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Expanding the Role of Social Class in Multicultural Counselor Education Curricula

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Expanding the Role of Social Class in Multicultural Counselor Education Curricula

Abstract

Although professional counselors are called to develop Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC; Ratts et al., 2016), and social and cultural diversity are highly researched (e.g., Barrio Minton et al., 2014), social class as a multicultural construct has received less attention and is often reduced to being defined as socioeconomic status (SES). Therefore, this article provides a brief historical context of social class, explores the current state of social class research in counseling and counselor education, and suggests methods for increasing inclusion of social class in counselor educators' multicultural pedagogy.

Keywords

Social Class, Curriculum, Counselor Education, Multicultural

Author's Notes

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The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCCs; Ratts et al., 2016) are of central importance to the counseling profession. Both the American Counseling Association *Code of Ethics* (ACA; 2014) and Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs *2016 Standards* (CACREP; 2015) call on counselors to have the awareness, knowledge, and skills to render competent care to a diverse clientele inclusive of “racial, ethnic, and cultural heritage; socioeconomic status; age; gender; sexual orientation; and religious and spiritual beliefs, as well as physical, emotional, and mental abilities” (CACREP, 2015, Glossary). Despite social and cultural diversity being among the most researched constructs in counseling and counselor education (Barrio Minton et al., 2014; Barrio Minton et al., 2018; Barrio Minton et al., 2020), attention to social class as part of multicultural identity and experience lags far behind constructs such as race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (Cook & Lawson, 2016; Pietrantoni & Glance, 2019). Both the ACA (2014) *Code of Ethics* and CACREP (2015) standards perpetrate this misconception by defining the construct in terms of socioeconomic status (SES) rather than through the cultural experience of social class.

By not having a foundational understanding of social class as a complex and multidimensional construct, counselors risk neglecting clients’ worldview, creating unresponsive counseling relationships, and not aligning counseling and advocacy interventions in the relationship as required within the MSJCCs. Similarly, counselor educators who do not have a foundational grounding in the complexities of social class may prepare future counselors through a lens of unconscious social class biases, thus replicating the social class inequalities the profession strives to eradicate (Cook & Lawson, 2016).

A consensus definition of social class is debatable in the helping professions (Liu et al., 2004; West-Olatunji & Gibson, 2012). In a review of three counseling psychology journals from

1981-2000, Liu et al. (2004) identified 448 different terms to describe social class, illustrating its complexity. Researchers in the counseling profession, alternatively, tend to condense social class to traditional variables such as income, education, and occupation (Cook et al., 2019). Cook et al. (2019) also noted social class terminology is underutilized in counseling journals. Social class, therefore, is a cultural construct that needs greater exploration and broadening in the counseling profession (Cook et al., 2019; Liu, 2011).

Although scholars disagree on the definition of social class, they do agree that more research is needed on how social class is thoughtfully and intentionally incorporated into the therapeutic alliance (Cook & Lawson, 2016; Liu et al., 2004; Smith et al., 2016; Vontress, 2011). Likewise, more research is warranted on how student counselors learn about the complex intricacies of social class in the therapeutic alliance as part of the process of developing MSJCCs (Cook & Lawson, 2016; Kaiser & Prieto, 2018; Liu et al., 2007; Pietrantoni & Glance, 2019; Thompson et al., 2015). The purpose of this article is to provide a historical overview of social class from a sociological perspective, present current research on social class in counseling and counselor education curricula, and discuss implications for future research and practice.

Social Class and Social Class Worldview

Social class is “the totality of attitudes, beliefs, consciousness, values, behaviors, and interactions that impact people’s personal and group worldview based on their social location, resources, and experiences with their social class affiliations(s)” (Cook, 2014, p. 13). In this definition, Cook unified subjective constructs other scholars agreed impact individuals’ social class worldview (Hernández-Wolfe, 2020; Thomas & Schwarzbaum, 2011; West-Olatunji & Gibson, 2012). The aim of this section is to briefly summarize the various historical perspectives integrated in Cook’s (2014) definition.

For years, theorists have researched social class through various lenses, including economics as well as social and political power (Grusky, 2001). Grusky defined social class as the economic, political, and human power within individuals' sphere of influence. Karl Marx viewed social class through a primarily economic lens (Grusky, 2001). He believed society categorized individuals based on those who control the means of labor (the bourgeoisie) and those who produce the labor (the proletarians). While economics influenced Marx's theory of social class, religious doctrine helped form Max Weber's theory. Hard work, self-discipline, and frugality were the responsibility of humans in fulfilling their godly duty and living in accordance with God's teachings, thus creating the Protestant work ethic (Weber, 2018). Economic, religious, and political thought were not the only influences on theories of social class. Pierre Bourdieu believed social class was entrenched through a cultural lens of power and privilege used to understand and navigate one's social class system (Swartz, 1997). Bourdieu argued individuals need to know and understand dispositions associated with a particular social class status because they were active participants in their environments and were socialized through dispositions to navigate their specific social class system (Swartz, 1997).

Language is one form of socialization by social class (Payne, 2013). Payne (2013) posited that individuals from poor and working-class backgrounds view language as a means of survival with very casual rules of language, while the middle-class views language in a more formal register used for negotiating. Payne's work is not without critics. Some argue that Payne's framework is rooted in a middle-class worldview that places onus on the poor to improve their status in life, for instance (Dudley-Marling, 2015; Thomas, 2010). Critics of Payne's framework have called for a more inclusive construction incorporating the systemic inequalities of poverty which serve to perpetuate the problem (Biles et al., 2012). It is important, however, for counselors and counselor

educators to understand linguistic rules embedded in social class; without this knowledge, cross-class communication in the therapeutic alliance and classroom may impeded.

Another example of social class socialization can be found in values specific to social class (Swartz, 1997). Parents transmit cultural values and capital in ways that impact children's values surrounding education (Sullivan, 2001). For example, Kish-Gephart and Campbell (2015) found CEOs from lower social class backgrounds were less likely to engage in strategic risk taking than colleagues from upper social class backgrounds, theorizing this could be the result of upbringing and familial environment. These findings add credence to Finn's (2010) theory that students from working class backgrounds are taught to follow the rules of the dominant culture, while students from upper class backgrounds are schooled to have more intellectual curiosity and take risks. In other words, individuals from upper-class status are taught to be the future leaders of society, while those from working-class backgrounds are taught to serve.

More recently, scholars in counseling and psychology have developed models to better understand the complexity of social class through a more intricate subjective worldview (Foss & Generali, 2012; Kraus & Stephens, 2012; Liu et al., 2004). The Social Class Worldview Model (SCWM), in particular, captures a greater appreciation of social class as a complex, interpersonal process (Liu et al., 2004).

Social Class Worldview Model

Liu et al. (2004) developed the SCWM as a model for therapists to conceptualize social class outside of objective measures, while forming a stronger therapeutic alliance. The SCWM works on the premise that social class is a socialized experience that incorporates individuals' values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions. Within the SCWM framework, Liu et al. (2004) made the following assumptions about social class status: (1) social class worldview exists

on the individual level; (2) reality is shaped by the individual; and (3) social class worldview homeostasis is the goal of every individual.

The SCWM encompasses five interrelated domains: (a) Consciousness, Attitudes, and Salience; (b) Referent Groups; (c) Property Relationship; (d) Lifestyle; and (e) Behaviors (Liu et al., 2004). Consciousness, Attitudes, and Salience refers to the ability to understand and articulate one's social class worldview to others and self. Referent Groups are people from the past (group of origin), present (peer group), and future (group of aspiration) individuals use as social class guides to understand expected or aspirational behaviors. Property Relationship is the value individuals place on materials used to define their social class worldview. Lifestyle is how individuals choose to organize and allocate resources to maintain or achieve social class context. Finally, Behaviors refer to learned and socialized actions that reinforce an individual's social class worldview. The SCWM model expanded the conversation surrounding social class in counseling from traditional measures, such as SES, to a framework for counselors to broaden their objective understanding of social class to a more subjective, personal level for better client outcomes (Kaiser & Prieto, 2018; Liu et al., 2004; Newton & Erford, 2018).

Several years after publishing the initial SCWM, Liu (2011) revised the model to better emphasize individuals as interactive participants in their social class and economic environments, as well as the influence environments have on individuals. The SCWM-R comprises three components: economic culture, worldview, and classism (Liu, 2011). The combination of these three components facilitates a cognitive process defining a person's social class status.

Economic culture (EC/Ec) is the context in which individuals develop their social class worldview. A larger economic culture (EC) is tied to multiple smaller cultures (Ec) in which the individual resides. For instance, individuals residing in the United States, or their EC, live in a

capitalist society. However, these individuals are geographically situated within several micro-economic cultures, or Ec, based on their race, ethnicity, and profession.

An individual's worldview is another component of the SCWM-R (Liu, 2011). Liu (2011) defined worldview as “the beliefs, attitudes, and values an individual uses to understand and interpret his/her economic and social class situation and conditions” (p. 79). An individual’s worldview is shaped through social class consciousness, discussed below, and socialization. Socialization is implicit and explicit messages individuals receive from their socioecological system. The socioecological system individuals reside within shapes their social class understanding. This perspective parallels Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory. Within Bronfenbrenner’s developmental theory, individuals are in constant development in their community and the broader society. In contrast to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory, Liu’s (2011) SCWM-R specifically focuses on one’s development through an economic environment lens.

The final component of the SCWM-R is classism, direct prejudice against others perceived to be in a different social class. Much like racism, classism in the therapeutic alliance can cause ruptures between a counselor and client (Liu, 2011). Liu (2011) described four forms of classism. Downward classism describes an individual from a higher social class marginalizing or discriminating against someone from a lower social class. Upward classism indicates negative attitudes regarding someone considered to be in a higher social class. Lateral classism occurs among individuals within the same social class and is enacted with the expectation of maintaining norms of that social class reference group. Lastly, in internalized classism, people feel a form of dissonance in which they do not believe they are meeting the perceived standards of their current

social class and thus strive harder to achieve the material signs of their status. These elements and their underpinnings constitute classism within the SCWM-R.

Social Class and Classism Consciousness

The constructs of Social Class and Classism Consciousness (SCCC) within the SCWM-R provide insight into how counselors can recognize their social class awareness (Liu, 2011). The SCCC includes 10 statuses within three domains along a spectrum of social class awareness. In the first domain, No Social Class Consciousness, people's self-perceptions move from feelings of independence from social class to questioning their role in the social class system. In the second domain, Social Class Self-Consciousness, people begin to explore their place in a social system and move towards the status of blaming others and society for creating inequality. In the third domain, Social Class Consciousness, people recognize an unjust society and its negative impact on others. As a result, individuals that have evolved to the last domain understand their privilege in the social class system and understand that they must use this privilege to help others. The navigation and growth through the SCCC domains provide a rich context for counselor educators to bring social class awareness to student counselors. This argument is reinforced through research addressing social class biases in therapy (e.g., Kaiser & Prieto, 2018; Liu et al., 2004; Smith et al., 2008).

Social class is complex and elusive to research through a theoretical framework. Researchers, however, have studied and validated classism using the SCWM-R framework (Cavaliere & Chwalisz, 2020; Colbow et al., 2016). Colbow et al. (2016) designed the Classism Attitudinal Scale (CAP) to measure downward and upward classism based on Liu (2011)'s SCWM-R. Downward classism strongly correlated to the Protestant Work Ethic, the belief that all can make if it they work hard enough (Colbow et al., 2016). This belief is deeply embedded in the

structural class hierarchy of the United States regarding class mobility, which results in bias and discriminatory behavior against those from a lower social class background by those in power (American Psychological Association [APA], 2007; APA, 2019). Of interest, Colbow et al. (2016) however found a negative association between life satisfaction when isolated from other variables in their study. In sum, findings on upward classism were not as robust as with downward classism (Colbow et al., 2016). The researchers hypothesized that this may be because participants' subjective social status was closely tied to their income. Despite this limitation, the CAP can serve as a valuable tool to understand downward classism through a SCWM-R framework.

Further, Cavalhieri and Chwalisz (2020) devised the Perceived Classism Experiences Scale (PCEs) to study the four forms of classism based on Liu's (2011) SCWM-R. They found that downward, upward, and lateral sub-scales had high internal consistency and directly mapped to constructs in the SCWM-R. The authors also found that internalized classism and related emotions of devaluation and inferiority were a self-evaluation byproduct of other forms of classism. This is important because clients may experience internalized classism in the therapeutic alliance due to counselor presentation or office décor that triggers clients' feelings of inferiority and places barriers to forming a strong therapeutic alliance.

Culturally competent counselors must have awareness, knowledge, and skills to serve a diverse clientele (ACA, 2014; Ratts et al., 2016). This includes understanding one's own attitudes, beliefs, and values associated with social class and being responsive to clients' social class worldview awareness. A counselor's social class self-awareness enhances the therapeutic alliance with the client, thus leading to better client outcomes. As with other forms of bias and discrimination, classism in the therapeutic alliance can rupture the relationship and hinder positive client outcomes (Kaiser & Prieto, 2018). Thompson et al. (2015), for example, found that

psychologists' lack of awareness concerning social class impacted clients' experience in therapy. The SCWM-R affords counselors a framework to understand social class through an inclusive, holistic lens (Liu, 2011). Moreover, the CAP and PCES provide ways to organize further investigations to validate tenets of the SCWM-R, serving to further social class research in the counseling profession. The next section describes applications of social class and social class worldview specifically as it is applied to counselors and the counseling process.

Social Class in Counseling

Most counselors come from middle-class backgrounds, and their worldviews are integrated into the therapeutic alliance (Vontress, 2011). Without an awareness of these worldviews and their impact on work with clients, counselors risk unwittingly damaging the working relationship rather than addressing social class more intentionally and enhancing the working relationship. Cook and Lawson (2016) found counselors rooted their worldview through a SES lens rather than a social class lens. The counselors in the study used three traditional measures (income, education, and occupation) to describe social class, which led to class-based assumptions by participants. These assumptions can lead to biases and social class microaggressions from counselors (Cook, 2017; Sharir et al., 2019), which Sue (2010) defined as messages that devalue, insult, or demean an individual's non-dominant identity. Thus, counselors from higher social class backgrounds may struggle with understanding their clients' concerns, preventing a strong therapeutic alliance (Sharir et al., 2019).

Notably, though intersectionality of identities is an important concept in multicultural education for student counselors (Chan et al., 2018), few examples exist of counseling literature discussing intersectionality with respect to social class outside of the aforementioned traditional variables. Two significant contributions include Burnes and Singh's (2016) exploration of social

class and LGBTQQ identities and Conwill's (2010) use of gender, race, and social class to increase understanding of domestic violence in lower class Black communities. Clearly, this is an underserved area of focus in the general counseling literature (Cook et al., 2019).

Other helping professions, such as psychology and social work, have incorporated social class into the therapeutic alliance through intentional, evidence-based frameworks (APA, 2007; Strier, 2009). By incorporating social class into counseling, counselors can better understand social class through a holistic lens, incorporating both worldview and external forces at play (Liu et al., 2004). Specifically, this includes understanding the socialization cycle within social classes and hidden socialization rules, class-linked communication styles, and values associated with social class. By intentionally addressing these key variables in the therapeutic relationship, counselors will be better equipped to understand and work within clients' social class worldview as required by the MSJCCs (Ratts et al., 2016) and *ACA Code of Ethics* (2014).

Counselor Social Class Socialization

As previously mentioned, counselors, for the most part, are socialized in middle-class values (Vontress, 2011; Walsh, 2019). The historical underpinnings of counseling are rooted in a class-based self-actualization lens, which may be counter to the lower- and working-class cultures typically served by counselors today. McDowell et al. (2013) found as lower- and working-class graduate students progressed, they felt a sense of having "left behind" their family and community of origin, creating a sense of class dissonance. Thus, individuals residing in a different system than the one they were reared in may experience feelings of dissonance, guilt, anger, stress, and self-hatred. Two of the most salient factors in social class socialization for counselors relate to communication style and class-specific values.

Communication Style

Paris and Alim (2014) argued that the goal of the dominant culture is to eradicate linguistic norms of non-dominant cultures. The dominant culture's linguistic underpinnings are based on Western middle- to upper-class pedagogy (Sue & Sue, 2016). This pedagogy, which most counselors are taught, runs counter to non-dominant cultural norms and hinders the therapeutic relationship with clients from these non-dominant cultures (Sue & Sue, 2016). Marshall and Haight (2014) interviewed African American and European American child welfare professionals working with low-income African American families. The authors found participants of both races emphasized a more direct form of communication with their clients (Marshall & Haight, 2014). As one participant stated: "You don't have to be rude about it. You have to be direct about it..." (p. 85). This way of operating with clients subverts the dominant cultural expectation that all should conform to their communication patterns, which may include more indirect ways of communicating.

For counseling to be effective, counselor and client need to communicate in ways both parties understand (Sue & Sue, 2016). This is particularly important for counselors to reflect on in the therapeutic relationship because counselors and clients may unintentionally misunderstand each other. Further, the onus falls on counselors to understand clients' linguistic frameworks (Hernández-Wolfe, 2020). By intentionally attending to social class communication style in the therapeutic relationship, counselors can develop a deeper alliance with clients for better outcomes (Hernández-Wolfe, 2020).

Values

The MSJCC (Ratts et al., 2016) calls on counselors to explore their personal values and cultural identities, including how these personal values impact the counseling relationship. One

such set of personal values is based on the social class identity of the counselor and the privileges that come from said identity. Liu et al. (2007) detailed a list of privileges that Western middle-class individuals hold in the U.S., including familiarity with Western middle-class norms. These norms serve as a foundation for most counseling theories (Leong & Ponterotto, 2003). Bicchieri et al. (2018) defined norms as informal rules that govern groups and societies. From these norms, individuals are expected to perform a certain way based on the dominant social class worldview. When counselors adhere to norms of the dominant social class culture, however, they run counter to the MSJCCs (Ratts et al., 2016). Additionally, Pedersen (2003) argued that a singular point of view based on dominant norms and values hinders the counseling profession's stride toward inclusivity.

To this point, Smith et al. (2011) explored the influence of a client's social class on the early diagnostic impressions of student counselors; student counselors mainly identifying as middle-class pathologized hypothetical poor and working-class clients, believing these clients were resistant to treatment and expecting less successful outcomes compared to clients associated with higher social class. Alternatively, counselors from working-class backgrounds may find working with clients from higher social classes difficult. Hernández-Wolfe (2020) noted that counselors from working-class backgrounds can be intimidated by clients who are wealthy and hold social class power over them. These hidden yet powerful social class messages are important to recognize. Counselor educators play an important role in raising students' consciousness of social class socialization and its impact on their work with clients. To understand how social class as a multicultural identity is present, or absent, in the counselor education curriculum, it must first be considered within the context of overall graduate education.

Social Class in Graduate Education

Graduate education in the United States is class education in the United States (Smith et al., 2016). Smith et al. (2016) interviewed 15 poor or working-class graduate students and found participants experienced social class microaggressions in the form of classism in their graduate studies. One participant, for example, echoed the financial burdens of being a working-class graduate student while faculty wrongly assumed everyone was from a middle-class background. The participants were also reluctant to discuss their poor and working-class backgrounds because of exclusionary tendencies and negative views of those from middle-class backgrounds. These types of social class microaggressions create hostile learning environments based on class. hooks (2000) illustrated this poignantly in her writings on the dire need for a class-based perspective in higher education:

Slowly I began to understand fully that there was no place in academe for folks from working-class backgrounds who did not wish to leave the past behind. That was the price of the ticket. Poor students would be welcome at the best institutions of higher learning only if they were willing to surrender memory, to forget the past and claim the assimilated present as the only worthwhile and meaningful reality (pp. 36-37).

hooks (2000) succinctly illustrated the struggles graduate students face in academia by choosing between assimilating to the dominant social class paradigm and losing their roots or facing continual social class microaggressions for holding on to their working-class identity.

Graduate education in counseling is no different. Social class microaggressions are embedded in counselor preparation programs. In a recent study of doctoral counseling

students, O'Hara and Cook (2018) found participants were subjected to public social class microaggressions by faculty members. For instance, one participant was publicly scolded because she advocated for herself to complete a program milestone early to lessen the financial burden. This participant had to choose between upsetting her faculty and facing additional financial burdens. While addressing a diverse social class culture within counselor preparation programs is an important, addressing the intentional practices surrounding social class within multicultural counseling courses is equally important.

Social Class Within Multicultural Pedagogy in Counselor Education

Counselor educators should intentionally include social class in their curriculum to prepare student counselors for an increasingly socially stratified, multicultural society (Das, 1995). Das stated, "Special problems arise in a multicultural, multiethnic, and multiracial society because of racism, discrimination, and *social stratification* [emphasis added], and inequalities of power and access to resources" (1995, p. 50). Despite accreditation standards and the ethical responsibility of counselor educators to infuse culturally relevant teachings surrounding social class into the classroom, social class pedagogy within counseling curricula still needs further development (Clark et al., 2017; Cook & Lawson, 2016; Liu et al., 2007).

Considering the lack of research surrounding social class in counseling journals, it is not surprising that multicultural counseling materials tend not to include social class. Pieterse et al. (2009) analyzed multicultural syllabi from APA- and CACREP-accredited programs and found only 22% mentioned social class or SES, while 87% mentioned racial identity. This finding is worrisome, as counselor educators should incorporate aspects of diversity in their syllabi that "broaden [CITs'] perspective about diversity and aid them in reflecting on their own biases and assumptions" (Association for Counselor Education and Supervision [ACES], 2016, p. 26).

Commonly used textbooks in multicultural counseling courses contain inconsistencies and varying degrees of addressing social class. For instance, Sue and Sue (2016) embedded social class identity throughout their textbook as an intersecting identity for clients and devoted a chapter to social class with a primary focus on poverty. The chapter narrowly addresses social class through constrained objective measures, such as income, occupation, and education. This narrow definition runs counter to the broader conversation surrounding social class needed in counselor education.

In a parallel fashion, Reed and Smith (2014) tackled social class concretely as its own separate identity and focused the conversation primarily through the lens of poverty. Their social justice perspective acknowledges the complexity of social class by addressing systemic inequality issues related to class; however, the narrow focus on poverty stymies a broader conversation on social class in the classroom.

Newton and Erford (2018) devoted a chapter to social class and acknowledged that there are multiple perspectives to conceptualize the construct, which is important in student learning outcomes for student counselors. Further, various social class terms (e.g., poor, middle-class) were delineated, contributing to a greater understanding of the communication styles counselors may encounter in sessions. As with the previous examples, however, the singular construct of poverty dominates the chapter, forcing class discourse towards that narrow funnel.

Hernández-Wolfe (2020) provided possibly the broadest discussion on social class and counseling. The chapter on social class reviews sociological underpinnings of social stratification theories, class culture, and middle-class bias in counseling. The author also discussed Liu et al.'s (2004) research on social class and how counselors can mistakenly assume a client's social class because of the preparation they received in their graduate programs. Despite a broader review on social class, poverty remained the focus of the chapter. However, social class is more complex and

expansive than poverty (Liu, 2011). It is imperative to expand the profession's understanding of social class. Otherwise, multicultural training provided by counselor educators will suffer, impacting counselors' social class competency.

Implications for Practice and Research

Researchers agree there is a need for better social class pedagogy to ensure effective preparation for the next generation of counselors (Barrio Minton et al., 2016; CACREP, 2015; Celinska & Swazo, 2016; Cook & Lawson, 2016; Liu et al., 2004; Liu et al., 2007; Liu, 2011; Zalaquett et al., 2008). Counselor educators should reexamine their practices related to social class, starting with how they teach about the client intake process. Pedagogical practices surrounding intakes need to move beyond traditional measures to better describe social class (Cook et al., 2020). If counselors understand how social class impacts the intake process, they can better engage clients from the start. To that end, counselor educators could give sample intakes addressing financial barriers that may hinder the client's ability to fully engage in the counseling relationship.

Counselor educators also need to work with student counselors to reframe word choices that reflect more inclusive verbiage for individuals from lower class backgrounds. In the counseling room, the linguistic barriers perpetrated by classism can be as real a barrier as the counselor's body language. Because of this, evidence-based practices recommend counselors meet clients where they are, not just in terms of stages of change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1979), but also in their cultural identities, including their social class-based language (Ratts et al., 2016). Counselor educators process with student counselors how their language and vocal communication can serve as a building block or barrier to the counselor-client relationship during supervision in practicum and internship coursework. For instance, counselor educators and supervisors can listen explicitly for how linguistic differences (e.g., vocal cadence, use of specific words, length and

complexity of sentences) between counselors and clients may be enhancing or detracting from the therapeutic relationship. Additionally, language includes the labels used for other aspects of identity, and labels sometimes shift depending on a client's social class milieu (Burnes & Singh, 2016). These aspects of attentiveness to language in context should also be a focus of supervision with student counselors.

Further, counselor educators should examine instructional materials, including their syllabi, to determine how they are addressing social class as well as its intersections with other forms of identity such as race, gender, and sexual orientation. This can be accomplished through infusing more experiential exercises and reflections focused on social class (Newton & Erford, 2018). For instance, experiential exercises could include playing *Beat the Bourgeoisie* (Norris, 2013), a social class simulation game. Reflection assignments could have students create a social class genogram in which they can explore their family's social class history and how their family's social class privilege or oppression contributed to their position in life. Another practical exercise could include having counseling students complete a personal possession and privilege inventory in supervision. Having counseling students reflect on their possessions and privileges when counseling individuals living in poverty brings the context of social class to the forefront. Questions in the inventory could include, but are not limited to, "Did you arrive at your site in reliable transportation?" "Did you wear different clothing on different days for at least a week?" and "Were you able to stay focused in session without having to cope with hunger as a distraction?"

Additionally, counselor educators should revisit how they address social class through textbooks used in multicultural counseling courses. The textbooks cited in this article reveal a general lack of holistic conceptualization of social class. For the most part, the authors imparted pedagogy on social class through the lens of poverty. This narrowly constricted lens does not serve

student counselors well because the dominant upper social class view on poverty is perpetuated. Therefore, counselor educators would do well to supplement textbooks with other kinds of materials, such as podcasts, videos, and journal articles, thereby furthering the complex conversation surrounding social class. For instance, readings from the website classprivilegeinnces.wixsite.com/mysite *The Privilege in our pedagogy: Classism and class privilege in counselor educator* (The Class Privilege Project, n.d.) could be a helpful tool to further the social class conversation with counseling students.

Although the profession has intentionally incorporated discussions surrounding race, ethnicity, and sexuality into their programs overall, the intentional incorporation of social class continues to lag (O'Hara & Cook, 2018). Counselor educators can address this gap by systematically reviewing the multicultural framework of individual components of their counseling programs. For instance, in practicum and internship, are student counselors placed in a wide range of settings that expose them to a varying degree of social classes? In ethics courses, are students learning about their obligation to practice competently with clients from various social class backgrounds? In group counseling courses, are students exploring how communication differences rooted in differing social class worldviews might influence group members in various stages of a group?

Additionally, counselor educators have an ethical duty to examine biases and assumptions regarding their various identities and how these identities impact the learning environment (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2015; Ratts et al., 2016). As with the general population, counselor educators tend to neglect their own social class background, which leads to unintentional social class biases and microaggressions in the learning environment (Cook, 2017). To counter this, counselor educators need to examine their social class biases and assumptions through targeted reflections,

which would develop their social class awareness as they instill this awareness in their preparation programs.

Implications for Counseling Research

Social class is an important construct warranting greater research into counselor preparation (Clark et al., 2017; Cook & Lawson, 2016; Cook & O'Hara, 2019). Social class is usually addressed through the narrow lens of poverty, even though only 11.8% of the United States population lives in poverty (U. S. Census Bureau, 2019). This means 88.2% of the population is not addressed through a social class lens in counseling sessions. Additional research should include how counselor educators incorporate social class into curricula of multicultural counseling courses, and throughout their programs, while broadening the lens of social class beyond poverty. Counselor educators could revisit Vontress' (2011) seminal article on social class in the profession and respond to the call for additional research focus in this important area.

Another possibility is to explore how social class is addressed in career counseling courses specifically. Scholars in career counseling developed models in the 1990s emphasizing multicultural, structural, and systemic barriers that hinder career development for underrepresented and marginalized populations (Lytle et al., 2015). These updated models were a good step in moving away from the dominant white middle-to-upper-class lens, in which individuals have boundless opportunities based on a Protestant work ethic. Despite these recent developments, however, researchers still conflate social class and SES in most studies, while neglecting a holistic conceptualization of the construct in career development (Flores et al., 2017). A more intentional approach to social class and its influence on career development, through a holistic cross-class lens, is needed in the conversation.

Finally, counselor preparation programs should take a hard look at their admission practices. Vontress (2011) argued the profession is homogenous in its social class diversification, mostly comprising middle-class counselors and counselor educators. If other classes, beyond the dominant middle and upper classes, are unintentionally excluded from the table, class homogeneity of the profession will perpetuate. Researchers should explore how social class influences the admission of candidates. For example, how do counselor educators' views of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, which typically provide avenues for poor and working-class students to gain a higher education degree, impact admission to counselor preparation programs? Exploration of implicit biases related to social class and impact on admission processes would shed valuable and critical light on programs' efforts to recruit and retain diverse students, including those from other than middle class backgrounds.

Conclusion

The counseling profession devotes an enormous amount of research to practices in preparing students to become culturally competent counselors; however, attention to social class is largely missing in this exploration. This article highlights the complexity of tackling an elusive construct and barriers to effectively preparing counselors to address social class in the therapeutic relationship. If counselors and counselor educators are to move beyond the initial premise of social class, we must engage all social class populations intentionally and inclusively. By intentionally cultivating social class as a broad, complex identity in multicultural counseling curricula, the profession's goals of inclusivity for all identities will be strengthened. As a result, counselors will facilitate better client outcomes through an intersecting paradigm of both visible and invisible salient identities.

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