# Searching for Social Justice:
# Examining Counselor Educators' Training and Implementation

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## Abstract

Counselor educators in CACREP programs are mandated to include social justice in their training of counseling students. However, we contend counseling preparation programs have failed to adequately train counseling professionals to understand and implement social justice frameworks. Using an exploratory mixed methods design, we investigated counselor educators' educational and training background in social justice concepts as well as their teaching experiences infusing social justice throughout their Master's level CACREP core curriculum. Strategies counselor educators use to seek knowledge about and incorporate social justice in their praxis are presented. Furthermore, we studied the relationship between counselor educators' racial identity and their practice of implementing social justice frameworks into their teaching.

*Keywords: counselor education, social justice, racial identity, training and development*

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The underrepresentation of individuals of color at all levels of counseling programs (faculty, students, counselors, and clients) (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2018; Hammett-Webb, 2015; Hannon et al., 2023) and the minimal training students receive in working effectively and competently with diverse client populations limits both traditional and social learning around effectively understanding and engaging with diverse populations. Thus, 58.1% of students who complete counseling programs are white (CACREP, 2022), and likely lack the cultural competence and skills to serve underrepresented populations (Counselors for Social Justice, 2020). Furthermore, most programs consolidate the core required foundational knowledge focused on social and cultural diversity into a single class (Donald & Moro, 2014; Dong et al., 2015; Pieterse et al., 2009).

We argue that the current education and training process continues to produce underprepared counselors and counselor educators alike. This lack of training is exacerbated in doctoral programs, as training around incorporating concepts of multiculturalism, social justice, and anti-racism in teaching is either minimal or non-existent. Thus, new faculty entering the field are ill-prepared to teach these concepts in their assigned courses and address social justice related issues as they arise in class. Although faculty of color only make up about 26% of counseling faculty (CACREP, 2022), they are often charged with teaching sociocultural and social justice courses due to their white counterparts feeling ill-equipped to attend to this content in class (Ahluwalia et al., 2019). This may result in professional and personal challenges for faculty of color due to the inherited responsibilities as a gatekeeper and facilitator given the importance and intensity of the subject matter (Ferguson et al., 2023). The additional labor faculty of color endure as opposed to white faculty often results in racial battle fatigue and burnout (Taylor & Trevino, 2022). Additional challenges include having to contend with students who may lack receptivity to topics related to social justice.

Students of majority identities may be resistant to the necessary introspective and experiential activities that bolster knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness for counselors in training in a sociocultural and social justice course (Medvide, 2022; Seward, 2014; Torino, 2019). This resistance may be linked to the lack of incorporation of multicultural and social justice components into other graduate courses in counseling programs. It is our stance that despite only one course being accepted by CACREP, sociocultural and social justice should be at the foundation of all counseling programs and be intentionally incorporated throughout the curriculum. Although the multicultural social justice counseling competencies (MSJCC) highlights the necessity for integration, there remains a dearth of knowledge about how faculty are incorporating these concepts into their curriculum (Ratts et al., 2016; Taylor & Trevino, 2022). As such, the purpose of this study was to understand the extent counselor education faculty implement multicultural and social justice competencies across the Master's level CACREP core curriculum and to identify strategies they use to do so. Additionally, we sought to understand if racial identity influenced counselor educators' incorporation of social justice competencies into their courses.

## Literature Review

Since its inception, counseling has always included an advocacy component; from supporting immigrants in obtaining employment in the early 20th century to more recently naming social justice as the fifth force driving the profession (Hannon et al., 2023; Lee & Gomez, 2011). Despite this, the counseling profession continues to lag in its ability to prepare and produce counselor educators and counselors who can define, apply, and integrate social justice in their work as educators and clinicians (Dong et al., 2015; Singh et al., 2020). This lack of social justice integration and training persists in counseling and psychology programs alike (Taylor & Trevino, 2022). Vera and Speight (2003) fervently called on the profession to move beyond multiculturalism and abandon models that are insufficient in addressing oppression. They further argued for a social justice framework that included

critical thinking, critical consciousness, and a commitment to praxis that leads to social change not only for our clients, but within every area of the profession (i.e., teaching, research, and counseling). Unfortunately, counselors and students in counseling and counseling psychology programs largely remain unable to delineate the difference between multiculturalism and social justice or describe social justice advocacy as it relates to their roles (Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011; Taylor & Trevino, 2022). Even when counselor educators and counseling professionals can articulate social justice advocacy, many lack confidence, competence, or even motivation to engage in this work (Donald & Moro, 2014; Lee & Gomez, 2011; Taylor & Trevino, 2022). Below we discuss social justice across the Master's level counseling curriculum based on the limited literature available.

**Social Justice and Counseling Curriculum**

Within the CACREP accreditation *Social and Cultural Diversity* Master's level standard, the following content areas are specifically mentioned as necessary knowledge for students: 1) theories and models of multicultural counseling, cultural identity development, and social justice and advocacy, 2) the effects of power and privilege for counselors and clients, and 3) strategies for identifying and eliminating barriers, prejudices, and processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination (CACREP, 2016). As such, social justice is fundamental to a CACREP accredited Master's counseling program curriculum and a foundational component to being a counselor (Pieterse et al., 2009). Yet, the majority of CACREP accredited Master's level counseling programs continue to use one course to address all components of multicultural counseling, which is supposed to include concepts such as social justice, advocacy, power, privilege, and oppression (Donald & Moro, 2014; Dong et al., 2015; Pieterse et al., 2009). Despite a clear edict to incorporate social justice into the counseling curriculum, little literature exists detailing how to do so. Furthermore, the limited attention to social justice across the counseling curriculum has resulted in minimal research designed to explore its implementation (Chapman-Hilliard & Parker, 2022).

In their review of 54 syllabi focused on multicultural and diversity related topics, Pieterse et al. (2009) found that only seven syllabi included ways to enact social justice advocacy. Given that most programs have continued the practice of using one core course (e.g., Multicultural Counseling) to meet the CACREP standard, it is unsurprising that social justice is frequently omitted or addressed as a footnote. Furthermore, confusion around distinguishing multiculturalism from social justice has resulted in a focus on cultural competence as the goal instead of a foundation in preparation for social justice advocacy. In fact, authorities on cultural competence have asserted that, without attending to dynamics of power and oppression, cultural competence is ineffective in disrupting racism and other forms of oppression (Chapman-Hilliard & Parker, 2022; Sue & Sue, 2016). Moreover, counselors and counselor educators are unclear about ways to translate social justice advocacy from theory to practice (Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011; Wilcox, Shaffer, Reid Marks, Hutchison, & Hargons, 2023), and consequently are unable to teach emerging counselors how to do so.

Although the one course model is the existing standard across programs, several scholars have argued that social justice should be integrated throughout the Master's level counseling curriculum (see Donald & Moro, 2014; Medvide, 2022; Motulsky et al., 2014; Singh et al., 2010; Taylor & Trevino, 2022) as it supports students developmentally in integrating social justice into their professional identity and allows multiple opportunities to engage in advocacy at the micro and macro level. Additionally, counseling students desire a real commitment from programs to infuse social justice throughout their programs in action and not solely in words (Donald & Moro, 2014; Singh et al., 2010; Taylor & Trevino, 2022). While some programs have been able to integrate social justice concepts throughout their entire curriculum (Paisley et al., 2010), it is likely pivotal to consider the intentional implementation of the MSJCC (Ratts et al., 2016) in how counselor educators curate course curriculum and cultivate social justice practices within CACREP-accredited Master's level counseling programs. The multicultural and social justice praxis offers insight to providing culturally responsive counseling from counselor to client and

may be applicable in helping counselor educators deliver a culturally enhanced curriculum across the counseling program (Ratts et al., 2016).

**The Impact of Whiteness on Incorporating Social Justice**

Given the deep roots of white supremacy in the counseling field (Counselors for Social Justice, 2020; Hannon et al., 2023) we must acknowledge how the culture of whiteness continues to influence the profession (Counselors for Social Justice, 2020: Shure et al., 2023). Since social justice has a focus on eliminating oppression of all forms (Pieterse et al., 2009), it is often viewed as an issue affecting minoritized groups. As such, faculty of color are frequently called upon to teach these concepts and respond to issues of oppression within and outside of the classroom (Ferguson et al., 2023; Taylor & Trevino, 2022). This exacerbates the racial trauma that faculty of color experience, especially in historically white spaces (Ferguson et al., 2023; Taylor & Trevino, 2022).

Therefore, it is important that all faculty, including white faculty, teach the designated multicultural course and infuse social justice frameworks throughout the curriculum. For faculty to effectively address issues of power and oppression in their courses, it is essential they have engaged in the necessary self-reflection and embodied work to situate themselves appropriately within the conversation (Chapman-Hilliard & Parker, 2022). As such, an examination of their racial identity development would seem necessary to help faculty examine their approach, understand their privileged and oppressed identities, and reconcile how their identity development informs their pedagogical practices (Helms, 1995).

In this research study, we sought to understand the extent counselor education faculty implement multicultural and social justice competencies across the Master's level CACREP core curriculum and identify strategies they use to do so. We also aimed to understand if racial identity impacted the extent to which counselor educators incorporated social justice competencies into their courses. Therefore, the guiding research questions for this study were: 1) what are the experiences of counselor education faculty with implementing multicultural and social justice competencies across the Master's level CACREP core curriculum, and 2) is there a relationship between counselor educators' racial identity development and their implementation of multicultural and social justice competencies across the Master's level CACREP core curriculum?

## Methodology

To answer the research questions, we employed an exploratory mixed methods approach (Sherperis et al., 2023). That is, our primary approach to data collection was through qualitative research methods. However, we also incorporated quantitative methods to supplement the qualitative findings.

**Participants and Procedures**

Following IRB approval, purposeful and criterion-based participant sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) were utilized to collect data. The inclusion criteria for this study were 1) identify as a faculty member and 2) have taught at least one course as instructor of record in a CACREP accredited counseling program. The recruitment flyer was shared via listservs with a high probability of reaching counselor educators (i.e., CESNET, and membership lists from divisions of the American Counseling Association, such as Counselors for Social Justice). The recruitment flyer highlighted the need for participation from counselor educators teaching in CACREP accredited programs and directed potential participants to a REDCap survey that included in the following order screening methods, a demographic survey, both the author-created MSJCC survey and the Cross Ethnic-Racial Identity Scale-Adult (CERIS-A), and a request to participate in the qualitative interview. All participants who completed the REDCap survey were placed into a drawing to win a $25 gift card (five gift cards were awarded). Additionally, all participants who completed the interviews were awarded a $20 gift card.

A total of 50 people interacted with the REDCap survey. However, only 35 people completed the survey in its entirety and were included in the quantitative analysis ($n = 35$). Demographics of the sample were skewed across multiple identities, including being 71% female identified, 62% White identified, and little to no representation of

transgender and gender nonconforming persons or persons identifying as Middle Eastern or Native American, Pacific Islander, or Native Alaskan. Additionally, 71% of the survey participants identified as being 35 years of age or older ($M$ = 44; range = 49), all acquired graduate degrees, and just under 60% of participants were equally represented from the Mid East and Southeast regions of the United States (as defined within the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System [n.d.]). Twenty-two participants expressed interest in engaging in the qualitative interview and eleven interviews were conducted. Interviewee demographics are presented in Table 1.

### Table 1. Interviewee Demographic Information

| Pseudonym | Racial | Rank | Years Teaching | Gender | Education Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adrian | Black | Adjunct | 2 years | Male | Doctoral Degree |
| Alyssa | White | Core Faculty | 2 years | Female | Doctoral Degree |
| Bluebird | White | Full Professor | 30 years | Female | Doctoral Degree |
| Casey | White | Assistant Professor | 2 years | Female | Doctoral Degree |
| Fatima | South Asian | Assistant Professor | 3 years | Female | Doctoral Degree |
| Fernando | White | Associate Professor | 9 years | Male | Doctoral Degree |
| Henry | Black | Assistant Professor | 3 years | Male | Doctoral Degree |
| Jenny | White | Associate Professor | 8 years | Female | Doctoral Degree |
| Kady | Asian-American/White | Full Professor | 21 years | Female | Doctoral Degree |
| Laurel | White | Associate Professor | 10 years | Female | Doctoral Degree |
| Buckshot | Black | Associate Professor | 9 years | Male | Doctoral Degree |

**Qualitative Methods**

To increase our understanding of how counselor educators implement the MSJCCs within their teaching, we utilized a phenomenological (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) framework to gather and analyze the data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the authors of this article, who all have extensive knowledge and doctoral-level training in qualitative research. Additionally, the interviewers debriefed with all members of the research team to discuss reactions to and responses within the interviews to attend to potential bias. For example, one bias held by all researchers was that participants would have received minimal to no training regarding incorporating social justice praxis into curriculum. Although this assumption was supported by prior research, it was important to acknowledge and attend to this bias to ensure we were open to all potential outcomes. Our coding process allowed us to engage in reflexive processes while interpreting, organizing, and structuring data in a systematic manner to accurately represent the voices of participants as a collective.

The interview protocol consisted of nine overarching questions and multiple prompts to encourage participants' deep reflection on their education and training in teaching multicultural and social justice practices in counseling, as well as their experiences incorporating the MSJCCs into their teaching. Interviews lasted between 40-82 minutes and were recorded via Zoom and uploaded into a password protected database. Interviews were initially transcribed using OtterAi, and then a graduate research assistant reviewed the transcripts and edited them for accuracy. The nine interview questions were: 1) In your own words, can you describe the counseling department at your institution? 2) Tell us about your teaching experience as a counselor educator? 3) How have your racial and ethnic identities informed your lens as a counselor educator? 4) How much training did you receive on incorporating multiculturalism and social justice into your teaching? 5) How did/do you manage

difficult conversation(s) about culture and social justice in the classroom? 6) How has your institution, if at all, supported you in incorporating multicultural and social justice competencies in your curricula? 7) How do you, if at all, assess learning outcomes following the incorporation of difficult conversations in the classroom? 8) Is there anything else you would like to add that you think would contribute to this study? and 9) Can you provide us with a pseudonym for this interview should your words be used in a future publication?

## Quantitative Methods

To further examine the extent counselor education faculty members implemented multicultural and social justice competencies across the Master's level CACREP core curriculum and to examine the potential role of racial identity therein, we utilized two self-report questionnaires. The first questionnaire was created by the authors to collect data on participants' self-reported implementation of the MSJCC within their curriculum. The author-created questionnaire included a section for the collection of basic demographic information (7 questions) followed by 18 questions focused on participants' familiarity with and utilization of the MSJCC. Questions focused on participants' use of the MSJCC included specific probes regarding their incorporation of the four developmental domains (i.e., counselor self-awareness, client worldview, counseling relationship, and counseling and advocacy interventions) and embedded aspirational competencies (i.e., attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills, and action); all questions pertaining to the MSJCC were accompanied by a 7-point Likert scale (i.e., strongly disagree to strongly agree).

The second self-report questionnaire that was administered was The Cross Ethnic-Racial Identity Scale-Adult (CERIS-A; Worrell et al., 2019). The CERIS-A is a 29-item assessment that measures ethnic and racial identity across seven subscales of different attitudes including *assimilation*, *miseducation*, *self-hatred*, *anti-dominant*, *ethnocentricity*, *multiculturalist inclusive*, and *ethnic-racial salience*. *Assimilation* refers to the extent to which individuals adopt a nationalist identity over an ethno-nationalist identity (i.e., American instead of African American). *Miseducation* captures the level of stereotype endorsement individuals have about their own racial/ethnic group. The subscale *self-hatred* reflects the level of dislike individuals have toward their own racial/ethnic group, while the *anti-dominant* subscale captures the extent to which individuals dislike the dominant group in society. *Ethnocentricity* refers to the degree to which individuals feel their ethno-racial values should inform their lives. The *multiculturalist inclusive* subscale measures both the level of connection individuals have toward their own racial/ethnic group and their willingness to engage with and value the perspectives of other cultural groups. Finally, *ethnic-racial* salience measures the importance of individuals' race/ethnicity to their self-concept (Worrell et al., 2019). Each subscale is comprised of 4 items measured on a 7-point Likert scale (i.e., strongly disagree to strongly agree) and one item of the CERIS-A is not used in deriving subscale scores. Scores on each subscale range from 1-7 and are derived by summing the four items and calculating the mean. The final CERIS-A items were developed based on the expanded Nigresence model (Cross & Vandiver, 2001) and the Cross Racial Identity Scale (Worrell, Vandiver, Cross, & Fhagen-Smith, 2004). Results of a confirmatory factor analysis with the robust weighted least squares means and variances adjusted estimator (WLSMV) demonstrated structural validity for the final CERIS-A item pool. Internal consistency (α) for all subscales is acceptable ranging from .79-.89 (Worrell et al., 2019).

## Data Analysis

Following data collection, qualitative and quantitative data analysis occurred. For the qualitative portion of our study, we engaged in an inductive coding process in which we developed our codes from the data (Saldaña, 2021). Initial coding was conducted by the lead researcher and a graduate research assistant with prior training in data collection and analysis. The lead researcher reviewed coding procedures with the graduate assistant before analysis began in a two-hour research team meeting. The lead researcher and research assistant completed the first round of coding via open coding, in which excerpts were highlighted throughout each transcript followed by discussions to ascertain alignment among the codes (Saldaña, 2021). Discrepancies that occurred were largely

around language given the research assistant and lead researcher were trained in different disciplines. However, discussions occurred to ensure the resulting themes reflected both the lead researcher's and research assistant's interpretations of the data. Additionally, some codes seemed redundant, thus discussions around delineating codes occurred. Only one inconsistency required further discussion and was presented to the larger group for discussion and consensus. After the first round of coding, we engaged in structural coding in which we grouped various responses under one heading (Saldaña, 2021). Those codes were reviewed by the third author of this article for feedback. After this, all the researchers met to discuss the codes and finalize the codebook. Our third round of coding was focused coding, using the codebook, in which final themes were decided along with the descriptions of the themes (Saldaña, 2021). This was a consultative process, as themes were developed together to ensure the data was captured accurately. The second author served as the auditor of the proposed final themes and, thereafter, we presented our final themes to the entire research team. During this meeting, the results were discussed and ultimately agreed upon. In this final meeting, no issues arose, however, discussion occurred to provide clarification. The inclusion of four unique rounds of coding was intentional to address biases and inconsistencies, and bolster the integrity, trustworthiness, and validity of our findings.

The first stage of quantitative analysis included assessing correlations across the demographic data (i.e., racial identity, age, and sex/gender) with the developmental domains and aspirational competencies of the MSJCC, and the attitudes of the CERIS-A. As an exploratory mixed methods study, the quantitative data was primarily used to supplement the qualitative data (Sherperis et al., 2023). Additionally, the sample size was not sufficient for statistical power, limiting the utility of the quantitative results in the absence of the qualitative results. The second stage of quantitative analysis occurred in conjunction with the qualitative data. That is, the resulting significant correlations were viewed through the lens of the qualitative findings to contribute additional potential meaning to the thematic analysis.

## Results

Through the qualitative analyses described above, four major themes were identified: *Normalization of academic racism, searching for social justice, risk-free advocacy, and making room for social justice. Normalization of academic racism* refers to the white values espoused in the professional identity of counselors (notions of objectivity, counselor as tabula rasa, etc.); theorists deified as canons in the curriculum, and the perpetuation of white ideas of wellness and student, counselor, counselor educator, and client behavior. For example, when asked, "*how has your institution supported you in incorporating the multicultural and social justice competencies into the curriculum?* Adrian, responded,

> "They haven't done a damn thing to support me, the institution itself. The specific program has certainly done things to support, such as, offering some opportunity for me to be paid to do, like, racial trauma education, kind of work. But the institution itself has been a very large obstruction, where, like, a certain person with a lot of power, and someone who could create a lot of fear, like, actively inhibited two sort of social justice initiatives that I was involved with and that I would've involved students in and would have been helping lead faculty members in as well."

When discussing accountability, another participant, Bluebird, stated,

> "I have chaired a committee where we rewrote discipline code for the university with varying degrees of success. One of the issues was accountability. Um, and unfortunately that accountability is the system protects tenured people in spite of evidence that they are acting in ways that are abusive and racist. Um, but the system does not hold faculty accountable for the way they treat students. I'll leave it at that."

Several participants mentioned CACREP standards, and ways it impacted their program's ability to incorporate social justice into their curriculum. Fatima, when describing her department reported,

"it's very hierarchical, um, and somewhat archaic terms of, it's a counseling department that's existed for a long time. Um, I believe since the 80's? And I believe that they've had CACREP accreditation for that entire time. And, therefore, I think there's kind of an unwillingness to adapt and change um, as, as is needed by the current, you know, climate and also the students' interest."

In sharing her philosophical stance around social justice, Bluebird revealed,

"And one of the most important things about that needs to be understanding decolonizing our educational system, K through doctorate all the way. And so, you know, I believe that that's what we are morally, ethically, spiritually, and always, we are called to do that work, to do that social justice work, and we have not as a profession, we have not done that. We have not lived that path. We bought into accreditation that compresses creativity that defines white norms as the very, very narrow box in which we must operate."

## Searching for Social Justice

This theme refers to counselor educators having to look for knowledge around social justice and advocacy on their own because they received minimal to no training regarding incorporating these concepts into their teaching practices. Participants repeatedly claimed their training around incorporating multicultural and social justice frameworks and concepts was virtually non-existent, aside from discussions which occurred solely in their one required multicultural course. Thus, as they entered the field, they had to seek out information on their own. For example, Alyssa stated,

I think a lot of it has been, I have to seek that out, and it's there. It's available in our profession mostly as like CEs or, you know, conversations, um, with folks but mostly I've found that you kind of have to seek it out. So, you have to be self-motivated to really get to the place where I think counselor educators need to be to be successful.

Buckshot echoed this sentiment saying,

Because of things like systemic values that may be oppressive to people who aren't in the majority, um we have to take it upon ourselves to seek the additional training to seek the additional learning opportunities by way of professional development that will feed our curiosities, our clinical curiosities our research curiosities. Because we cannot rely on our programs to do all of it …We have to be committed to pushing ourselves while in our programs, after our programs for our own professional development for our own clock hours to be like, I'm going to learn about this, I'm going to engage in this, um so that, I can be in position to be the right kind of help for my clients, to be the right kind of help for students in the classroom.

Although the majority of participants shared they were not prepared to effectively and competently engage students in discussions around multicultural and social justice concepts, a few participants discussed the benefit of having professors in their doctoral programs who were well-versed in this topic, and how it shaped their ability and confidence to address culture in their courses. Laurel shared,

So, I would say in my Master's program, I had the very basic, you know, multicultural counseling course. But what happened was, I had Dr. Cirecie West-Olatunji as my professor, and she really opened my eyes to a lot of things. I mean I was pretty unaware of institutional systemic racism at that point... So, I went back to (named university), and I got my PhD with her, and I would say she was really the crux of my training.

Regardless of preparation, each participant acknowledged the importance and necessity of incorporating multicultural and social justice competencies into their curriculum. Furthermore, instead of giving into the status

quo, they reported seeking out sources and support to ensure they were able to competently incorporate content into their teaching and engage with students.

**Risk-Free Advocacy**

This theme refers to counselor educators picking and choosing when to advocate or speak up based on potential consequences. Participants discussed avoiding advocacy efforts that came with a cost such as low course evaluations, isolation from fellow faculty, or being seen as incompetent by students. Considering the MSJCC and the quadrants that focus on the privileged counselor and the marginalized counselor, it became evident that counselor educators' social positioning impacted the level of advocacy in which they were willing to engage. This positioning included their race, gender, faculty rank, and length of time at the institution. Participants openly revealed they may shy away from opportunities to engage in advocacy if they felt the costs were too high. However, several participants reported that once they had more power, they were more likely to engage in advocacy. For example, Bluebird stated,

> For the first part of my professional life as a counselor educator was, you know, seeking tenure, which brought out all the people-pleasing and conforming parts of my identity. And so, it wasn't until I, you know attained tenure that I developed a little more of a spine relative to standing up for issues that needed to be stood up for.

Henry, who shared he garnered a reputation over time for consistently advocating claimed,

> I have to acknowledge that sometimes that means that people have already anticipated that I'm going to come in with a particular agenda. And, for the most part, they right. I'm going to usually tell somebody about this. It will be very gentle, and it will be loving, and it will be kind. Um, but I will correct you when you say things that are very racist and very wrong. Um, and I think that has not always been the case for me. I've not always had that voice.

Though positioning played a role in the level of advocacy participants engaged in, there was a developmental component as well. Seemingly, as counselor educators' professional identity grows and they acquire more knowledge and experience, they may feel more able to competently engage in advocacy.

**Making Room for Social Justice**

This theme refers to the ways in which counselor educators use class assignments, discussions, textbooks, and co-curricular activities to foster awareness and engage in advocacy work. This theme also acknowledges that social justice is seen as an add-on and not integral or core to the curriculum. Participants provided insight into ways in which they made room for social justice through assignments and across the program. Adrian shared,

> I would be very intentional about using current literature in class and require readings around current hot topics, particularly race-based trauma, police violence, looking at AAPI hate, things like that. More recently bringing in sort of Roe v Wade with the potential of that being overturned, and really things like that that I feel like sometimes get called social justice issues, and they're thought of as separate from mental health.

For Adrian, it was important to make room in his courses for social justice by being intentional around the required readings and incorporating current social issues into his teaching. Furthermore, he highlighted the importance of connecting social justice issues to mental health, and not seeing them as separate.

As stated in the literature review presented earlier, some counseling programs infuse multicultural and social justice competencies throughout their curriculum. In fact, Alyssa highlighted her program's commitment to integrating social justice throughout their program by making it a core area and ensuring assignments include social justice concepts. She reported,

We have program learning outcomes in the eight core areas but we also have a ninth social justice program learning outcome that we try to make sure that we hit that in all of our classes as well. Um, and so, most of our assignments feature some component of either, uh, directly addressing that and that the assignment is more or less structured around looking at diverse populations around how would you correct this forming a plan, um, an actual intervention plan to address it.

Although Laurel ensured CACREP standards were met, to make room for social justice she chose to modify some of the classroom assignments. She claimed,

I still end up using a lot of the CACREP standards. And what I've done is I've modified a lot of the required assignments, um, which are attached to our, you know, the standards that we're assessing our key performance indicators, you know, all that good stuff. I've modified a lot of those assignments, to be service-learning assignments.

As stated above, participants did not receive adequate training on infusing social justice into their teaching and therefore, had to seek information and training on their own through professional development opportunities, mentorship, or other resources (i.e., readings, videos, etc.). Yet, this perpetual absence of social justice within educational programs did not deter participants from making sure it was included. Whether on their own accord or by their counseling program's design, participants made concerted efforts to integrate social justice concepts across various courses.

## Exploratory Mixed Methods Analysis

Turning to the results of the quantitative analyses, multiple significant correlations were discovered, each of which potentially enriches the qualitative results. Foremost, racial identity was found to be correlated with multiple attitudes assessed by the CERIS-A. Specifically, lower scores on the CERIS-A attitudes of Assimilation ($r = -.41$, $p < .05$) and Self-Hatred ($r = -.39$, $p < .05$) were correlated with identifying as a person of color. Thus, participants of color were more likely to identify with their ethnonational (e.g., African American) identity than their national (e.g., American) identity and less likely to dislike their own ethno-racial group (Worrell, Mendoza-Denton, & Wang, 2019). Thus, faculty of color may implicitly connect with the value of multicultural and social justice education, as their rejection of a Eurocentric identity and racial/ethnic stereotypes are both central to their teaching. Lastly, the CERIS-A attitude of Ethnic-Racial Salience was positively correlated with self-reports on incorporating the MSJCC aspirational competency of Knowledge ($r = .334$, $p < .05$) within their pedagogy. Thus, participants who viewed race as important to their self-concept were more likely to report teaching components of knowledge to increase awareness of their own identities and the role of power, privilege, and bias within the counseling context (Ratts et al., 2016; Worrell et al., 2019).

## Discussion

In this study we sought out counselor educators who intentionally implement multicultural social justice competencies into their Master's level curriculum. Although CACREP includes these competencies in their standards, there is no standardized set of pedagogical methods to guide the facilitation of students' preparedness to engage in social justice advocacy. In addition to understanding how faculty integrate social justice into the curriculum, we explored the impact racial identity may or may not have on their willingness, ability, and practice of doing so.

Our findings reiterate the gap in the literature regarding foundational knowledge and standardization around effectively teaching multicultural social justice competencies in Master's level counselor preparation programs (Chapman-Hilliard & Parker, 2022; Wilcox et al., 2023). The *normalization of academic racism* theme further highlighted the intersection between white supremacy, academia, and counselor education (Ferguson et

al., 2023; Hannon et al., 2023). That is, participants shared how the existing culture of academia is grounded in historical values that prioritize whiteness and discourage inclusion and effective social justice pedagogy. The themes *searching for social justice, risk-free advocacy, and making room for social justice* helped to explain the current obstacles that counselor educators who are devoted to this work face. Specifically, there is not enough attention or action in counseling programs to ensure the preparedness of educators and students alike (Chapman Hilliard & Parker, 2022; Dong et al., 2015; Singh et al., 2020; Taylor & Trevino, 2022). Additionally, those who are intentional about this work, consequently, forge their own paths in building their competency in teaching this material secondary to social justice pedagogy not being prioritized within the counseling curriculum (Chapman Hilliard & Parker, 2022). Lastly, prioritizing social justice at the core of counselor identity and education requires risk because it goes against the status quo of the profession (Hannon et al., 2023, Ferguson et al., 2023).

Embedding social justice and advocacy in the counseling profession throughout all its components (clinical practice, teaching, supervising, etc.) requires the profession to look inward (Donald & Moro, 2014; Medvide, 2022; Motulsky et al., 2014; Pieterse, 2009; Singh et al., 2010; Vera & Speight, 2003). Similarly, the *making room for social justice* theme captured participants beliefs about the importance of intentionality when incorporating social justice work in counseling pedagogy. Just as we argue that counselor educators must do internal work to effectively train students to become change agents in our society, the counseling profession must look inward to challenge and restructure the ways it perpetually limits actual change and progress. This includes interrogating the very foundation of our theories and their lack of a multicultural and social justice lens and being willing to eliminate certain theories in favor of frameworks that more effectively serve our clients (Hannon et al., 2023; Singh et al., 2010; Wilcox et al., 2023). Searching for social justice is both an actionable and a philosophical stance. This is operationalized in the efforts we make to infuse social justice literature in the materials we teach, the way we conceptualize our clients' cases, and the treatment strategies we employ. It is a state of being, not an afterthought, and must be embodied in everything we do (Taylor & Trevino, 2022). If as counselors the work we do is in dismantling and eradicating systems that are detrimental to our clients' wellbeing, then part of our work as counselors must be a constant search for those areas of inequities and social injustices. Thus, searching for social justice serves as an action-oriented engagement for counselor educators to bolster their knowledge around social justice issues, and a call to the profession to infuse social justice throughout their praxis. This is necessary in advancing the goal of social justice as counselor educators who have received social justice training have reported self-efficacy around incorporating social justice in their professional and personal lives (Taylor & Trevino, 2022).

Lastly, the quantitative findings revealed the connection between one's ethno-racial identity and the desire or likelihood to incorporate social justice and multiculturalism in one's teaching. Individuals with a strong sense of their ethno-racial identity had a stronger inclination to engage in multicultural and social justice practices. This underscores the significance of racial identity development (Helms, 1995) and the incorporation of multiculturalism throughout one's pedagogy. Counseling programs that are committed to training a new generation of counselors who are social justice and multiculturally oriented may do well to consider these findings.

**Implications for Future Research**

This study lays the foundation for more in-depth work in examining the multicultural and social justice practices of counselor educators and the degree to which they feel competent in teaching social justice advocacy in doing said work in their own practice. Using an exploratory mixed methods approach, the quantitative results were explored solely in conjunction with the qualitative data (Sheperis et al., 2023). Gathering more comprehensive data may highlight additional trends in who is (or is not) teaching the principles of the MSJCC in counselor education. Further, deeper exploration of other identities may illuminate important findings. To this point, while this study focused primarily on race, the authors uncovered correlations between gender identification and age with multiple CERIS-A attitudes. Therefore, just as racial/ethnic status may relate to the practice of implementing the MSJCC into teaching, age and gender identification also may impact one's ability to integrate multicultural and

social justice pedagogical practices. Moreover, we encourage the replication of this study with a larger sample size that could enhance the reliability and validity of the current results.

Additionally, participants in this study echoed barriers to social justice implementation that were noted in the literature. For example, lack of institutional and program support, inadequate training, fear of consequences, and lack of efficacy remain obstacles to infusing social justice in counseling programs (Taylor & Trevino, 2022). As such, we encourage researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies institutions and programs implement to support the advancement of social justice and support faculty engaged in this work. One way to do this is to duplicate the work of Pieterse and colleagues (2009), examining syllabi across counseling programs to understand what, if any advancements have been made regarding counselor educators enacting social justice advocacy in their courses. This is important to understand our areas of growth and deficits as a profession.

**Limitations**

Though the findings of this study are valuable, there are limitations. Foremost, the samples for both the qualitative and quantitative portions of this study were predominantly white (i.e., 55% interviewees and 63% of survey participants). While this racial skew may be roughly aligned with the profession of counselor education, the data lacked voices of people of color overall and especially specific races/ethnicities. Additionally, as with all qualitative research, the authors and readers should exercise restraint in generalizing the results presented herein. The qualitative findings highlight the depth of some counselor educators' experiences in teaching multicultural and social justice competencies in their coursework. Although connections can be drawn between our findings and the experiences of counseling professionals across the spectrum, these results should be utilized to foster further research and not interpreted as representative of the entire profession. Further, the themes extracted were solely developed by the researchers based on the data, without participant feedback. However, given the four rounds of coding in which we engaged, we feel strongly we captured participant narratives accurately. Another limitation is that we chose to specifically focus on counselor educators engaged in social justice implementation. Thus, the voices of counselor educators who do not engage in this work were absent. It may be useful to investigate these voices to understand the obstacles, barriers, or intentional practices that impede social justice praxis.

The quantitative findings were partially conducted via an unpiloted survey that has not yet been tested for reliability or validity. While the tenets of the MSJCC are endorsed by the American Counseling Association and all the MSJCC developmental domains and aspirational competencies were shown to be strongly, positively correlated with each other, with coefficients ranging between .65 to .90 ($p < .01$), the lack of reliability and validity for the survey that was employed must still be considered. Lastly, it should be acknowledged that this study was developed, and data were collected prior to the release and implementation of the 2024 CACREP Master's level standards. While the 2024 CACREP standards increased the inclusion of terms such as social justice and advocacy, it remains unclear whether substantive programmatic change in Master's level counselor training will develop. Further, we are hopeful the current research supplements the increased focus on social justice in the standards by identifying barriers and strategies currently experienced by counselor educators. Despite these limitations, this study offers an informative and initial look at how counselor educators incorporate the MSJCC into their pedagogy, provides unique insights into their experiences, and highlights the need for additional research on the counselor education profession.

## Conclusion

Social justice is a foundational component to the education of counseling students (CACREP, 2016), core to the professional identity of counselors (American Counseling Association, 2014), and necessary in ensuring the dismantling of oppressive forces in clients' lives (Chapman-Hilliard & Parker, 2022; Killian & Floren, 2019; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). As such, we must prepare all practitioners and educators in our profession to understand and integrate social justice into their work. Continuing to accept one course as the standard in educational programs,

limits the amount of time educators dedicate to the topic, and continues to silo social justice as adjunctive instead of core (Killian & Floren, 2019; Taylor & Trevino, 2022). Moreover, given the lack of adequate training in this area, counselor educators at the margins continue to be forced to lead the way solely based on their lived experience. If social justice is core to our professional identity, our commitment through action, and not just words, must be evident (Taylor & Trevino, 2022). Elevating our standards to integrate social justice throughout our counseling programs will then demand adequate training of counselors and counselor educators alike, removing the need to have to search for justice, and demonstrating that social justice is not an exception, but the rule.

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