Promoting Anti-Racism and Critical Consciousness through a Critical Counseling Theories Course

Jyotsana Sharma
Oklahoma State University Tulsa

Carlos P. Hipolito-Delgado
University of Colorado Denver

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Promoting Anti-Racism and Critical Consciousness Through a Critical Counseling Theories Course

Jyotsana Sharma, Carlos P Hipolito-Delgado

Racism is alive and well in the United States. To promote critical consciousness and anti-racism in counselors-in-training, the counseling theories course, typically a student's introduction to the profession, requires revision. Thus, we propose a critical counseling theories course. In this course, we argue critical theories (multicultural theory, social constructivism, feminist theory, and critical race theory) and neurocounseling theory should be centered, introducing theories that are relevant to our current sociopolitical reality and that promote the values of anti-racism in the counseling profession. In this article, we describe the critical counseling theories course structure, instructional approach, and assignments. Data from student evaluations, instructor reflections, and student focus groups add to the justification that a critical counseling theories course could successfully instill critical consciousness in counselors-in-training and in turn promote anti-racism in counseling theory and practice.

Keywords: critical counseling theories, anti-racism, critical consciousness, critical race theory, counselor education

Racial bias and hate are generally the products of ignorance, overgeneralization, and lack of authentic information about racial groups, usually due to limited contact with racially diverse groups (Tatum, 1997). This ignorance is further reinforced by educational approaches that center Eurocentric monocultural perspectives that rob students of access to diverse perspectives and the ability to think critically (Loewen, 2018). Many graduate students entering counselor education programs had limited contact with racially diverse communities and experienced a Eurocentric curriculum in schools, limiting their ability to understand cultural differences. To foster anti-racism, counseling students require curricular and pedagogical strategies that foster critical thinking and promote awareness of the systemic oppression of communities of Color (Freire, 1970; Watts et al., 2003). We call for a critical approach to teaching counseling theories, that is grounded in the tenets of Freire (1970) and critical race theory (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002), to center the experience of race and promote critical thinking.

A counseling theories course is typically a graduate student's introduction to the field. Unfortunately, these courses usually center Western theories and reinforce Eurocentric perspectives of the field. Though there are various means to foster anti-racism in counselor education, we argue that a critical counseling theories (CCT) course with a focus on critical race theory (CRT), social constructivism, feminism, and multicultural counseling can foster critical consciousness and anti-racism in counselors-in-training (CITs). Additionally, CITs will exit the course being more critical of traditional theories and capable of understanding the sociopolitical circumstances of their clients.

The primary goal of this manuscript is to describe the proposed design for a CCT course that seeks to promote anti-racism and critical consciousness. We will also provide initial evidence of the efficacy for the use of CCT via the program evaluation of a pilot CCT iteration. This program evaluation used a combination of data from instructor reflections, course evaluations, and student feedback. The goal of this program evaluation was to document student outcomes, as related to anti-racism and critical consciousness, and assess course design and instructional strategies.

Critical Consciousness

Although traditional counseling theories can be culturally responsive, they are typically individualistic and ignore the impact of racist systems on

Jyotsana Sharma, Oklahoma State University; Carlos P Hipolito-Delgado, University of Colorado Denver. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jyotsana Sharma, jyotsana.sharma@okstate.edu

communities of Color (Singh et al., 2020). To remedy this issue, we argue that a CCT course should be grounded in notions of critical consciousness. Critical consciousness describes the process by which marginalized communities critically analyze their social conditions and take action to liberate themselves from oppression and is rooted in the educational theory of Freire (1970). We argue that critical consciousness provides counselors the knowledge and skills to engage in anti-racist practice.

Though Freire did not theorize on the development of critical consciousness, other authors have proposed models that share three common stages: critical social analysis, sociopolitical self-efficacy, and sociopolitical action (Diemer & Hsieh, 2008; Watts et al., 2011; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Here, we provide a brief overview of these stages. The goal of critical social analysis is the recognition of sociopolitical inequalities and how these inequities are maintained by dominant social structures (Watts et al., 2011). The development of sociopolitical self-efficacy requires a sense of confidence in one's ability to take action toward liberation (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Finally, the sociopolitical action stage entails sustained effort to liberate oneself from oppression (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015).

Approaches to fostering critical consciousness in educational settings share techniques that embrace dialogue, foster critical questioning, and encourage sociopolitical action. To embrace dialogue, the instructor avoids positioning self as an expert, encourages the participation of all students, and welcomes contrasting opinions (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). To foster critical questioning, students should explore local, personally relevant examples of racism to examine how social and political systems perpetuate oppression (Watts et al., 2011). Although preparation for action is acknowledged as a vital educational strategy, there is limited discussion on what this looks like in the classroom (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Within the context of CCT, to foster the development of critical consciousness and anti-racism, it is necessary to find theoretical influences outside of counseling; fortunately, CRT provides a promising theoretical foundation (Singh et al., 2020).

Critical Race Theory

Most counseling theories reinforce Western worldviews and contribute to whiteness being embedded in counseling theories courses (Haskins & Singh, 2015; Singh et al., 2020). As a foundation of a CCT course, CRT can be a tool to critique "traditional" theories, address power and privilege in the profession, increase understanding of the complex mental health needs of marginalized communities (Moss & Singh, 2015; Singh et al., 2020), and promote anti-racism. CRT is an interdisciplinary framework for understanding the racialized experiences of communities of Color and how U.S. sociopolitical systems are grounded in racism (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). There are five main tenets to CRT: racism is an essential and permanent feature of American social, cultural, and political systems; whiteness guarantees privilege and silences the experiences of communities of Color; social equity for communities of Color is pursued only when these interests converge with Whites; notions of color blindness, meritocracy, and equality serve to disguise racial inequity; and an examination of intersectionality is necessary to better understand the experience of people of Color (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Singh et al., 2020; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Unfortunately, in the counselor education literature, discussions of CRT are largely limited to its application to research.

There is, however, a small group of articles that describe the implementation of CRT in counselor education. Haskins and Singh (2015) described how CRT can help counselor educators recognize where counseling curriculum perpetuates whiteness, color blindness, and meritocracy. The perpetuation of whiteness in counselor education serves the educational needs of White students (Haskins & Singh, 2015) and can alienate students of Color. Additionally, curriculum and instructional strategies that promote color blindness and meritocracy will negate the distinct needs of students of Color.

A strength of CRT is providing a basis to understand the pernicious nature of racism. To maximize this potential, counselor educators using CRT explicitly address racism and embrace critical conversations on race (Haskins & Singh, 2015; Moss &

Singh, 2015). By engaging in such deep examination of race, there exists the promise of counseling students developing skills in understanding the complex issues facing communities of Color (Moss & Singh, 2015; Singh et al., 2020). Furthermore, students can become social justice allies by examining notions of white supremacy and their role in deconstructing power differentials (Moss & Singh, 2015; Singh et al., 2020). Given the centrality of race in CRT, the implementation of CRT in CCT courses can be useful in fostering anti-racism in students (Moss & Singh, 2015; Singh et al., 2020).

Multicultural Competence and Counseling Theories Courses

Multicultural competence is described as the most important construct in counselor education (Malott, 2010). To foster multicultural competence in students, a program requires a structure that promotes criticality and examination of culture (Gonzalez-Voller et al., 2020). Unfortunately, most examinations of multicultural competence in counselor education have focused on a single course: multicultural counseling (Castillo et al., 2007; Gonzalez-Voller et al., 2020; Malott, 2010). Though there is evidence that participation in a multicultural course has a positive impact on multicultural competence (Castillo et al., 2007; Malott, 2010), a void remains in examining the impact of other counseling courses on multicultural competence.

In understanding the potential of a counseling theories course in promoting cultural competence and anti-racism, the research of Gonzalez-Voller et al. (2020), Paone et al. (2015), and Castillo et al. (2007) are helpful. Gonzalez-Voller et al. (2020) conducted a longitudinal study of multicultural competence of CITs and found that they experienced growth in competence over their training but noted that the rate of growth was highest while students were taking courses (between the orientation and practicum). Paone et al. (2015) examined the White racial identity, color blindness, and awareness of racism in a group of White students enrolled in a counseling course centered on identity, racism, privilege, and anti-racist action. At the end of the course, participants reported increased awareness of privilege, reduced color blindness, and White identity development, which the authors interpret as greater anti-racist attitudes. Castillo et al. (2007)

used a pseudo-experimental design to compare the development of multicultural competence of students enrolled in a multicultural counseling course with those enrolled in a counseling theories course. Interestingly, participants in the counseling theories group reported growth in multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills and less implicit racial bias. Based on their results, Gonzalez-Voller et al. (2020), Paone et al. (2015), and Castillo et al. (2007) argued for counselor educators to infuse multicultural training into all courses. What is more, Castillo et al. (2007) noted that counseling foundations can contribute to acquisition of multicultural competence in CITs, and Paone et al. (2015) found how an explicit focus on issues of race can contribute to anti-racist attitudes. Though this is a small literature base, it is an initial indication of the potential of a CCT course to promote multicultural competence and anti-racism.

Critical Counseling Theories

Freire (1970) and hooks (1994) urge educators to alter and adapt to the evolving needs of education around the world. In our current social context, counselor educators have the opportunity to become trailblazers of anti-racism by refusing to teach in traditional Eurocentric ways. Before moving into altering or adapting anything in a course, it is important that counselor educators engage in their own work, specifically understanding how educational practices can be culturally sensitive and anti-racist and promote critical thinking. As such, we recommend that counselor educators engage in learning centered on critical educational pedagogy and practices and work to understand their own power and privilege.

Once educators have improved their self-awareness and become more skilled in liberatory educational practices, it is their responsibility to transform the courses they teach with critical thinking and anti-racism at the forefront. To this end, we describe a CCT course that seeks to foster critical thinking and anti-racism in CITs. We note this course is a modification of the traditional counseling theories and not intended to be a new or elective course.

Why Critical Counseling Theories

A counseling theories course is typically the first course graduate students take in their counseling

program. This course is often taught chronologically, and it focuses on "traditional" theories (psychodynamic, behavioral, and humanistic) that are grounded in European values and ideals, creating a Eurocentric monocultural perspective of counseling. To promote anti-racism and critical consciousness in CITs, we propose a critical counseling theories course specifically focused on critical race, feminist, social constructivism, multicultural, and neurocounseling theories. We argue that a focus on critical theories will help students develop an understanding of the role of sociopolitical forces that shape human emotion, cognition, and behavior. Furthermore, the approach will provide CITs with a holistic, culturally inclusive, and sociopolitically informed perspective on counseling theories and when working with culturally diverse clients.

Instructional Approach

To foster critical consciousness and anti-racism, a liberatory instructional style is necessary for CCT. As such, a banking method of education (Freire, 1970), where the instructor is the possessor of knowledge and students are empty vessels waiting to receive knowledge, is inappropriate. Banking methods promote a dichotomy of power, marginalize students, and run contrary to the goals of CCT. Consequently, as part of their self-awareness work, the instructor of the CCT is encouraged to consider how their instructional style contributes to the marginalization of students and to seek more liberatory methods.

To encourage critical thinking, we approach this course with a Socratic approach to instruction. The Socratic method of instruction entails active participation and requires students to critically question their values and beliefs (Griffith & Frieden, 2000). The instructor in a Socratic classroom is a facilitator using questions to lead discussion, asking follow-up questions to help students clarify their thinking, and helping students come to their own realizations (Griffith & Frieden, 2000). What is more, Picou et al. (1998) advocated for the usage of the Socratic method in the classroom as it improves students' retention of material.

In addition to promoting the Socratic method, the instructor will want to make establishing rapport with students a primary goal. hooks (1994) described the importance of deconstructing power dynamics in the classroom and the need for an instructor to be relatable and approachable. Rapport will help students feel comfortable sharing their experiences and reduce anxieties related to learning about topics that challenge the dominant discourse. For this strategy to succeed, the expectation of student discussion must be established at the outset—see Hipolito-Delgado (2016) for a suggestion on setting the tone for classes seeking to foster discussion and critical thinking. The students should leave the first class with the understanding that they are expected to read the theory of the day and be ready to discuss questions, opinions, thoughts, and application-related inquiries in all subsequent classes.

Course Topics

In this section, we describe topics that counselor educators should prioritize when teaching a CCT course and provide a rationale for these topics being learned and discussed earlier in the course. These course topics include multicultural counseling theory, neurocounseling, social constructivism, feminism, and critical race theory.

Multicultural counseling theory (MCT) should be the first topic addressed in a CCT course. MCT provides students with an understanding of how the cultures of the client and the counselor impact the helping process (Ratts et al., 2016). Specifically, the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (Ratts et al., 2016) are a guide for CITs on how to develop cultural competence through an increased self-awareness, knowledge of diverse communities, culturally relevant skills, and recognition of the importance of advocacy. Beginning a critical theories course with MCT would promote the critical tenets in the field of counseling: cultural awareness, sensitivity, and humility. It presents the view that nurture or learning that takes place through an individual's environment is important. Additionally, this helps students prioritize cultural understanding, critically analyze traditional theories, and incorporate aspects of MCT into all subsequent coursework.

Neurocounseling, the latest addition to the field of counseling (Luke, 2016), provides another im-

portant aspect to counseling: the structure and functions of the brain and nervous system and how a basic understanding of these structures can help us understand individual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The advantage for students to learn about neurocounseling at the start of a counseling theories course provides a perspective on nature and how biology and genetics are important considerations for understanding human behavior. This aspect can then be integrated along with any theory to provide a more holistic picture of how neuroscience contributes and impacts mental health and well-being.

Social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) should be considered next. An understanding of constructivist theories aids CITs' focus on the importance of social, cultural, and environmental influences that help shape an individual. Humans are considered social beings; we are unable to exist without society. Whatever we absorb from these social encounters shapes our values, beliefs, and attitudes through the process of internalization. Bringing these theories to the forefront would highlight the importance of a client's sociopolitical contexts and environment. It raises awareness in CITs of how social experiences, such as those with privilege or marginalization, are deeply internalized and not shaken easily.

Feminist theory is traditionally left to the end of a counseling theories course. Bringing feminism to the forefront might engage students in considering how experiences with gender and patriarchy impact the lives of clients and counselors. Issues of genderism, sexism, marginalization, and minoritization may be something that CITs are experiencing themselves in the current sociopolitical climate but are likely not considering actively. Addressing feminism at the forefront might provide insight into the various intersecting identities of clients and the sociopolitical positioning of said identities. I, the second author, have found that starting with feminist theories is more palatable to students, particularly White women. What is more, in understanding gender oppression, it provides students with an entrée into the topic of racism and racial oppression.

Critical race theory should also be introduced at the outset of a CCT course. Though not a counseling theory, an exploration of CRT forces the consideration of the role of racism in American society and the role of counselors in deconstructing systems of power and privilege (Moss & Singh, 2015; Singh et al., 2020). CRT will also aid students with an understanding of how traditional counseling theories might actively or subtly promote racial bias. Additionally, an understanding of CRT will likely increase the development of anti-racist ideas in CITs.

Once CITs' critical consciousness and cultural awareness lens has been developed at the forefront, educators can then focus on the historical journey of how "traditional" theories of counseling developed over the years. Examining traditional theories through the critical perspectives described above will provide students with an understanding of who traditional theories were meant to serve, their limited applications with marginalized populations, and perhaps how they might be adapted in more culturally appropriate ways. Having the knowledge base of critical theories at the start of a graduate study can allow CITs to use critical consciousness and anti-racism for the entirety of the program, potentially aiding their development as anti-racist counseling professionals in the future.

Course Assignments

Additionally, it is imperative to align assignments in a CCT course toward developing critical thinking and analysis skills. Theory critiques are a good way to explore how students make sense of what they are learning during the course and to promote critical thinking; these projects can be executed as presentations or written assignments (see Appendix). For example, the reader might ask a group of students to critique a theory from a multicultural or constructivist point of view or ask students to look for ways in which feminist or neurocounseling can be integrated to render a traditional theory more applicable to a broader range of diverse clients. This type of assignment is intended to encourage students to think about a theory and analyze it using a critical lens while assessing the strength and weakness of a theory in working with culturally diverse communities. Also, the assignment would aid CITs in developing critical thinking skills that are equally applicable to understanding counseling theories as assignments in other counseling courses.

Evaluation

The program evaluation associated with this manuscript is not an exhaustive empirical study; rather, we sought a preliminary assessment of the first interaction of the CCT course design. Through this evaluation, we aim to provide the reader with insights on the feasibility of the course and effectiveness of the CCT design in fostering anti-racism and critical consciousness in students. Note that instructor reflections and a student focus group were not a part of end-of-course student evaluations but were added to provide a richer understanding of students' experience in the CCT course

Setting

The CCT course was taught in the summer of the 2020 term at a university in the south. This particular course was taught during an 8-week summer semester, with the class meeting twice every week for 2 hours and 50 minutes. Ten students enrolled in the course; they were all in their first semester of a graduate counseling program. In this first iteration of the course, critical race theory did not yet have a class section devoted to the topic, and feminism was taught in the latter half of the course. All other theories were addressed as proposed above.

Instructor's Approach

The instructor approached this course with the explicit intention of fostering critical consciousness in her students. To this end, she avoided an expert stance, instead recognizing that the students were experts of their own understanding and experiences. The instructor consciously role modeled "I" statements to encourage students to both use "I" statements and share their experiences with classmates. She intentionally presented opposing points of view if students were leaning toward one particular polarity, as to require critical thinking and analysis, negotiation of opposing opinions, and reconciliation of multiple viewpoints. The instructor avoided providing "answers" and encouraged students' inquiry; while this caused some contention with students, her goal was to foster discussion and critical thought.

Methods

To assess course design, feasibility, and efficacy, course evaluations and instructor reflections were analyzed. In addition, a focus group with former students was conducted. First, a content analysis of all existing course evaluations for the CCT course from the summer of 2020 was conducted. In the course evaluations, the students were asked questions about the course, the instructor, the instruction, the workload, choice of textbook, and grading practices and provided space for additional comments. Student comments were thematically analyzed.

To gain information on the instructor's perceptions of the course, instructor reflections were also collected. The instructor was asked to describe her intentions in designing the course in this manner (centering critical theories) and to reflect on the outcomes of the course, specifically, if students developed critical thinking skills and anti-racist ideology. For the purpose of this evaluation, the instructor reflections are used primarily as a form of triangulation for the data obtained from students.

To obtain a richer understanding of the student experience, students enrolled in the CCT in the summer of 2020 were invited to participate in a focus group. All enrolled students received an email that described the purpose of the focus group and an invitation to participate. Those who expressed interest were sent the informed consent and asked to provide their availability. Six out of 10 students agreed to participate, and the focus group occurred via a video meeting platform. Once their consent was recorded, the students were asked five to six specific questions in a semistructured manner, including what it was like to read and discuss multicultural theory, neurocounseling theory, and social constructivist articles upfront. The final question was critical as it solicited student opinion on whether they felt centering critical theories was helpful in fostering critical thinking and anti-racism. The focus group lasted for approximately 45 minutes and was audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. Student comments were thematically analyzed. This evaluation was approved by the institutional review board at the university of the first author.

Findings

In general, students described enjoying the CCT course; specifically, they appreciated the discussion-based format of the course and saw the benefit of centering critical theories in the course. Below we will provide a brief summary of student responses.

Course Evaluations

In their end-of-semester evaluation, students rated the CCT course above both the department and university means and particularly appreciated the discussion-based format, rating the instructor a 4.3 out of 5. Students appreciated that the instructor pushed them to think critically and form their own opinions. One student noted that they "really like how the assignments force us to think critically about the theories." Some students appreciated being pushed to find their own answers, though others found this frustrating. In the instructor reflections, the CCT instructor noticed students' frustration in the course. She noted that she often provided basic instruction and then encouraged students to arrive at their own conclusions through critical discussion during class time. Though not all students appreciated this instructional approach, it was grounded in a desire to promote critical thinking skills in students.

Focus Group

Students who participated in the focus group generally appreciated the structure and teaching style of the CCT course in the summer of 2020. Additionally, students described how the course contributed to their critical thinking skills and supported the decision to center critical theories in the course. Below is a brief summary of student responses as related to teaching style, critical thinking, centering of critical theories, and how the course prepared them for future course work.

Instructional Style

Students appreciated the discussion style of the course as compared to attending a lecture on the theory they already read. It was noted that the conversation was always novel and engaging and one could discuss, agree, disagree, and pull apart the materials to figure out which theories a person agreed with or did not agree with. One student

noted her appreciation of the course's discussion style saying:

> I personally feel like engaging in critical discussion about every theory every week. Like if I didn't do that, I don't think I would remember them nearly as well. And I don't think I would've learned. … I wouldn't have applied my own beliefs and like listened to other people's [beliefs].

Students described feeling that they were not forced to take anything on face value but were encouraged to figure out how a particular theory could be applied and what the pros and cons of each theory were and had the autonomy to choose whichever theory they connected with the most. Another student noted that "just being able to hear other people's opinions on the theories using, providing different perspectives, that running dialogue was so helpful for being able to like absorb information." These quotes provide an indication of how a discussion-based instructional style in CCT can contribute to critical thinking and retention of material.

Critical Thought

The students stated that engaging in critical thought and discussion was established as the culture of the course early on. They agreed that discussing what everyone thought about the theories, the philosophy behind the theory, the key applications, and techniques was something that was valuable and important to the process of learning. There was agreement that being able to pick apart a theory was beneficial, being able to listen to others' opinions helped form ideas around what may or may not be useful for application of a certain theory or how it may be integrated with other theories or techniques. One student noted:

> Because we were able to talk about it and discuss it and like use critical thinking … it gave me more confidence to speak out like times when I was like, I don't really agree with this theory and … then be able to confidently explain why I think this theory is inaccurate … because the way we discussed it helped me to concretely set it in a tone where I could confidently use it to actually help someone.

This was an intentional stance that was taken by the instructor, as she noted in her reflection: "I would ask what they thought about the theory from their

critical lens. … The resulting discussions became more robust and students brought in their personal and professional experiences that lent itself to a richer understanding of the theories." As such, it appears that students did experience increased critical thinking skills through the CCT course.

Centering Critical Theories

Students expressed high support for placing critical theories at the front end of the course. The students stated that reading and discussing these before the traditional theories helped them build a perspective on where the field is now and what we are hoping to achieve as counselors in the 21st century. The participants expressed that the knowledge of critical theories helped inform their understanding of other counseling theories. One student described this as follows:

> I think too, having it [the critical theories] as part of the introduction also let it be a part of every discussion because it was like each theory we talked about, we could tie it back to now, how does this relate to the multicultural theory and how does this relate to like the neuroscience behind it? So I thought that was helpful too because we could integrate it throughout the whole semester.

> Supporting this statement another student stated:
> Like having the multicultural upfront made us more aware of how some of the other, the older ones … [are] really outdated and really harmful to clients that aren't White and maybe even male. So like, it gave us a way to like, be like … Oh, if we are going to use this theory, we need to be extremely, extremely aware of that.

Though most participants appreciated MCT, neurocounseling, and social constructivist theories being placed at the front end of the course, others felt that there may be benefit in a chronological approach that might aid in understanding how theories developed historically.

Preparation for Future Courses

Some students noted that the CCT course prepared them for subsequent classes. They shared that centering critical theories in the CCT course created an expectation of how they should practice as counselors. One participant stated:

> I feel like leading with that [CCT course] set the tone for the program in that you always want to be as inclusive and multiculturally sensitive, but you always want to be like looking for ways to learn about other people and help them better … it's kind of shaped the way I view counseling, um, in a good way.

Other students shared how knowledge of critical theories has helped them understand and critique what they have learned in other courses. As one student added:

> Like everyone pretty much has said, it's been really helpful going forward into the fall semester. Cause, um, I know that our current professors have made passing comments about, um, like the neuroscience of different things, but not having that foundation of knowledge beforehand, it wouldn't, the impact of it wouldn't have been the same.

Based on these comments, it appears that students were able to take what they learned in the CCT course and continue to apply the knowledge in subsequent courses.

Reflections and Considerations

Though the findings of this evaluation are not exhaustive, we provide the following reflections and consideration for the implementation of a CCT course in counselor education. In this section, we will discuss what appears to be working with the course and limitations in the current course design. Ultimately, we believe that this evaluation provides initial indications of the promise of a CCT course.

What Worked

Students appeared to appreciate the discussion-based format, benefited from critical theories being centered, and developed critical thinking skills. One of the realizations that surfaced while conducting the evaluation was that the students valued the discussion-based instructional style. In student evaluations and the focus group, students described what they gained from the discussion and how this contributed to critical thinking. As such, we believe that

a discussion-based approach is essential for development of critical thinking (Freire, 1970) and the success of the CCT course.

From student reports, we also gleaned that centering critical theories and neuroscience was positively received by most students. Most students specifically stated that multicultural and neurocounseling theories added to the way they understood, evaluated, and applied all other theories of counseling. Students also described how this critical approach aided their retention of information.

Another major takeaway from this course evaluation was that prioritizing critical theories appeared to facilitate the development of students' critical thinking skills of students. Students described how knowledge of critical theories aided them in critiquing theories and their applications with diverse clients. Additionally, the instructor reflected on how students' critiques of theories became more robust throughout the course. Through the CCT course, the instructor created an intentional push toward critical consciousness development by consistently reminding students to express their thoughts, to ask critical questions on the purpose of a theory and who it is serving, and to be flexible in listening to others' opinions of a theory. Students described how these critical thinking skills aided them in subsequent courses.

Limitations

Though the data obtained from students provide an initial indication of the efficacy of a CCT course, there were limitations related to the small nature of this evaluation and student's discussion of anti-racist attitudes. Please note that the goals of this evaluation were never generalization, nonetheless the small nature of this investigation and the fact that all students identified as White pose a limitation to this evaluation. Future evaluations and research on the CCT course are necessary with larger and more diverse student populations.

When the CCT course was taught in the summer of 2020, feminism and critical race theories had not been incorporated into the course as is currently being proposed. It is the authors' belief that providing CRT its own session and placing feminism earlier in the course will increase CITs critical thinking skills and development of anti-racists attitudes. Thus, students will be more capable of understanding clients'

sociopolitical context and provide more culturally responsive interventions. Alas, additional research will be required to assess this proposition.

Finally, students did not explicitly address anti-racism in their evaluations of this course. Though we believe that greater focus on feminism and critical race theories might address this issue in subsequent iterations of the course, in this evaluation, we were unable to conclude that students developed anti-racist attitudes. It is worth noting that the development of critical consciousness often occurs after the termination of a course (Morganthaler, 2016), and this might also be the case for anti-racist ideals.

Recommendations

These limitations withstanding, we argue for wider implementation of CCT courses and further research on the efficacy of the course. The initial evidence of students' development of critical thinking and retention of information provide sufficient rationale for this implementation. Through additional iterations of CCT, further information can be obtained about which critical theories best contribute to the development of critical thinking and anti-racist beliefs in CITs. Programmatically, CCT can be the first step to developing a critically conscious program that supports the integration and infusion of critical theories into courses like multicultural counseling theory, school counseling, mental health counseling, and trauma-related courses. The intentionality of critical course designs would not only improve consciousness of CITs in working with marginalized populations but also build on values of social justice in the counseling profession.

Conclusion

Racism is described as a permanent feature of American reality (Bell, 1992) that operates to oppress communities of Color and rob White communities of their humanity (Freire, 1970). Counselor educators possess the unique opportunity to challenge racism, both in their classrooms and in society at large. By fostering anti-racism and critical consciousness in counseling students, counselor educators will not only impact the worldview of their students but, potentially, the services received by clients. We argue that a critical counseling theories course is a first step to this end, and we call for

counselor educators to implement a CCT course in their programs.

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Appendix

Multicultural Theory Critique

For your multicultural theory critique, work in your assigned groups to prepare a brief critique of the theory assigned to your group. Address the following:

1. Describe the theory briefly. Cite at least two references that present empirical evidence to support the theory.
2. State the limitations of applicability of the theory from a multicultural perspective. Clearly articulate your perspective and provide examples as needed. Though you may draw from critiques already present in the literature (and should cite accordingly), there needs to be clear evidence of your group's critical thinking skills.
3. Propose and discuss "solutions" that may address these limitations (e.g., specific areas of research, changing of interventions, inclusion or cultural issues, integration of another theory).

The critique should be approximately 1,000-1,500 words, which is roughly four pages. Be prepared with your statement. Your peers will have the opportunity to ask you questions during class time.

Total 25 points (15 points for the written paper, 5 points for collaboration as a group, 5 points for how you handle the questions during group discussion time).