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Social Justice: A Long-Term Challenge for Counseling Psychology

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Counseling psychology has a long history of interest and commitment to social justice and multicultural issues. This article discusses some of that history and, in addition, speaks to specifics of implementing a liberation psychology frame of reference into clinical practice along with the issues of implementation and challenges faced by those of a social justice orientation. The authors support the position of Vera and Speight (2003 [this issue]) but point to (a) the need to avoid ahistoricism as practitioners work with social justice and (b) the need for awareness that the multicultural competencies themselves represent a major social justice organizational intervention.

Vera and Speight's article (2003 [this issue]) brings us back to the '60s, a time of social ferment and challenge to existing social systems, when many people wrote about new roles for counseling psychology. Perhaps this time counseling psychology will listen and start systematic efforts toward social justice. In this article, we would like to support their comments on social justice and fill in a few historical pieces to round out the picture.

In the late '60s and early '70s, I (Ivey) was a consultant to the Veteran's Administration and did early work in microskills training with long-term hospitalized veterans (Ivey, 1973b). The experimental project was proving highly successful even with highly disturbed patients. However, the hospital administration cancelled the project when the project staff was halfway through data collection, as we were "changing standard hospital treatment procedures." As part of the treatment, we encouraged patients to consider the systemic and environmental contingencies that brought them to the hospital. And needless to say, the hospital decried, in particular, the bringing of patients to awareness of environmental issues. In a clinical case presentation of the project, I commented on the need for both family involvement and social action in therapy (Ivey, 1973b):

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Many families really don't want the behavior of psychiatric patients changed. Change simply disrupts the reinforcement balance with the home. Similarly, society does not necessarily want behavior change.

[A]n additional goal of the psychiatric facility should be to train patients as change agents. Each patient might be trained in change strategies and encouraged to develop changes . . . in the society that sent him to the psychiatric setting. Examples of such change agent activities would be teaching one's own family to relax systematically or to listen more effectively to one another. The change might be more at a societal level and require involvement in community action programs such as work with the poor or disadvantaged. One of the most successful programs for helping some individuals fight their own drug addiction is working to fight drug addiction in others. (p. 342)

Elsewhere, I described in detail the role of the psychologist as an activist change agent and commented on "counseling psychology's remarkable ability to ignore the societal problems that surround us on every side. . . . We have not acted on racism in the profession" (Ivey, 1973a, pp. 112-113).

But even in 1973, these points were not new. Patterson, Darley, and Elliott's classic *Men, Women, and Jobs* (1936) made the point that it is virtually impossible to solve some individual problems if the context in which they occur does not change. If social conditions of societal underemployment and unemployment, unfair distribution of income, and oppression continue, counselors and psychologists will continue to work with victims of "the system."

Counseling psychology has a long and distinguished history in various efforts to bring multicultural issues and social justice concerns to the foreground. The work of Leona Tyler and John Darley (among many others), and Division 17 members' central role in founding Division 35 (Women), are just a few examples of counseling psychologists' taking the lead when social change issues arise. Despite all this, there are many who feel that counseling psychology has been too hesitant to promote social change and social action. Perhaps we are at a time when social justice will finally become a central aspect of counseling psychology, but others have called for such a shift in the past, and fundamental change has remained elusive.

Let us be thankful for past efforts and the major changes that have occurred due to the multicultural movement, but clearly an upstream preventive approach is essential. We must act proactively to counteract the fact that it is much easier to sit in one's office and wait for middle-class clients than to engage in outreach and social change. Vera and Speight (2003) are about changing the status quo. This means more attention to prevention, psychoeducation, and community psychology—and all within a multicultural and social justice framework. This means restructuring of our training programs *and* state licensing requirements. Needless to say, we face a long battle ahead.

This article will focus on two dimensions of social justice work—how we might incorporate a liberation psychology directly into clinical practice and the multicultural competencies. A summary will focus on some obstacles as we move toward an increased orientation to social justice. Social justice is clearly an imperative—but do we have the will to encounter the issues?

INTEGRATING LIBERATION IDEAS INTO CLINICAL PRACTICE

How can we incorporate the ideas of Martin-Baro (1994) and Paulo Freire (1970), the central liberation theorists, into the counseling and therapy session? How can we help individuals find their relationship to the context that relates so closely to their issues? And specifically, how can we actually change the nature of our practice using a liberation point of view?

Chapter 3 of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970, pp. 82-124) discusses his methods of building critical consciousness in detail. In briefest form, Freire worked as a coequal with his learners, often Brazilian peasants, who may have not been able to read. He taught reading through what he termed *codification*, in which the themes of culture were identified from the peasants' own personal experience and stories. He employed sensorimotor modalities through first focusing on tactile, visual, and auditory experience. This was followed by *naming*, and the group learned key words to describe the context around them. This resulted in concrete linear descriptions with stories and events from their lives. As peasants shared their stories, they *reflected* on the meaning of the stories and their own lives. This movement from experience through reflection, ultimately systems thought, is basic to a liberation approach and exemplified concretely in developmental counseling and psychotherapy (Ivey, 2000) and psychotherapy as liberation (Ivey, 1995). We will also find specifics of reframing the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition (*DSM-IV*), to reflect a liberation approach to so-called "psychopathology" (Ivey & Ivey, 1998).

Freire was starting with basic experience but always helping people see their issues in social context and in relationship to environmental contingencies. As the stories progressed, participants could see the commonality of their stories, and they would begin to discuss the need for *action* on their new awareness. The individual and the social context were fully connected. Freire's thinking and liberation theology (itself often derived from Freire) have been central in the process that has led to increased democracy in South America. Martin-Baro's (1994) work is perhaps the most coherent and valuable presentation of liberation ideas currently available. There one can find a rationale and blueprint for much of what Vera and Speight (2003) present.

Microcounseling over the years has constantly emphasized a balanced focus between the individual and contextual issues, particularly the culture and surrounding environment. Microcounseling (Ivey, 1971; Ivey & Ivey 2003) stresses the importance of the concept of focus in the interview. If the therapist focuses on the client and the client's problem, then the client's construction of the issue is typically in individualistic terms with attribution of the problem focused on the individual and her or his responsibility for personal change. This, of course, is another language for the Wellesley Stone Center's emphasis on self-in-relation or being-in-relation (Baker Miller, Stiver, & Hooks, 1998). A contextual view always focuses on the individual in connection to others to the broader social context. Ogbonnaya (1994) took this a step further when he spoke of the *person-in-community* with the many implications of this broad contextual view. These viewpoints, of course, may be contrasted with the individualistic orientation of most humanistic, cognitive-behavioral, and psychodynamic theories and strategies.

Developmental counseling and therapy (Ivey, 1993; Ivey, 2000) has adapted the ideas of Freire and has specific suggestions as to how a contextual view may be implemented more fully in the counseling and therapy session. *Psychotherapy as liberation* (Ivey, 1995) has as its goal both individual problem solving and resolution of concern *and* enabling clients to discover how their issues were generated in social context. Underlying this method, of course, is an attempt to bring about more complete awareness of oppression and social justice issues. Highly specific methods and systems for integrating liberation ideas in clinical practice are described in Ivey (1995) and the forthcoming *Developmental Counseling and Therapy* (Ivey, Ivey, Myers, & Sweeney, in press).

Multicultural counseling and therapy (MCT) is an integrative theory oriented toward contextualizing the field (Sue, Ivey, & Pedersen, 1996). The sixth proposition of MCT focuses on the liberation of consciousness:

The liberation of consciousness is a basic goal of MCT theory. Whereas self-actualization, discovery of the role of the past in the present, or behavior change have been traditional goals of Western psychotherapy and counseling, MCT emphasizes the importance of expanding personal, family, group and organizational consciousness of the place of self-in-relation, family-in-relation, and organization-in-relation. This results in therapy that is not only ultimately contextual in orientation, but also draws on traditional methods of healing from many cultures. (Sue et al., 1996, p. 22)

In summary, the liberation ideal sets up a different goal for counseling psychologists, one that demands awareness, knowledge, and skills in the environment—all of which ultimately should lead to social justice. They

serve as a useful moral backdrop as we consider how the multicultural guidelines relate to social justice.

THE MULTICULTURAL GUIDELINES FOR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE: HISTORY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPLEMENTATION

The multicultural competencies have a long history, much of it related to counseling psychology, which Vera and Speight (2003) do not cite. The competencies are a major organizational intervention that represent social justice in action. Rather than criticize the competencies for not working on all important social change issues, perhaps it would be more helpful to realize that the competencies will always be a work in progress and that the competencies are but one aspect of the social justice movement.

Parham and Forest (2003) have reminded us that the guidelines we see today are not the product of a "new millennium phenomenon." They provide a comprehensive summary of how the multicultural competencies came about through the efforts of one hundred or more individuals. Due to the involvement of so many committed professionals at various steps of the process and over 30 years, it is impossible for anyone to cite the many participants who brought about the development and expansion of the multicultural competences.

It is equally difficult to lay credit at the feet of any particular person or organization, because no single effort was sufficient to create and sustain the momentum over this span of time. Parham and Forest (2003), for example, cited Joseph White, one of the founders of the Association of Black Psychologists, who, as early as 1972, called for multicultural competence in his influential chapter "Toward a Black Psychology." At the Vail Conference on Professional Training in Psychology, White, George Albee, and Allen Ivey wrote the following statement, which has been widely cited and equally widely ignored:

The provision of professional services to persons of culturally diverse backgrounds by persons not competent in understanding and providing professional services to such groups shall be considered unethical. (As cited in Korman, 1973, p. 105)

In an effort to follow up on this statement, in 1981, I (Ivey) appointed Derald Wing Sue as head of the Professional Affairs Committee of Division 17. He, with the support of a large committee, wrote the first version of the

present multicultural competencies. It is noteworthy that the Division 17 Executive Committee chose not to endorse the competencies but merely to accept them. Subsequently, they were published in *The Counseling Psychologist* (Sue et al., 1982), and gradually their influence spread despite the lack of early support from Division 17.

As Vera and Speight (2003) note, Thomas Parham, president of the Association for Counseling and Multicultural Development (AMCD) appointed a committee composed of Sue, Patricia Arredondo, and Rod McDavis (1992), which resulted in further definition and delineation of the multicultural competencies. Arredondo et al. (1996) operationalized the now 31 multicultural competencies. Sue et al. (1998) continued the effort with further expansions and added 2 additional competencies. This included the addition of racial identity as a major component of the competencies. This book was the result of the Division 17 Committee on Ethnic and Cultural Diversity, whose task was cosponsored by Division 45. We see here that three major professional organizations contributed substantially to the evolving competencies.

Gerald Stone's presidency brought the action back to Division 17. A large committee was appointed, a new report of multicultural competence written, and this time the Division 17 Executive Committee endorsed the report. Presidents following Stone have continued this tradition. Thus, Counseling Psychology and Division 45, the Society for the Psychological Study of Ethnic Minority Psychology, have become the leaders in the multicultural competence movement along with AMCD.

Through the efforts of a writing team led by Nadya Fouad from Division 17 and Patricia Arredondo from Division 45, the competencies were rewritten into Multicultural Guidelines for Professional Practice (American Psychological Association [APA], in press). Considerable support was received from the APA in the final stages with help in rewriting and reworking many important details. Remarkably, the multicultural competencies were passed unanimously by the APA Senate. The American Counseling Association has yet to endorse the competencies, although several divisions of the association have become deeply involved in the movement.

But where's the beef? Guidelines for practice remain guidelines. They are meaningless without implementation. The social justice orientation now becomes central—are we going to “walk the talk?” Vera and Speight (2003) provide a good summary of recent literature toward that end. There is an even larger literature from the past saying essentially the same thing. What is important is moving concretely and specifically toward implementation of the multicultural competencies in our training programs and state licensure requirements *and* maintaining a solid commitment to social justice concerns.

ON THE CHALLENGES AS WE MOVE TOWARD IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IDEALS

Despite the fact that awareness of oppressive environments has long been part of the counseling psychology domain, social justice remains only a small portion of our training and action. Vera and Speight (2003) are at their strongest when they say,

Without an explicit emphasis on ending oppression, counselors may misconceptualize (or underemphasize) major determinants of (and therefore solutions to) problems that compromise the well-being of marginalized communities. (p. 270)

This is an important value statement for the future of counseling psychology. To not follow their suggestions is to be supportive of a status quo that itself supports oppression.

However, multicultural competencies and guidelines, theoretical/practical systems, articles such as this one by Vera and Speight (2003), and even a clear value stand still do not represent implementation and action. Why has the multicultural and social justice movement been so slow in gaining acceptance—and even slower in being adopted by our training agencies and state licensing boards?

E. Oetting (personal communication, “Social Justice and Outreach,” January 30, 2003) has provided some useful clues as to why the multicultural and social justice approaches have such difficulty in being put into operation. He points out that we live in an ecological system. The academic system is an environment focused on credit hours and supporting research—particularly research that provides money. In turn, the university is part of a larger capitalist, socioeconomic system that is oriented to profit. We have seen that resources and profits go to a small but powerful elite. The ideas and ideals of multiculturalism and social justice are at variance with the values of the university and other large systems.

As a specific example, Oetting (personal communication, 2003) has pointed out that the preventive, developmental, and outreach functions of college counseling centers have decreased markedly over the years, as universities demand that their centers focus on remedial issues that administrators can easily understand. A counseling center that stands out and seeks to work with the total campus ecology may find itself attacked. Thus, we find most counseling centers tend to keep a low and “professional” profile. Often, campus administrations prefer not to know about the issues that an outreach/prevention program uncovers. The same low profile holds true, of course, with

our training programs and community agencies. Society does not want to change—it wants individuals to adapt to existing systems.

Much of the progress (and there is real progress) that is being made in multiculturalism relates to obvious economic issues. Our capitalist society “follows the money trail.” Now that it is clear that a diverse and multicultural future is the destiny of the United States, more and more people from all walks of life are encountering and seeking ways to work with the new multicultural world. California in 2005 will no longer have a majority of White people. The same will be true in the not-too-distant future of other Southwestern states, and by 2050, the total nation will have more People of Color than Whites. Businesspeople and government recognize this as fully as psychologists. At issue for the nation is a smooth transition to a new state of being.

But power and privilege remain and are likely to remain with White people, particularly the affluent minority. Some of these people are socially aware and recognize that their own well-being requires a social justice orientation. A vast majority, however, are more interested in keeping the oppressed down through working against affirmative action, eliminating the social safety net, and restricting access to medical care for the poor to say nothing about making restitution for past wrongs or even offering a formal apology for past actions such as slavery and the genocide of Native Americans. This “holding action” of the White majority could last for years, particularly if aware individuals continue to focus on individualism as the only answer to our issues.

An action orientation is called for. We do need a social justice orientation, and that requires greater attention to outreach, prevention, community service, and advocacy. Many of those active in the multicultural competency movement were active in founding the American Counseling Association Division—Counselors for Social Justice. We see rumblings in Division 17 in the same direction. Divisions 35, 44, and 45 are all deeply concerned with social issues, and of course, the Society for the Study of Social Issues has been working with these issues for years. Could it be that we at long last are truly moving toward a social justice orientation? These groups have provided the outline of an important action plan for the future. Let us hope it does not take more than 30 years this time, as it did with the multicultural competencies.

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