Social Justice Plan
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In my practice as a professional counselor, I subscribe to the American Counseling Association *Code of Ethics* (2014), which mandates me to actively participate in social justice initiatives for the marginalized in creating a more equitable society. As an emerging counselor educator and leader I believe it is both a privilege and a duty to engage in social justice efforts to establish equity for all. My conceptualization of social justice draws on Lee’s (2007) definition which states “that all people have a right to equitable treatment, support for their human rights and a fair allocation of societal resources, … for educators … [this] implies personal and professional conduct that opposes all forms of discrimination and oppression” (p. 1). The ethical and moral obligations I have as a professional counselor align with my identity as a Christian. Jesus, the embodiment of love, calls me to be His hands and feet by loving others, unconditionally. I am instructed to “speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute [and] speak up and judge fairly; defend[ing] the rights of the poor and needy” (Proverbs 31:8-9, New International Version). Therefore, I believe my personal and professional lives complement one another as I participate in social justice initiatives. The following social justice action plan is based on Lee’s (2007) five action steps.

**Explore Life Meaning and Commitment**

I believe that my role as a counselor is based on the holistic-wellness model, which involves me listening and responding to the hurts and challenges of clients. I seek to utilize established best practices and empirically supported treatments in efforts to alleviate pain while providing clients with access to resources, and allowing them to overcome and/or cope with difficulties in life. I believe that my clients and students are of inherent value and worth; developmentally, they come with certain preconceived beliefs and values that may differ from...
and/or contribute to their limited views of society. My role as a counselor and counselor educator is to inform them with the hope that their worldview is expanded allowing them to tolerate ambiguity and develop emotional complexity. I believe that I am both an active agent of change in society, directly challenging and/or intellectually engaging the status quo while simultaneously equipping others with the tools necessary to do likewise. This results in me broadening my worldview of society as I seek to establish equity for all people, while training clients and students to become social justice advocates in furthering the call for equity. In so doing, I earnestly believe that I am “committed to fostering and supporting a society that is more enlightened, just and humane through my life and work” (Lee, 2007, p. 1).

**Explore Personal Privilege**

In relation to personal cultural privilege, I believe that I am less likely to experience oppression due to my unearned privilege being a straight male of Chinese and East Indian descent in a society that enforces patriarchy, where males are encouraged to hold positions of leadership. Growing up in North American society, I also enjoy unearned privileges by virtue of being of lighter complexion, since our society idolizes people groups with lighter skin tones. Privilege also comes from growing up in a middle class family based on socioeconomic status in a society where money matters, and having the opportunity to earn/afford an education from kindergarten to graduate school, since education is a valued commodity in society. Our society, and the field of counseling have become more open to hiring ethnic minority faculty, so being male and of Asian ancestry is helpful in me securing jobs post graduation in a field that is predominately Caucasian and female. By using my unearned privilege being an educated and middle class ethnic minority male counselor/educator, I am uniquely positioned to exert influence in a male dominant society, and exploit my cultural privilege with the intent of
promoting “equity, human rights, and a fair allocation of societal resources” (Lee, 2007, p.1) by encouraging businesses and schools to hire and/or partner with people of different genders, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups.

**Explore the Nature of Oppression**

According to Lee (2007), “counseling for social justice must be based on an understanding of the nature of oppression. Whenever people are denied access and equity that ensure full participation in the life of a society they experience oppression” (p. 2). Reflecting on the impact of oppression in my life and work, I believe that I have been a victim of oppression. I was bullied in Guyana by African children at school because the political party in power was predominantly African and encouraged racial tension between Africans and Indians. I was also bullied by Caucasian Canadian students when I first moved to Canada in 2004, and made fun of the color of my skin and being from the lower middle class. On the other hand, I believe that I have perpetuated oppression in a few ways, being educated and from the middle class, I have found myself consciously and unconsciously judging others as having less value because they were poorer/richer and/or less educated. I also find myself being more judgmental of African and Caucasian people groups due to my earlier educational experiences of being bullied by African and Caucasian students. As I have matured personally and as a professional, I believe that I am uniquely positioned to exert my authority/power in just and unjust ways. I cannot recall acting unjustly based on my personal or professional authority or power. However, I am choosing to surround myself and be open to feedback from respectable, and loving mentors/peers should this abuse of power arise, and I hope to be humble enough to take corrective action.
Work to Become Multiculturally Literate

Growing in my identity as a counselor/educator, involves me becoming “committed to living cultural diversity as a reality rather than experiencing it as an abstraction” (Lee, 2007, p. 2). This involves me adopting a lifestyle that challenges me to become multiculturally literate through experiencing with the intent of understanding the multifaceted nature of multiculturalism. I hope to increase my multicultural literacy by seeking to actively gain knowledge of various ethnic groups (past and present), and making it a priority to visit different places, and meet and learn from various people groups (nationally and internationally). Multicultural literacy will also involve me spending time reviewing newspapers, periodicals, and literature from varied cultural groups, and expanding my understanding by participating in different cultural experiences. It might also involve me learning a new language, and/or participating in the lifelong endeavor of encouraging religious/spiritual tolerance (Lee, 2007).

Establish a Personal Social Justice Compass

Lee (2007) encourages counselors/educators to develop a set of personal principles and ideals expressing and guiding our commitment to social justice, because they “provide a moral compass to guide both … life and work” (p. 2). Documents I choose to use as my compass, influencing my thinking as a counselor/educator include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1984), which establishes universal principles founded on freedom, justice, and peace; the American Counseling Association’s Ethical Codes (ACA, 2014); the Advocacy Competencies developed by the American Counseling Association’s Counselors for Social Justice Division (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2003); and the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies developed by the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (Ratts et al., 2015). The reason for subscribing to these documents

Comment [4]: Excellent – it is important to have involvement and aspirations for competence at these levels, particularly as a CES.
as my compass is because they “embody the essence of social justice ideals and principles” (Lee, 2007). I hope to utilize these documents as guides in my personal and professional actions related to social justice and advocacy in the field of counseling.
References


