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## **Counseling Psychology and Social Justice: Houston . . . We Have a Problem**

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*The 4th National Counseling Psychology Conference presented a unique opportunity for our field to share our progress and contemplate future directions. Fouad et al.'s account is a contribution to the documentation of our profession's history. Fouad et al.'s article and the 4th National Counseling Psychology Conference can also be viewed as a continuation of our profession's search for its identity. The authors of this reaction paper urge the counseling psychology profession to integrate a social change identity. Specific recommendations to effect this transformation are offered.*

The 4th National Counseling Psychology Conference presented a unique opportunity for counseling psychology students to attend a national conference solely devoted to issues pertaining to their area of study. At the time of the Houston Conference, the authors were in their 2nd, 3rd, and 7th years of doctoral studies in counseling psychology at Seton Hall University, Teachers College, Columbia University, and Fordham University, respectively. The authors participated in the conference by attending various sessions and being involved in symposiums and roundtable discussions that included the following: (a) a symposium on responding to race-related hate crimes on college campuses (Utsey & Bolden, 2001); (b) a paper on multicultural alliances for graduate students, a presentation that grew out of the presenters' involvement with the Student Alliance for Multicultural and Mental Health Issues (SAMMI) (Pieterse, 2001); and (c) a roundtable discussion on applying a social justice framework to a college counseling center setting (Smith, Baluch, Sheehy, & Bernabei, 2001). The specific involvement of the authors at the Houston Conference is presented as a context in which to inform readers of the perspective that is brought to our reaction by Fouad et al. (2004 [this issue]).

### **IMPRESSIONS OF THE CONFERENCE AND THE FOUAD ET AL. (2004) MAJOR CONTRIBUTION**

The chronicling of the conference documented by Fouad et al. (2004) provides a vital window to the inner working of the leadership of our discipline for students who lack prior knowledge of the development and context in which the 4th National Counseling Psychology Conference took place. The documentation of our profession's history provides a contextual grounding for students, who of course represent the future of the discipline. The historical perspective gleaned from Fouad et al.'s description of the three prior national counseling psychology conferences is particularly helpful in enhancing our understanding of the development of the field, and has provided us with a greater sense of the identity of counseling psychology as seen through the eyes of those counseling psychologists who have come before us. Additionally, the account of the conference by Fouad et al. gives us a greater appreciation of the overall magnitude of the Houston Conference. With regard to the Houston Conference itself, we experienced many and varied reactions, including a sense of hopefulness regarding the future direction of our field, a feeling of confirmation/validation regarding our decision to enter the field, a stronger sense of identity as future counseling psychologists, and an ensuing disappointment that there were no discernable changes or follow-up in our profession with regard to fully integrating a social justice analysis despite its centrality in the conference (e.g., social action groups [SAGs] and numerous presentations on social justice issues in counseling psychology).

### **FRAMING OUR REACTION TO FOUAD ET AL. (2004)**

As we considered how to frame our reaction to Fouad et al. (2004), we realized that our discussion was really a reflection of conversations taking place in the broader society. We feel it is important to ground our perspective in the broader society in which we live, as others have noted that counseling psychology is yet another microcosm of our society (Pedersen, 1999). The multicultural movement within counseling psychology (see Pedersen, 1999) mirrors the larger civil rights movement in this country, in that while there has been an ambivalent commitment toward the consideration of racial inclusiveness (e.g., recent Supreme Court affirmative action cases *Grutter vs. Bollinger* and *Gratz & Hmacher vs. Bollinger*), this commitment falls short of systemic structural changes and reduction of covert racism, sexism, and heterosexism. Just as these larger social movements (e.g., racial civil rights, women's rights, and lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender rights) are about a

fight for survival, freedom, and self-determination, we believe that the social action movement in counseling psychology is a similar struggle. In keeping with this social justice framework, we would like our reaction paper to be a call to our profession to consider its future applicability to broad swaths of U.S. society if it does not fully take up its power and ability to impact social change. As documented by Fouad et al., the discipline has been engaged in a long-standing discussion on the relevance, identity, and social contributions of counseling psychology. Our reaction paper serves as a small contribution to that ongoing conversation.

### **COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY: IDENTITY IS STILL A FOCAL POINT**

In commenting on the themes of the Houston Conference, Fouad et al. (2004) indicate that the “conference expressly did not have a goal to clarify the identity of counseling psychology” (p. 60) and that “for many individuals on the convening group, discussion about identity had already taken place in Executive Board meetings and had been successfully resolved” (p. 61). In reading the description and outcomes of the Houston Conference, however, one is left with the sense that “Houston 2001: Counseling Psychologists Making a Difference” was explicitly about identity, with a particular focus on expanding the identity of counseling psychologists to include in a direct way the role of social change agents as a central aspect of the identity of counseling psychology.

The counseling psychology literature is replete with voices advising, challenging, predicting, and introspecting on the professional and individual identity of counseling psychologists (Carter, 2003; Fretz, 1980; Howard, 1992; Lent, 1990; Neimeyer & Diamond, 2001). The picture that emerges ranges from counseling psychology’s identity being in the “eye of the beholder” (Fretz, 1980) to a vibrant, mature discipline feeling increasingly comfortable with its complexity.

What is also evident is that the inclusion of social action and social justice as integral aspects of how counseling psychologists conceptualize their work is not a new area of emphasis; however, it is yet to be a central aspect of how we see ourselves. Our impression that social action is not central to counseling psychologists’ identity is offered as an alternate additional explanation for the “modest” (Fouad et al., 2004) attendance and outcomes of the SAGs at Houston. It leads one to wonder whether social justice is really what counseling psychologists want to do.

Counseling psychology has a long history of acknowledging and incorporating diversity (Meara et al., 1988) and being aware of societal oppression

(Howard, 1992). A recent survey asking counseling psychologists to predict the discipline's future directions indicates that "commitment to issues of diversity" is seen as the most prominent future identification for counseling psychology within the United States (Neimeyer & Diamond, 2001). It is, however, only recently that counseling psychology as an institution has sought to translate that awareness and commitment into social justice initiatives at an institutional level. Fouad's presidential address (2001) and Carter's (2003) inclusion of a Social Justice forum in *The Counseling Psychologist* are reflective of this shift at the highest levels of the Society. Proactive strides have been made toward the goal of transforming the identity of counseling psychology with the development of the now accepted Multicultural Guidelines (American Psychological Association [APA], 2003; Arredondo & Perez, 2003) and the call for greater diversity in the Society (Bingham, 2000).

However, it does not appear that social justice as a unique aspect of the identity of individual counseling psychologists and counseling psychology as a professional discipline is currently a widely held identity. In our experience in the field of psychology, defensive reactions often greet attempts to offer a social justice analysis. If psychologists were to confront their own participation in wider socially accepted aspects of privilege and systems of oppression, not only would our professional behavior have to change, but our very identities and understanding of the world would be impacted as well. In terms of professional behavior, for example, we might have to invite the constituents we serve to have a voice in what and how services are delivered to them (e.g., including client advocacy groups in the SAG at Houston). Additionally, we might have to examine whether in our professional roles we serve as gatekeepers and place-keepers for our social order and unintentionally maintain the status quo. In terms of personal identity, personal narratives about one's individually obtained achievements would have to shift; we might have to examine whether our social networks are inclusive and whether the establishments we patronize are de facto segregated (Bowser & Hunt, 1981, 1996; McIntosh, 1992).

### **COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIAL CHANGE: MOVING BEYOND GOOD INTENTIONS**

There has been a noted shift in the attempt of counseling psychology to be more inclusive of groups that have been historically marginalized (people of color, women, and lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender) within the profession (Bingham, 2000). Therefore, a central aspect of the planning of the Houston Conference was the emphasis on inclusiveness (Fouad et al., 2004). In partic-

**TABLE 1: Racial/Ethnic Heritage of Division 17 and American Psychological Association (APA) Members**

Race/Ethnicity	Division 17									
	Associate		Member		Fellow		Total		APA	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
White	61	62.9	1,716	77.9	274	88.7	2,051	78.6	63,829	76.8
Black	4	4.1	71	3.2	15	4.9	90	3.5	1,405	1.7
Hispanic	4	4.1	52	2.4	8	2.6	64	2.5	1,767	2.1
Asian	2	2.1	43	2.0	6	1.9	51	2.0	1,452	1.7
American Indian	1	1.0	7	0.3	2	0.6	10	0.4	208	0.3
Other	0	0.0	1	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.0	29	0.0
Multiracial/multiethnic	0	0.0	1	0.0	0	0.0	1		24	0.0
Not specified	25	25.8	311	14.1	4	1.3	340	13.0	14,382	17.3

SOURCE: APA Directory Surveys (2000 and 2002), <http://www.apa.org/about/division/images/tables17.pdf>, and <http://research.apa.org/2000profiles.pdf>. Compiled by APA Research Office.

ular, the conference leadership looked to respond to Bingham's (1999) presidential address where she challenged the society to be more proactive in responding to inclusiveness. Yet the notion of inclusiveness needs to be examined in light of the meaning associated with inclusion and the impact of "drawing the circle bigger." Of note is the fact that Fouad et al. do not report the demographic breakdown of the conference attendees (other than the fact that 40% were students). The meaning behind this omission is unclear. Perhaps such information was not gathered; perhaps some feel that the circle is now large enough. It is important, however, to note that notions of inclusion need to be larger than having more women in leadership roles or having a Black female divisional president, as laudatory as these developments are. Statistics from the Society of Counseling Psychology and the APA show that even numerical racial/ethnic inclusion within the APA remains elusive (Kite et al., 2001) (see Table 1). Furthermore, the type of inclusion that embraces, validates, and legitimizes non-Western views of human development and ways of being needs to be stressed. This type of systemic change requires long-term commitment to addressing internal prejudices as well as injustices and inequities in our programs, institutions, and society (Reynolds, 1997).

Given the discussion of social justice, potential reasons for the apparent low turnout in the SAGs may be the following: (a) the inherent nature of sacrifice that social justice requires; (b) a lack of or misunderstanding on the part of the attendees; (c) the ambiguity of the definition; (d) the newness of social justice in regard to creating a movement within the counseling psychology field is indicative of the nature of change—it requires patience and faith that the actions occurring will plant seeds, grow roots, and bear fruit; and (e)

social justice may have been an additional responsibility at points in our lives where we feel that we are already overburdened. In addition, there may be specific reasons for low attendance in each of the groups; for example, the Care for Chronically Mentally Ill may not have been in alignment with the focus on health and client strengths that typify the counseling psychology focus.

### **SOCIAL JUSTICE AS A CORE VALUE OF COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY**

Within our profession's attempt to revision itself in a more inclusive manner, social justice is a core value (Smith, Baluch, Bernabei, Robohm, & Sheehy, 2003). For counseling psychology to move beyond the status quo to becoming a vibrant, powerful force, it must assess in an honest, forthright manner its commitment to social change. To paraphrase Hodges (2001), for counseling psychology "to ignore cultural influences and diversity is not merely shortsighted, it threatens the viability of the profession" (p. 170). Sue (1995) contends that our work as psychologists "will be an endless and losing venture unless the true sources of the problem (unequal access to resources, stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, and oppression) are changed" (p. 476). We believe we are not being fully effective unless we address the sources of psychological distress at the cultural and institutional levels. Hall (1997) declared that we are committing cultural malpractice if we continue to focus our attention and energies exclusively on the individual, internal self and ignore systemic, institutional, and cultural patterns and influences.

Counseling psychology must determine how our profession can begin to operate on the principles of distributive justice (i.e., equitable distribution of power and resources), collaboration, democratic participation in decision making, and equal power and voice rather than mere numerical representation. Psychology must in meaningful ways acknowledge broad, systematic inequities and oppression in our profession and society. Most important, we must embrace and fully understand the assumption that every individual and profession is located within an unjust system. In particular, we must be able to articulate how each of us and our practices contributes to the maintenance and perpetuation of unjust systems in the United States (e.g., education, employment, criminal justice). As has been noted earlier, many have offered blueprints on how to conduct a multicultural organizational analysis (Baluch, Bernabei, Robohm, Sheehy, & Smith, 2002; Jackson & Holvino, 1988; Sue, 1995).

Just as society has systemically excluded classes of people (including their histories, ways of being, and values), so has psychology (Gould, 1981;

Guthrie, 1997), and, in particular, our experiences as psychologists-in-training have been oppressive. For example, in classrooms and practicums, we have had the experience of having our realities denied and viewpoints denigrated. At times we have been told that a social justice analysis is utopian; political, not psychological; and inappropriate advocacy work. Additionally, we have had to read as legitimate science works that directly question our mental capabilities as members of a U.S. racial minority group (e.g., *The Bell Curve*). Theories and research have been based on White, European values that have tended to pathologize other ways of being and practicing (e.g., family systems theories pathologizing close family ties as enmeshment or privileging individuation as healthy ideal for self). Often, part of our postgraduation work is to unlearn biased theories and expand our conceptualizations to be more inclusive.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

If we accept the assumption that we are supporters of social justice, we are obliged to take action. To this end, we offer the following recommendations for our profession to take a transformative stance as advocated by Sampson (1993). Our recommendations are in addition to the many recommendations that came out of the SAGs.

- A social justice paradigm should be applied to the counseling psychology curriculum by explicitly teaching psychology's history of scientific racism, along with providing cross-cultural competency training. For example, the following texts should be included in our history and systems courses: (a) *Even the Rat Was White* (Guthrie, 1998), (b) *The Mismeasure of Man* (Gould, 1981), (c) *Women and Madness* (Chesler, 1989), and (d) *Racism and Mental Health* (Willie, Kramer, & Brown, 1973). We believe that unless we continue to identify the historical underpinnings that shaped our institutions and cultural mores, we will not be able to recognize when our practices and assumptions are culturally specific, not universal.
- To sustain the vibrancy of counseling psychology as a discipline and anticipate the growing trend toward interdisciplinary research, training parameters should be expanded to allow for interdisciplinary education. This expansion of training parameters would better prepare students to address social justice issues at various systemic levels. Areas of interdisciplinary study might include public policy, public health, anthropology, history, and ethnic, gender, religious, and sexual orientation studies.
- Improve dissemination of conference proceedings to those who were unable to attend. Each counseling psychology program should receive a summary of the conference proceedings.

- Include the Fouad et al. (2004) document within introductory counseling psychology courses for historical perspective on our profession's identity development.
- Echoing a recommendation of the SAG on Racism, have multicultural competencies, not merely multicultural courses or infusion, be a mandatory requirement for program and internship accreditation and licensing.
- A multicultural organization framework and analysis (Sue, 1995) should be mandatory tools in any accrediting and licensing process. In addition, anti-racism education should be included to counteract White nationalism and racism (Anner, 2003).

We believe that the above recommendations are concrete ways to build on the call to inclusiveness and move counseling psychology closer to its desired goal of being a vehicle for social justice. Yet we do wonder to what extent the field will respond to this call. With regard to inclusion as a principle of social justice, will our inclusiveness lead to a legitimizing of alternative approaches to healing that have not characterized our largely Eurocentric approach to mental health? Will our inclusiveness lead us to fight the larger, riskier battle of elevating the multicultural competencies to ethical mandates and required competencies and not only professional/scientific recommendations? Will our inclusiveness lead us to acknowledge generations of scientific racism and do this by means of public apologies and initiatives to repair our historical treatment of Blacks, Native Americans, women, and lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender people as inherently deficient?

## CONCLUSION

The question of how to define counseling psychology has been raised in the Fouad et al. (2004) article as well as throughout the history of counseling psychology (Howard, 1992). As students, our hope is that counseling psychology will take up its full mandate to be involved in preventative, developmental, as well as remediative efforts. The practice of psychology is a political act and a moral enterprise (Katz, 1985; Smith, Baluch, Bernabei, Robohm, & Sheehy, 2003). Most definitions of counseling tend to focus on the individual while leaving the social order conveniently undisturbed, thereby maintaining the status quo (Smith et al., 2003). The SAG initiative—"generating an agenda for each social problem that transcends the traditional focus on individual intervention strategies" (Fouad et al., 2004, p. 40)—continues to represent a wonderful opportunity for counseling psychology.

However, what is taught, who teaches it, and who is practicing psychology appears to still be White dominated (APA Research Office, 2000, 2002). Sta-

tistics compiled by APA indicate that those making our decisions, holding power, and setting the agenda are primarily White. We wish to remind our readers that social justice and social change in the United States have never been achieved by mere goodwill, but rather with mandated requirements for inclusion and nondiscrimination. In closing, we urge our peers and those practicing in the field to not merely pay lip service to the ideals of social justice but to do critical self-examination of themselves, their departments, and their institutions. As Malcolm X said, "You can't teach what you don't know and you can't lead where you won't go" (Howard, 1999, p. 4).

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