

Disruptive Social Justice Curriculum: How it looks in the Classroom, the Research Lab and in Clinical Training.

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NCSPP Handout

The APA's 2017 multicultural guidelines present a new and exciting epistemological shift in multicultural training and practice in the field of psychology. While multicultural competence has historically focused on the accumulation of knowledge, awareness, and skills about diverse groups (Benuto, 2018; Singh et al. 2010), the publication of Guideline 5 introduces a social justice perspective. Guideline 5 states "psychologists aspire to recognize and understand historical and contemporary experiences with power, privilege, and oppression" (American Psychological Association, 2017, p. 4).

Although there are challenges in defining social justice (Thrift & Sugarman, 2018), scholars have described social justice within psychology to involve advocacy (Motulsky et al., 2014) and "recognition of the impact of unearned privilege and discriminatory oppression on clients' mental health" (Singh et al., 2010, p. 767; Pieterse et al., 2009). Scholars have also advocated for psychologists to become change agents which involves "scholarship and professional action designed to change societal values, structures, policies, and practices, such that disadvantaged or marginalized groups gain increased access to tools of self-determination" (Goodman et al., 2004, p. 793). The APA has thus formally echoed the call of fellow scholars who have embraced the importance of social justice within psychology.

Despite psychologists' recent call to action, there is a dearth of literature offering approaches, standards, and outcomes for implementing doctoral-level social justice pedagogy in psychology curricula. A significant portion of the existing literature reveals that counseling, educational, community, critical, and liberation psychologists (Goodman et al., 2004), as well as masters-levels programs have engaged more in social justice work. Further, much of the literature focuses on social justice philosophies, definitions, and competencies (Ali et al., 2008; Motulsky et al., 2014, Singh et al., 2010); there has been little effort put forth in outlining practical implementations of social justice, in not only multicultural competence but across all doctoral-level psychology curricula.

The absence of practical social justice pedagogy is not simply due to a lack of effort, but also a lack of consensus on what social justice entails within the field of psychology (Thrift & Sugarman, 2018). In their recent review, Thrift and Sugarman argue that professional psychology has failed to acknowledge the historical context, evolution, and implications of social justice. Thus, psychology has ignored the wider political and moral debate about "human freedom, individual and collective responsibility, and the role of the state" (Thrift and Sugarman, 2018, p. 13-14) that necessarily accompanies social justice. Thrift and Sugarman suggest that without a unified conceptualization of social justice, the field of psychology faces challenges in its incorporation.

While Motulsky et al. (2014) does not speak to a lack of consensus about social justice, they recognize a lack of agreement in how social justice can be integrated into doctoral-level psychology curricula. Motulsky et al. state that "Although more programs integrate multicultural content across the curriculum, it is unusual for social justice issues to be incorporated into the majority of the coursework" (p. 1062). In addition, courses dedicated solely to social justice are uncommon (Motulsky et al.). Although multicultural competence and social justice are

intimately related, without a clear consensus on the definition of social justice and, therefore, social justice pedagogy, social justice initiatives can be subsumed by multicultural competence.

The inclination to combine social justice exclusively within multicultural competence is understandable and might be unintentionally promoted by the APA's inclusion of social justice in the new multicultural guidelines (APA, 2017). However, there is a danger in concentrating social justice to multicultural competence. Social justice and advocacy might be construed as only relevant to multicultural issues; systems of power and privilege necessarily affect all aspects of professional psychology and thus all psychology courses. As a result, psychology curricula is disregarding a critical responsibility to consider issues of social justice and opportunities for advocacy beyond multicultural competence.

Despite the limited literature, several scholars have pioneered in their research efforts in integrating social justice pedagogy into doctoral-level psychology curricula. Singh et al. (2010) found that among 66 doctoral-level psychology trainees, 85% had not taken a course with social justice content and reported disparities in their definition of social justice. However, Singh et al. also found that the majority of participants endeavored to integrate social justice into their practice and sought social justice training outside of their academic programs; Singh et al. conclude trainees would benefit from additional programmatic support, opportunities, and mentorship in their social justice training.

While Ali et al. (2008) provide generous examples of their implementation of social justice pedagogy in a clinical practicum and career interventions curriculum, Motulsky et al. (2014) also demonstrate that social justice pedagogy can be integrated in coursework outside of typical multicultural courses; Motulsky et al. share examples of the inclusion of social justice competencies in Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods, Vocational Development and Career Counseling, Psychological Assessment, and Biological Bases of Behavior. The examples reflect Burnes and Singh's (2010) recommendations to include social justice literature, self-reflective exercises, and experiential learning exercises.

In Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods, Motulsky et al. describe the use of "art, poetry, and self-reflective identity exercises" (2014, p.1068). These unorthodox pedagogical methods support students in considering their social location, cultural perspective, philosophical assumptions, and biases which might influence the research process (Motulsky et al.). In addition, the course includes articles which provide a cultural critique of research, such as the lack of representation of marginalized groups (Motulsky et al.). The authors state that students undergo a change in their understanding of evidence-based research and "the power of research for social change and client advocacy" (Motulsky et al., 2014, p. 1069).

In Vocational Development and Career Counseling, Motulsky et al. (2014) highlight the course naturally lends itself to social justice considerations and advocacy. Motulsky et al. use readings, discussions, case studies, and assignments that focus on oppressed populations and systemic issues of power and privilege that relate to work issues. For example, the course utilizes an online discussion forum in which students engage in a discussion about their social justice evaluation of assigned career counseling articles (Motulsky et al.). The course also includes a case study analysis which encourages students to incorporate advocacy work in their practice.

Ali et al. (2008) similarly describe the use of class debates and practical applications of social justice perspectives in their work as future vocational counselors.

In Psychological Assessment, Motulsky et al. (2014) teach to the systems of power and privilege inherent in psychological assessment and psychopathology, using Galtung's (1969) term "structural violence" (p. 1072). The authors describe several exercises which aim to facilitate students' reflection. For example, the instructor uses class discussions to highlight the juxtaposition between the utility of psychological assessments and its historical contribution to legitimizing institutionalized racism (Motulsky et al.). In addition, the course uses an exercise which encourages students to reflect on the construct of intelligence critically; the discussion helps students understand that intelligence, and thus psychological assessment, is steeped within normative western epistemology and culture (Motulsky et al.). Motulsky et al. suggest the social justice considerations inspire students to recognize the potentially harmful implications of testing as well as opportunities for advocacy work.

In Biological Bases of Behavior, Motulsky et al. introduce social justice perspectives by incorporating issues of biodiversity. The course also uses class debates as a platform for encouraging students to discuss ethical controversies related to animal research such as whether animals should be used in scientific research. Furthermore, Motulsky et al. review past studies and teach students to consider the historical context of the research including the background of the researchers themselves; this critical analysis exposes the systemic and cultural biases rooted within psychological research. Similar to the Vocational Development and Career Counseling course, the Biological Bases of Behavior course also employs an online discussion board to support students in their exploration of gender disparity in science (Motulsky et al.). Motulsky et al. also describe the use of the book *Born on Blue Day: Inside the Extraordinary Mind of an Autistic Savant* (Tammet, 2006) to support discussions about what is considered "normal" and "abnormal."

Although the literature related to practical examples of implementing social justice pedagogy across doctoral-level curricula is limited, many scholars refer to the challenges of securing faculty support and collaboration (Ali et al., 2008; Goodman et al., 2004; Motulsky et al., 2014; Singh et al., 2010). Despite these documented challenges, Bartoli et al. (2015) assert that "Facilitating multicultural competence has become central to ethical clinical counseling training, with its responsibility resting on training programs and clinical supervisors" (p. 247). Bartoli's sentiments can be extended to social justice initiatives, which is supported by Vera and Speight (2003). Vera and Speight state that social justice can be incorporated into psychology programs by training the next generation of psychologists as change agents. Thus, if the field of psychology is to realize the APA's social justice aspirations and answer the call of fellow scholars, doctoral-level psychology programs must begin to consider a comprehensive inclusion of social justice pedagogy and put theory into action.

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Some examples of social justice-related dissertations from the AU Seattle PsyD program.

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Garcia A (2018) "The Way to Become a Man": The Influence of Commercial Sex on Male Psychosocial Development

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Sidhu, G. (2017) [The Application of Western Models of Psychotherapy by Indian Psychotherapy in India: A Grounded Theory \(2017\)](#)

Daffon, J (2017) The Effects of Gender and Perception of Community Safety on Happiness.

Geissler, V (2016) [Black and White Multiracial Adult Women' Experience of Their Physical Appearance: A Qualitative Descriptive Phenomenological Analysis](#)

McNichols, C. (2016) [Can The Complex Care and Intervention \(CCI\) Program be Culturally Adapted as a Model For Use With Aboriginal Families Affected by Complex \(Intergenerational\) Trauma? \(2016\)](#)

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COURSE	
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Topics	Readings/Activities	Assignments	Concepts to convey	Information sharing	epistemological questioning