

## Liberatory Anti-Oppression in Counselor Education: Infusing Action into Pedagogy

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**Abstract.** In higher education, the experiences of historically marginalized and underrepresented students are often undervalued, challenged, or ignored. Counselor educators must actively advocate within predominantly white, heteronormative, and cisgender-centered training environments by leading initiatives that decolonize the classroom and center liberation. The purpose of this manuscript is to introduce, Liberatory Anti-Oppression in Counselor Education, a culturally responsive pedagogical framework designed to infuse anti-oppressive, antiracist, and liberation-based practices into counselor training. To develop this framework, we conducted a review of peer-reviewed scholarly literature from academic journals. The result of this inquiry is a structured approach for counselor educators to implement liberatory practices in the classroom. We conclude by calling for a shift in the counseling profession toward liberation, offering practical strategies for educators and students alike.

**Keyword:** Marginalized students; Decolonizing the classroom; Culturally responsive pedagogy; Liberatory Anti-Oppression; Counselor education.



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## INTRODUCTION

Instances of inequality and discrimination are persistent throughout the history of the United States (Evans et al., 2021). The oppression of historically marginalized and underrepresented students' can be found in the discrimination evidenced in most institutions including health and mental health care settings (Evans et al., 2021). Instances of institutional and systemic discrimination can be some of the most problematic and pervasive forms of oppression (Evans et al., 2021). Examples of systemic discrimination include disparities in access to quality education, healthcare discrimination leading to premature disease and death, instances of undue police violence targeting historically marginalized and underrepresented individuals and communities, and biased judicial systems supporting white-centered institutional racism (Evans et al., 2020; Hemmings & Evans, 2018).

Continuous exposure to oppressive systems for historically marginalized and

underrepresented populations may lead to trauma which may include physical, psychological and/or cognitive reactions to the distressing event or events (Hemmings & Evans, 2018; Evans et al., 2015). Trauma as a result from institutional and sociopolitical systems can lead to mental health and healthcare issues including anxiety, depression, substance use, heart disease, and early mortality (Evans et al., 2021). Continuous exposure to acts of discrimination can be detrimental to an individual's quality of life. Counselors are implicit if they are unable or unwilling to acknowledge the harm experienced by clients who report experiences of discrimination.

Acts of discrimination can also be identified within higher education, particularly at predominantly white institutions that espouse white-centered, heteronormative, and cisgender norms (PWIs; Grier-Reed & Ajayi, 2019). Examples of discrimination of historically marginalized and underrepresented students in higher education include microaggressions in the

classroom, expectations to understand and apply white, heteronormative, and cisgender-centered perspectives exclusively, and underrepresentation of diverse faculty (American Council on Education, 2021). All too often, the intricacies of diverse groups are overlooked and thus the vast diversity of culture, values, and customs is unappreciated and not addressed in counseling classrooms (Tervalon & Murrya-Garcia, 1998; Whitehead, 2018). One example is the lack of content on worldview, primarily collectivistic identities in counseling texts, to inform the assessment, conceptualization and treatment of clients and the preparation of counseling students who identify as collectivistic (Chan et al., 2021; Thomas, 2013).

Many counseling programs prepare students within a white centered and colonized framework—traditional counseling theories are derived from European colonist principles which lack the intention of combating oppressive systems that contribute to health disparities and exacerbates behavioral health issues (Comas-Diaz & Torres-Rivera, 2020; Singh et al., 2020). Additionally, many counseling theories have been criticized for endorsing heteronormative, Eurocentric, white ideologies for all client populations. This flawed perspective eliminates the voices and experiences for many historically marginalized and underrepresented populations.

Despite this, many counselor education programs also espouse a social justice orientation. Social justice efforts often include recognition of internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic methods of discrimination and how they negatively impact client health and wellness (Evans et al., 2020). This begs the question, how are counselor education programs addressing the intersecting and diverse orientations of counseling students? It is imperative that counselor training explores alternative theories/approaches to address client presenting concerns in our current era.

It is vital for counselor educators to create an educational experience that is inclusive of all students' lived experiences by decolonizing counselor education curriculums and classrooms. Decolonization focuses on disrupting power, privilege, and inequity by dismantling the very policies and practices that keep them in place (Hernández-Wolfe, 2011). Examples may include inputting universal design of learning practices into course design, teaching more contemporary counseling theories that are

inclusive of diverse perspectives, and exploring the role of affirmative counseling practices.

Although counseling professionals and educators may be committed to anti-oppression and can recognize acts of interpersonal discrimination, they are less equipped to recognize and dismantle oppressive systems (Evans et al., 2020). One obvious way that counselors can help to address these issues is through advocacy in the classroom and in counseling practice in the communities for which they reside (Tervalon & Murrya-Garcia, 1998). The purpose of this manuscript is to provide a culturally responsive pedagogical approach that can be infused into a counselor education program to decenter white, heteronormative, cisgender pedagogy and empower historically marginalized and underrepresented students in the classroom. This approach incorporates an Afrocentric focused worldview to inform student learning and counselor practice. A liberatory, anti-oppressive, Afrocentric approach could be appropriate to infuse for all students including historically marginalized and underrepresented students. Students are educated from white-centered philosophies in the classroom and thus all students, regardless of their racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, can benefit from a diverse pedagogical conceptualization. It is our belief that by exposing students to alternative ways of learning and thinking, that they will be better equipped to maintain rapport with clients and achieve counseling goals.

For this manuscript on liberatory anti-oppression in counselor education, the authors employed an integrative review of the existing literature. Our method focused on examining a broad range of peer-reviewed scholarly articles published in high-quality academic journals in counseling and other related fields. We intentionally prioritized sources that reflected diverse epistemologies, particularly those grounded in liberation psychology, decolonialization, and antiracist pedagogy. This process allowed us to synthesize key themes and frameworks from the literature, which informed our combined approach of liberatory anti-oppression counselor education. Through this review, we also developed our conclusions and offered recommendations grounded in both theory and praxis.

### **Anti-Oppression and Liberation**

The term anti-oppression denotes an ideology rooted in action. Whereas the opposite

of racist is often viewed as nonracist, Kendi (2019) suggested that being nonracist simply does not suffice as a solution to combat isms in the United States. Rather, individuals must acknowledge and understand history, privilege, and power; identify issues in power and policies, rather than people; inform others including friends, family, community, society, and oneself; and then take action. In other words, anti-oppression combats discrimination through action. Exhibiting neutrality does not facilitate the fight against discrimination in society, instead it perpetuates harmful mentalities, practices, and policies. Therefore, anti-oppression requires critical consciousness (Freire, 2000), education, advocacy, and social justice action.

In many ways, liberatory counseling is a natural fit with anti-oppression practices. Characterized as both a science and an art, counseling in general, and liberatory counseling in particular, can be conceptualized as a process of affirming human freedom, authenticity, and progress (Chan et al., 2021; Cervantes, 2001; Hansen, 2012). Counselor education would benefit in considering the complexities of the human experience when teaching anti-oppression, as opposed to standardized protocols that lack the intricacies of subjectivity (Singh, 2020).

Validation of the human experience and the notion of irreducibility are foundations of liberatory and humanistic counseling approaches. The client as irreducible is understood to mean human beings are holistic and cannot simply be reduced to lesser parts (Comas-Díaz, & Torres-Rivera, 2020; Hansen et al., 2014). Derived from its focus on human wellness, growth, and development, liberatory counselors and counselor educators recognize the phenomenological, narrative experiences of their clients, students, and communities. As the profession of counseling continues to experience a shift towards theoretical postmodernism, it is becoming more widely supported that clients' presenting struggles are frequently located *within* a larger context and in relation to the environment (Cottone, 2016; Hansen, 2006).

Historically marginalized and underrepresented students continue to experience inequities in academia which may be overwhelmingly influenced by racism, sexism, oppression, and historical trauma (Whitehead, 2018). Not only do these disparities need to be recognized in society, but a culturally responsive

approach must also be implemented to counteract such potential harm in the classroom. To address this, scholars and researchers are recommending an inclusive, decolonization of counselor education and a commitment to anti-oppression (Evans et al., 2020). ). In addition to increasing knowledge, awareness, and skills when working with diverse students, all counselors should also leverage their privilege to dismantle oppression (Arrendondo et al., 1996; Tervalon & Murrya-Garcia, 1998). In this article, a liberatory, culturally responsive anti-oppressive approach for counselor education training and development is presented. Suggestions for counselor educator practices and future researchers are included.

### **Contemporary Barriers to Historically Marginalized and Underrepresented Students**

While injustice occur in many contexts (e.g., homes, communities, and systems), counselor educators have an obligation to specifically examine these inequities within the academic environment. The literature is growing in regard to the experiences of prejudice, discrimination, and racism of historically marginalized and underrepresented students attending PWIs (Grier-Reed & Ajayi, 2019). Since PWIs serve as a microcosm of American culture (Douglas, 2005), determining ways in which historically marginalized and underrepresented students can be affirmed and supported is warranted. In July of 2024, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* identified that one in five undergrads are trained across an elite 102 academic institutions who are all PWI's, despite statues of private, public and for profit (June, 2024). Although counseling programs value diverse student identities, it can be assumed that a large number of counseling students have been trained in PWI institutions at some point in their education warranting a discussion on how counseling programs can decolonize the curriculum to reflect community and client needs.

Furthermore, the ontological experiences of historically marginalized and underrepresented students may include a dual identity, a sense of *twoness* that forces people to subjugate their identity to the expectations of the outside world (Dubois, 1968, Fanon, 1952; Sartre, 1966; 2007). Given that students experience discrepant ontological positions, students of color or otherwise from the margins carry a unique set of circumstances into the

classroom environment. These circumstances demonstrate the need for liberation as a predication to successful learning, thriving (or self-actualizing). In every classroom exists a whole menu of student ontological positions. Each student is essentially exposed into their social circumstances at birth; this includes one's location in time and geography as well as physical and biological makeup. Given this, each classroom must consider and accommodate those embedded in oppressive circumstances (Heidegger, 1962, Roche, 2020).

Some decolonized theories that can guide curriculum development include Critical Race Theory, Relational Cultural Theory, Feminist Theory and Intersectionality (Carbado et al., 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2010; Duffey & Somboddy, 2011; Enns, 2012; Singh, 2020). These theories examine sociopolitical practices that have supported racism, sexism, acculturation and discrimination in the dominant culture (Yao et al., 2019). These strategies include acknowledging the intersection of discrimination and the self; the role of power and privilege in the classroom and clinical practice; embedded white-centered/whiteness in the curriculum; and infusing marginalized perspectives to ensure cultural sensitivity on the curriculum (Haskins & Singh, 2015; Singh et al., 2020). By making use of these strategies, counselors engage in a more complicated sense of simultaneity in conceptualizing the lived experiences of historically marginalized and underrepresented students. By establishing counseling relationships from these principles, counselors can interrupt and mitigate the continued influence of colonial thinking and provide spaces that cultivate liberatory actions and thought (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Vereen et al., 2020; White & Palacios, 2019). In the following section, a liberatory antiracist lens will be discussed and applied to the context of counselor education.

### **Liberatory Anti-Oppression in Counselor Education**

Anti-oppression in counselor education offers a blend of liberation psychology and Afrocentricity to counselor education pedagogy. Liberation psychology highlights the intersectionality of historically marginalized and underrepresented students and works to understand the multiple influences that intersecting identities have on their worldview, relationships, and role as a counselor. By

examining the constructs of privilege, power, and position, counselor educators can advocate for the destruction of barriers, practices, and policies in place in an attempt to decolonize counseling pedagogy and provisions. Liberatory anti-oppression honors, respects, and centers historically marginalized and underrepresented students' experiences by endorsing alternative modes of thinking and learning. Counselor educators subscribing to an anti-oppressive approach may serve as leaders, influencers, disrupters, and accomplices to promote historically marginalized and underrepresented students' growth and development, while providing support and transparency to all students in the classroom.

### **Liberation**

Oppression is defined as "a social construction to create a categorical organization of people and groups within society," (Amadasun & Evnayiro Omorogiuma, 2019, p. 198). Oppression counters intersectionality theory as it is invalidating and demeaning. Oppression can lead to negative health outcomes including race-based trauma, intergenerational trauma, health disparities and exacerbate behavioral health issues (Evans et al., 2021). "Social change movements have always valued critical consciousness, dissatisfaction, and righteous anger over gratitude and cheerfulness," (Becker & Marcek, 2008, p. 597). In these cases, flourishing could be associated with justice and fair treatment. One suggestion is to reconceptualize counselor education classrooms to include ideas of social justice and liberation.

Liberation psychology promotes transformation of the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of mental health disorders in advancing social justice in counseling. Focused on the experience, knowledge, and action of oppressed and historically marginalized populations, liberation counseling calls for the recognition of those impacted by oppression, suggests the recovery of collective memory, and opposes oppression recommending social transformation (Comas & Torres Rivera, 2020). In applying a liberation approach to counseling, issues of power and privilege can be explored and dismantled while individual experience is honored.

Some researchers argue that historically marginalized and underserved communities must be exposed to the realities of oppression and the resilience utilized in addressing it (Constantine &

Sue, 2006). A liberatory approach to anti-oppression is useful to inform counselor educators' practices. Such an approach may fray the edges of systemic racism (and its consequences) and create practice and pedagogy spaces that are safe for all. It is imperative that counselor educators advocate in white, heteronormative, cisgender-centered training environments where historically marginalized and underrepresented students' human experiences are undervalued or ignored (Martinez-Cola, 2020). Institutional and sociopolitical discrimination is demonstrated when students' subjective experiences are dismissed and thereby invalidates the core philosophy of liberation. Instances of institutional racism may extend into the counselor education classroom where historically marginalized and underrepresented students may be expected to assimilate to the colonized conceptualization of counseling and ethics (Ricardson, 2017). Examples of this may include code switching (Du Bois, 1968), assuming an individualized worldview, and expecting students to not integrate components of their intersecting identity into their work as a counselor (American Council on Education, 2021).

Humanistic learning theory, associated with liberation psychology, is the philosophy of applying the theory of humanism to education by promoting student's growth, development, and self-actualization (Purswell, 2019). This approach is applicable to training counselors because this theory is grounded in the existence of each person's unique reality in their subjective world. Additionally, this theory also models a phenomenological perspective for students to extend beyond the classroom in the conceptualization of future clients and clinical practice.

### **Afrocentricity**

An African-centered paradigm, or Afrocentricity, is a philosophical ideology that promotes the entire existence of individuals of African descent including the worldviews, experiences, cultures, values, and history of its people (Asante, 2003). When used to inform anti-oppression, Afrocentricity honors existence by restoring African thought, respecting African worldviews, and empowering individuals of African descent (Nobles, 2007). Afrocentricity centralizes the purview of African Americans while also advocating for the moral enhancement

of society (Whitehead, 2018). This counters a white-centered approach to the classroom and allows for innovative ideas and expressions to be explored.

It is necessary to incorporate African-centered teaching into counselor education programs (Whitehead, 2018). This atmosphere fosters holistic development, opportunities for growth, empathetic understanding, and organizing counseling knowledge based upon one's subjective experience (Purswell, 2019). An anti-oppression learning environment cultivates increased awareness about oneself that may translate to a better understanding of others. Counselor educators and mentors are attuned to students' diverse backgrounds, experiences, and frames of reference. "Students who feel that faculty treat them with respect, give them honest feedback about their ability, challenge them intellectually and give them emotional support are less likely to perceive a negative campus climate or prejudice," (Cress, 2008, p. 104). This approach promotes transparency and trust in the classroom and invites difficult conversations while fostering growth and understanding of the equally valid experiences of others (Purswell, 2019).

Implementing an African-centered learning theory into the counselor education classroom can have a meaningful impact on all students' learning processes (Asante, 2003). Exploring and discovering self-acceptance, open-mindedness, self-awareness, and experiencing interpersonal counseling dynamics (i.e., empathy and genuineness) is valuable for personal and professional development. These qualities can also advantageously promote acceptance, connection, and compassion of white students toward their historically marginalized and underrepresented peers, and vice versa. Providing students with a safe and nonjudgmental space to get acquainted with their own biases, values, and opinions, and how these affect the world around them, is an integral piece of the counselor education journey. This inclusive environment not only invites students to acknowledge these strongly held beliefs (Purswell, 2019), but also to challenge and adjust entire belief systems that may contradict the humanistic ideology. This is particularly relevant in today's society where discrimination, and oppression are so deeply ingrained into the American culture. Counseling faculty can integrate African-centered learning theory to

teach the foundational principles of humanism and anti-oppression in counselor education programs.

### **Anti-Oppression**

Teaching African-Centered, liberatory anti-oppression ideologies in counselor education corresponds with a holistic framework of students, clients, and society as a whole. For counselors and counselor educators, teaching from an anti-oppression oriented approach may better align with their philosophy of people, education, and the world around them (Purswell, 2019).

Counselor leaders who may be perceived as disruptors, co-conspirators, and/or accomplices, and within higher education, studying anti-oppression may be perceived as controversial (Essed, 2013; Richardson, 2017). For these reasons, it is imperative that white counselor educators leverage their privilege in order to deliver anti-oppression, liberatory and African-centered humanistic practices in the classroom. This must include an increased recognition and advocacy of institutional barriers that impede historically marginalized and underrepresented student program progress.

Counselor educators are in a position to provide the tools necessary for students to mitigate the internalization of colonial ideologies exerted upon them. Counseling professions continue to deepen their understanding of the nature of power in society as foundational to a community's portrait of access, opportunity, and well-being. Furthermore, being of marginalized social status creates a complex terrain from which youth must thrive. Colonialism is characterized by systemic subordination of marginalized cultures in an effort to coerce the adoption of dominant values (Singh et al., 2020; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2015). For students, colonialism can encroach on wellness through socialized and enforced narratives of normalcy that become internalized.

### **A Combined Approach**

The ideology of liberation, anti-oppression and African-centered approaches to complex characteristics and values such as the imprecise understanding of an individual's humanness in the world (Brady-Amoon, 2011). This integration allows for an ongoing developmental process of self-actualization and self-acceptance. An ideological foundation of anti-oppression describes the impossibility of comprehending truth as it pertains to human life

and experience. This aligns with the notions of subjective experiences and individual interpretation including the recognition of truth as opposed to absolute truth (Hansen et al., 2014). While the study of liberation values an individual's worldview and their existence in the world both as an entity and in relationship to others, the infusion of anti-oppression also promotes a call to action. Solidarity is safety. Through listening to our student's experiences, we can learn about the institutional and structural harm and work to dismantle it within our institutions and structures (Drake, 2023).

Liberation offers an ideology to address social justice and antiracism in counseling by instilling a philosophical emphasis on the context and nature of diverse human experience (Grier-Reed & Ajayi, 2019). Encompassing values of insight, introspection, and the essentiality of human relationships, humanism advocates for growth potential, transformation, and adaptation to an evolving world. The way in which individuals make meaning from subjective experiences is influenced by sociocultural contexts and interpersonal interactions (Hansen, 2012). To not consider the multitude of contexts in which human beings live would be an oversimplified and reductionist view of human experience. Anti-oppression and liberation are harmonious in that human's subjectivity provides the lens of understanding individual experience and the world itself. Most importantly, anti-oppression ideology subscribes to the notion of ceasing suffering and oppression by way of individual freedom for all (Wilks & Ratheal, 2010).

An emphasis on anti-oppression incorporates liberation psychology and Afrocentricity to provide implications for counselor education pedagogy. All three ideologies offer its own theoretical contribution which can be simultaneously braided to provide a unique harmony in the classroom. Liberation highlights the growth, meaning, and purpose of students' subjective worldviews. Anti-oppression demands social justice action to counteract racist practices and policies. Afrocentricity illuminates the entirety of existence to foster growth and the celebration of diversity. The interwoven fabric of this combined approach guides counselor educators to honor historically marginalized and underrepresented student backgrounds and experiences; decenter white pedagogy; and act as leaders and

coconspirators to dismantle oppression. Furthermore, anti-oppression provides implications for counselor education pedagogy which includes educators as growth cultivators while learning from students and mitigating barriers along the way. Counselor educators must center anti-oppression to honor and respect historically marginalized and underrepresented students, as opposed to further marginalization or socialization into the centralized culture. Last, these implications celebrate the diversity of student worldviews and advocate for the necessary policies to enhance their learning and development.

### **Strategies**

An example of a liberatory, anti-oppressive approach to pedagogy includes the use of counterspaces for students and faculty of color (Case & Hunter, 2012). This space is utilized to decrease distress, process thoughts and emotions, and encourage any person of color in the academic community who has experienced marginalization (Grier-Reed & Ajayi, 2019). It comes as no surprise that anti-oppression ideals can be applied to this concept of counterspaces in facilitation of a safe environment that promotes empathy, meaning making, and social support (Grier-Reed & Ajayi, 2019).

Counterspaces could serve as one of many approaches to promote the liberation of students of color. Likewise, a liberatory philosophy can set the stage for historically marginalized and underrepresented students to emphasize strengths and wholeness in the face of oppression by affirming experiences, cultivating meaning, and promoting resilience. Applying concepts from Comas Diaz and Torres Rivera's text *Liberation Psychology: Theory, Method, Practice and Social Justice* (2020) similar to clinical spaces, counselor educators could reimagine the counseling classroom to include exploration of historical memory, courageous conversations, addressing complicit attitudes in systems, confronting oppression in the classroom and institution and establishing shared community values. These suggestions help to destabilize existing power structures and invites students to connect with the class material in meaningful ways. Thus, the emphasis is on co-creating different experiences for our clients and communities (Drake, 2023).

Another powerful liberatory strategy in counselor education is the bookend approach (Lee et al., 2025; Wright et al., 2022). Lee and

colleagues applied this pedagogical method in the context of a counseling theories course grounded in liberation psychology, which can be utilized for both individual lessons and the broader course arc. Students begin with foundational readings on liberation psychology, white supremacy, and colonialism to cultivate a critical lens for understanding how colonial ideologies influence counseling theories. The central portion of the course involves engaging with traditional theories while critically examining the embedded biases and power dynamics within each. The course culminates with students actively re-envisioning these theories as liberatory tools, applying their reimagined frameworks to case conceptualizations to integrate anti-oppressive praxis. Whether applied to a particular lesson or course curriculum, the bookend approach begins with critical foundation setting and ends with reflective or applied activities that requires students to engage with the course material in ways that resist oppression and center liberation.

### **METHOD**

This study employed a systematic literature review approach to develop a liberatory anti-oppression pedagogical framework within counselor education. The authors conducted a comprehensive review of peer-reviewed scholarly literature from academic journals, focusing on themes related to critical pedagogy, liberatory education, and anti-oppressive practices in counselor training. Sources were selected based on thematic relevance, scholarly credibility, and their contribution to the theoretical and practical development of transformative educational approaches. The review process involved identifying, selecting, analyzing, and synthesizing key findings from previous studies to construct a framework that infuses actionable strategies into counselor education pedagogy.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Due to institutional and systemic patterns, sometimes the general population may prefer for things to *remain as they are* versus change because it is comfortable. The issue with that is some of our systems are inherently discriminatory. By keeping things the way they always were, this can lead to continued oppression. Given that white-centered

frameworks frequently do not meet the subjective needs of historically marginalized and underrepresented individuals, families, and communities, the counseling field must implement a humanistic antiracist approach to better appreciate the unique worldview of this community (Martinez-Cola, 2020; Whitehead, 2018). The strengths of all culturally diverse students can be emphasized and cultivated. In addition to focusing on historically marginalized and underrepresented students' strengths, it is imperative to examine the multiple dynamics of distress faced including discrimination and oppression (Nobles, 2007).

For counselors in training to appreciate and comprehend individual experiences, it is essential for counselor educators to view them through a subjective lens (Hansen, 2012). After all, the diverse perspectives of students cannot be addressed through simplistic and reductionistic frameworks. Rather, counselor educators must embrace the intricacies and complexities of human beings and their existence in the world as we work to dismantle oppression and implement antiracist pedagogy in counselor training (Hansen, 2012).

The relationship among humanism, multiculturalism, and social justice is evident in the counseling profession (Brady-Amoon, 2011). These orientations collectively provide an understanding of the social, cultural, and political influences on human life. Specifically, the commonalities highlight important issues concerning equity, advocacy, and justice. Applying this concept of integrated humanism to counseling and counselor education offers great potentiality to the field (Brady-Amoon, 2011). Inside the counselor education classroom, humanistic anti-oppression honors the marginalized experiences of students, challenges students to step out of their comfort zones, and educates students to advocate for social justice.

This influence of humanistic anti-oppression can promote change at the individual, community, and societal levels. Anti-oppressive counselors and counselor educators honor individuals' perspectives which are informed by culture and societal norms, to name a few. Counselors and counselor educators are ethically and morally responsible to combat the many difficulties marginalized students might experience. These efforts are focused on eliminating inequities and the unjust systems in which they exist (Brady-Amoon, 2011).

Maintaining an anti-oppressive orientation is beneficial in order to holistically understand the experiences of marginalized students and communities. This emphasis on individual experience is particularly pertinent when stressors are caused by racism, sexism, discrimination, and oppression. Thus, anti-oppression centers the significance and meaning of historically marginalized and underrepresented students' experiences while advocating for social justice in an oppressive world.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

It is understood that social systems at birth can be stratified by identity and expressed through structures of power (Comas-Díaz & Torres-Rivera, 2020). However, the process of self-actualization and self-definition must first involve the freedom to pursue it. The ontological givens of historically marginalized and underrepresented students are predicated on the need for liberation prior to self-actualization (Du Bois, 1968; Fanon, 1967; Vereen et al., 2017). A liberatory, anti-oppressive framework in counselor education offers students an opportunity to combat the traditional white centered and colonial teachings in counselor education.

As Torres-Rivera (2020) outlined, liberatory psychology encourages counselor educators to train students to reconsider the purpose of counseling itself—shifting toward practices that honor the recollection of historical memory, affirm the sovereignty of clients to claim and share their truths, and challenge complicity within counselors and systemic structures. By positioning the client within their broader community and naming the roles of oppression and colonialism, students are called to elevate their consciousness and intentionally dismantle existing power differentials. These practices not only transform the counselor's perspective but also invite future counselors to become active participants in social justice and advocacy.

To operationalize this liberatory anti-oppression framework, the ten core principles of anti-oppressive practice can guide counselor educators and students alike (Peters & Luke, 2022). These include developing critical consciousness by engaging in reflexivity and unlearning the constructs of power and privilege.

They involve centering the marginalized individuals, practicing wellness with compassion, and creating brave spaces built on trust and community. Further, anti-oppressive practice demands shared goal setting, deconstructing oppression through broaching and accountability, and identifying systemic barriers. It culminates in advocacy through collective action steps and the redistribution of sociocultural and political privilege and opportunity. Together, these principles provide a foundation for transforming the classroom into a space of liberation, justice, and healing, preparing students to become proactive counselors in the field who actively challenge systems of oppression and work towards liberation.

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