledge that much of my ambition is fueled by the pressures to contribute to systems that are not reciprocating my investment and the internalized ideas that my productivity is reflective of my self-worth.

My experiences of alienation have largely fueled the ways that I choose to integrate social justice in the field of Counseling Psychology. My research interests related to LGBTQ+ mental health not only allow me to serve a community that I belong to, but also afford me the opportunity to engage with like-minded scholars who can relate to my “out of place” feelings. More importantly, I seek to enter a career in academia with the intention to mentor students who “look like me” in an effort to build a more inclusive and supportive field for the future Counseling psychologists.

Centering the Voices of Minoritized Students by Alison Cerezo

I am Counseling Psychologist, having earned my PhD in 2009. I am a mixed-race Latina with parents that were born in Guatemala and Puerto Rico. I identify as queer and as somewhere between non-binary and woman. I am the first and only person in my immediate family that has graduated from college. I was born and raised in an area of Los Angeles, CA with few economic and social opportunities for young people, meaning my older brothers went off to the army or straight into the workforce following high school. My identities and my lived experiences play a central role in my engagement with academic spaces. I see academia as a means to an end, an opportunity for social and economic mobility. As Counseling Psychology faculty, I approach my work as building opportunities for engagement in clinical work and research from a social justice stance, being able to address social and health disparities for communities that face historical, systemic barriers to their well-being.

Addressing health disparities is a driving force in all of my work, from discussions about systemic racism and oppression in research methods, clinical training and supervision, to the ways students are tasked with considering social and economic policies and/or movements in coursework. My commitment to health disparities is rooted in personal experience as a caregiver to my parents. When I was 18 years old, my father lost his eyesight and as a result, our family lost our home. Several years later, my mother also suffered major health crises. My parents' health issues, and the economic fallout as a result of those issues, have marked my entire adult life. I've come to learn that my family's health and economic challenges are not unique but rather reflect disparate rates of chronic health issues in Latinx and BIPOC communities. My family is part of a larger pattern of inequity in the U.S. where many BIPOC are employed in low-paying physically demanding jobs with few health resources. I make it a point to discuss intersectional experiences and needs with students, asking them to consider those community members that are hardly reached and thus hardly served. I teach that all interventions should start with those individuals in mind so that services rendered have the capacity to reach all members of the target community. In times of social unrest, teaching and training from a social justice orientation has meant that I use this very same principle—I first consider the needs of doctoral students who are hardly reached and hardly served and let that guide all of my work efforts. I have learned that students are well aware of their training needs. It is our job as faculty to listen and to modify our training objectives and processes accordingly.

Analysis of Author Reflections

We shared our narratives to call attention to our lived experiences as minoritized individuals in Counseling Psychology. For us students, graduate training has always occurred during intense social unrest targeting our home communities. However, we have experienced a disconnect in how training programs—and the larger Counseling Psychology field—consider and address our needs. As students with minoritized identities, feeling “othered” is not a new feeling. We experience imposter syndrome in moments when we are the only woman of color in a professional space, or when we offer a perspective that challenges dominant psychological discourse related to theory, research, or clinical approaches. Our collective sense of “otherness” underscores the importance of speaking out about our experiences, to name how chronic and persistent feelings of not belonging has direct implications on psychologist training and the ability to effectively serve our communities.

The Importance of Social Justice Driven Role Models and Mentors

Mentorship has played a critical role in helping us tune into our strengths, self-efficacy, and resilience during this time of heightened social unrest. We have been inspired by mentors who have used their positions of power to advocate for our training needs. This includes teaching us about areas that are integral to the well-being of minoritized groups, despite positioning themselves to be at risk for institutional backlash (Patel, 2015). These mentors create spaces in which students can feel free to voice their concerns safely and become empowered to take necessary action that will challenge the status quo. This has included mentors operationalizing steps toward achieving institutional change (e.g., how to advocate for departmental funding). These role models have demystified what it means to be committed to the field of Counseling Psychology and how students can themselves challenge training perspectives and practices that do not fully align with the values of our field (e.g., a lack of balance between individual-level work and systemic-level work). Indeed, we are grateful for the mentorship that has supported us and has been vital in our development and growth as future Counseling Psychologists. Yet, accessible mentorship from those who look like us and/or share similar cultural experiences is still something we long for and crave. As the current state of the nation continues to be blanketed by a hostile sociopolitical climate, we reflect on our stories and call for resources to equip us with the tools needed to sustainably serve minoritized communities and avoid burnout. Moreover, we observe that institutions must proactively lean in to hear about the experiences of individuals that have been historically underrepresented in and outside of Counseling Psychology and be open to suggestions for how to address the gaps in social justice training from these perspectives.

Recommendations for Counseling Psychology Training

In this next section we offer several recommendations for how training programs can better consider and address the impact of ongoing social unrest on Counseling Psychologist training.

Student Forums to Uplift Minoritized Voices

It is critical that training programs provide forums for students with minoritized identities to voice their experiences and needs, including, how they are directly impacted by discriminatory policies and/or actions. In our experience, many of our loved ones were personally threatened by anti-immigrant legislation; yet, these issues are treated as though they are outside of our personal experience. It is therefore critical that trainees have opportunities to discuss the complex challenge of developing a psychologist identity amidst sociopolitical unrest and that professors and clinical supervisors acknowledge the impact of these issues on our personal lives. Importantly, we argue that programs must not only seek to gather data about how to improve professional development for students with minoritized identities but that they also be transparent about they will seek to implement important changes. We suggest that programs seek a culture shift from a hierarchical decision-making process to more of a horizontal approach in which students are active members in program changes.

Strengths-based Mentorship

Our narratives highlight that professional identity development can be further supported interpersonally by professors in the field who are committed to student development and in investing in the next generation of social change agents. Specifically, our stories suggest that institutions ought to continue to capitalize on the implementation of using strengths-based guidance particularly when working with individuals from diverse backgrounds. In other words, counseling trainees, who may face unique stressors can benefit from additional support and encouragement given the unique stressors they might face (Wong, 2014). Role models and mentors can have a profound effect on students and contribute to their overall well-being and success. We recommend that programs consider how to connect students with mentoring opportunities inside and outside of their training programs to enhance community engagement and support of students. For instance, we encourage departments to build collaborative partnerships with existing programs within universities (e.g., diversity initiatives) to facilitate social support and community building.

Shifting Institutional Culture

To date, scholars have argued for an institutional change, a shift in White institutional values that are guided by notions of individualism, patriarchy, and defensiveness and operate by a top-down value system (Grzanka et al., 2019). We call for Counseling Psychology departments to assess their culture by considering whose values are the basis of operation via an analysis of who comprises leadership within the department, college and/or larger university. This includes productivity expectations during the Coronavirus pandemic. We have found that blanket statements of self-care versus specific changes in work demand and/or access to critical resources can lead students to feel undervalued and unprioritized. We suggest better recognition of students' increased experiences of fatigue, exhaustion, and burnout and invite departments to gather data about students' needs on an ongoing basis. Our hope is that these data will foster transparent community and decision making in the best interest of students' ever-changing training needs. Indeed, ongoing data gathering that seeks to understand Counseling Psychology trainees' experiences, and their relationship to social justice training, is critical for the advancement of our field.

Limitations

Our group was comprised of gender expansive women of color in Southern California. A more diverse sample (e.g., African American, transgender, Southern region of the U.S.) would have reflected different minoritized experiences in Counseling Psychology training not represented by our backgrounds. Moreover, our narratives are a snapshot of our perspectives at a specific time point in our training (third and fourth years) thus reflecting what we believe is missing in our training at this particular moment in our career trajectory. Students in their first or second year of doctoral studies might have different perspectives on what is needed to strengthen their training

as future Counseling Psychologists. Finally, utilizing an approach that inquired about our experiences and our professional identity development at different points in our training could have resulted in a more accurate picture of how our training experiences and needs changed over time and during different phases of social unrest.

Conclusion

Counseling Psychologist training amidst ongoing social unrest has brought to light the social, political, and economic challenges impacting our field, as well as opportunities to help students learn how to be responsive to ever-growing polarity in the U.S. We recommend that Counseling Psychology training programs be intentional about hearing the needs of minoritized students and implement suggested changes at the individual and institutional levels (i.e., forums followed by action, strengths-based mentoring) to ensure that training meets the needs of all students.

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