

Moving Towards an Anti-Racist Curriculum: Student and Counselor Educator Advocacy

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Abstract

Examination and exploration of anti-racism practices in counselor education has resurged in the past several years. This conference proceeding will describe how one online counselor education program paired student and faculty collaboration to address anti-racism in core curriculum. Through an online town hall and weekly advocacy meetings, counselor educators and students devised and implemented an advocacy plan. Discussion includes ethical decision-making and advocacy actions undertaken as a collaborative student and faculty effort.

Keywords

anti-racism, counselor education, advocacy

Anti-racism within counselor education has garnered significant attention recently in response to a resurgence of social justice directed action both externally and within the counseling field specifically (Gonzalez & Cokley, 2021; Ieva et al., 2021; Sharma & Hipolito-Delgado, 2021; Singh et al., 2020). Counselor educators are called to actively promote the values of the counseling profession to include “honoring diversity and embracing a multicultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural contexts” (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014, p. 3) and “promoting social justice” (ACA, 2014, p. 3). However, counselor education programs and their policies may be slow to implement socially just and anti-racist practices (Ieva et al., 2021). The purpose of this manuscript is to describe how one online school and clinical mental health online counseling master’s program rapidly engaged in counselor educator and student advocacy collaboration to address racism within a career counseling theory.

The Problem

In spring 2021, the first author learned how Linda

Gottfredson, a prominent career theorist, holds racist and biased views regarding intelligence theory. Upon closer examination, Gottfredson’s work and public statements revealed harmful underlying biases and assumptions supportive of scientific racism, sexism, and the gender binary, all of which are incongruent with ethics and values as members of the field of counseling (ACA, 2014). The first author and another colleague contacted the National Board of Certified Counseling Credentialing and Quality Insurance director to confirm that content about Gottfredson’s career theory had been removed from the National Counselor Exam. In summer 2021 the first author transitioned to the present institution and brought the concerns about Gottfredson to the career counseling course lead who is also the second author. The two immediately went into action to bring attention to the concerns with the enrolled school and clinical mental health counseling students in the program. We determined creating a brave space (Arao & Clemens, 2013) whereby we acknowledged the discomfort we may experience and potential for racial trauma given the content as we commenced a student townhall. The following information was shared with students in a collaborative townhall.

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Gottfredson's work and public statements support a genetic basis for racial inequalities in intelligence scores, educational performance, and socioeconomic status (Gottfredson, 2004). In 1994, Gottfredson (1997) authored an article for the *Wall Street Journal* in support of *The Bell Curve*, a book that generated much criticism due to its racist claims that intelligence test scores showed an inherent intellectual inferiority of Black Americans (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). Gottfredson continues to verbally support other authors, such as J. Philippe Rushton, Robert Plomin, and Arthur Jensen, whose works make racist claims based on genetics of intelligence (Gillborn, 2016; 2018). Gottfredson also vehemently opposed policy efforts for equal job opportunities for all races and genders, including Affirmative Action, referring to these efforts as "racial gerrymandering" (Gillborn, 2016; 2018; Gottfredson, 1996). Gottfredson claims that her critics are attempting to suppress important research on intelligence (Gottfredson, 2005), but her conclusions reinforce racial inequities rather than offer potential solutions (Luke & Redekop, 2014).

According to Miller (1994), Gottfredson has received \$267,000 in research grants from the Pioneer Fund, an organization founded in 1937 upon White supremacist ideals with goals of "race betterment" for the United States through funding research in eugenics and heredity (Kenny, 2002). The Pioneer Fund has supported other researchers tied to scientific racism, such as Ruston and Jensen, and has funded research supporting genetic and intellectual inferiority of Black and Latinx people (Kenny, 2002). In addition to her financial ties to this organization, Gottfredson also publicly defended the Pioneer Fund and its grantees (Anderson & Van Atta, 1989; Kaufamn, 1992; Miller, 1994).

Another important consideration regarding Gottfredson's (2002) theories of circumscription and compromise is that the understanding of the nature of gender identity has expanded since the formation of these theories (Luke & Gibbons, 2022; Wada et al., 2019). Gottfredson's theories are rooted in a binarized perspective of gender limited to biology (i.e., sex and gender assigned at birth), fails to distinguish gender from sex, and fails to acknowledge people who are transgender, nonbinary, or gender nonconforming (Wada et al., 2019). While gender-based discrimination and oppression is still a reality for women, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people, there has been development in our cultural understanding of what is characterized as a "feminine" or "masculine" occupation or life role that make some of the gender-based assumptions in Gottfredson's theories obsolete (Wada et al., 2019).

Student and Faculty Collaboration

After sharing the above referenced information, the

group engaged in an ethical decision-making model (Forester-Miller & Davis, 2016) to determine a course of action. First, we identified several ACA Codes of Ethics (2014) applicable to the problematic scenario. These included (1) avoiding harm to clients (A.4.a), (2) advocating at an institutional level to remove barriers to equity and access (A.7.a) and (3), utilizing scientifically sound modalities to include theories (C.7.a). Next, the core dilemma emerged in the discussion: How can counselors utilize a career theory when it is potentially harmful because of the theorists' racist belief systems? Within this dilemma multiple concerns were discussed and considered. For example, while everyone agreed the career theorist's underlying beliefs were racist and abhorrent, many grappled with how to proceed with the newfound knowledge. Questions posed included:

- Should the theory be removed from all career counseling textbooks completely?
- Or is this an opportunity to engage in dialogue about addressing White supremacy ideology within counselor education?
- And if so, how do we proceed?

The group suggested several courses of action such as contacting the author of the career counseling textbook to alert them to the concerns and contacting the National Career Development Association, a division of ACA. At the conclusion of the townhall no definitive action plans were decided upon outside of the group pledging to continue advocacy efforts.

Advocacy

After the townhall the counselor educators sent a survey to all students to ask for additional feedback and interest in continuing to collaborate on advocacy efforts to address the problem. We held another meeting with interested students and discussed actions going forward. The group meetings offered students opportunities to further share feelings and reactions to the problem and to connect to faculty both of which facilitate community within online counseling programs (Sheperis et al., 2020). The group members agreed to work towards drafting a letter to the career counseling textbook author as a first step. To do so, we discussed what information and recommendation should be conveyed to the author. Through consensus, we agreed to share information regarding the belief systems of the career theorist paired with our recommendations on how to thoughtfully include the information in revisions of the current text. Our recommendations included the following:

- Add a section in the text to discuss the racist and heteronormative problematic statements supported by the career theorist.
- Acknowledge the potential for the content to be racially traumatizing.

- Provide resources for counselor educators to facilitate intergroup dialogue surrounding difficult subjects. We offered two such resources: Landreman (2013) and Schoem and Hurtado (2001).
- Encourage counselor educators to empower counselors-in-training to share questions, concerns, and resolutions about the problematic theorist as well as consider how to address White supremacy within counselor education.

We shared our final letter with the counselor education core faculty and the Dean of Education to gain their unanimous approval before we sent to the textbook author. The author responded to our letter quickly, thanked us for sharing what we learned, and pledged to not only incorporate changes in the textbook revision but also to begin disseminating the knowledge with their students immediately. Buoyed by the affirmative response, the group worked to draft two additional letters to NCDA and the current president of the American Counseling Association. At the time of this manuscript the outcomes of those efforts have yet to be realized.

Discussion

Counselor educators are called to support the ACA Code of Ethics (2014) values of multiculturalism, social justice and advocacy. Further, counselor educators in online programs must also actively engage students (Sheperis et al., 2020) to promote a sense of community. Our project addressed both areas by inviting students into dialogue about a problematic career theorist stance and collaborating to develop a plan of advocacy. In so doing, we led students through an ethical decision-making process (Forrester-Miller & Davis, 2016), created a brave space (Arao & Clemens, 2013) for community, and ultimately engaged in collective action (Toporek & Daniels, 2018). The collaborative efforts paired well with the domains of the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (Ratts et al., 2016) as we collectively examined our own privileged and marginalized statuses as it pertained to the racist premises of the career theorist and then subsequently, united to implement advocacy work to dismantle institutional barriers.

Conclusion

In training the next generation of counselors, counselor education programs are required to help students embrace client and professional advocacy (Toporek & Daniels, 2018). In doing so, counselor educators should strive to engage in collaborative efforts with students outside of the virtual classroom to further apply the advocacy skills, knowledge, and advocacy standards articulated in the ACA Code of Ethics (2014),

MSJCC (Ratts et al., 2016), and the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Toporek & Daniels, 2018). The actions discussed herein demonstrate the collective effort within one online counselor education program to illuminate racism and bias within the counselor education curriculum and engage in professional advocacy.

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