

Introduction to our Curriculum: Counseling Theories through a Liberation Psychology Lens

This curriculum on Counseling Theories is in response to the Curriculum and Praxis Presidential Initiative launched by Amy L. Reynolds, Ph.D. , the President of the Society of Counseling Psychology (SCP; Division 17, American Psychological Association) in December 2021. As part of the initiative, 13 curriculum groups worked toward “transform[ing] what we do and how we do it within SCP so we can create an inclusive and liberatory Counseling Psychology” (Reynolds, 2021). All the 13 curriculum groups were invited to “critically examine and deconstruct how various competencies, courses, and content are taught, how we socialize our students, and then reimagine, dream, and reconstruct new and transformative ways to teach and train.”

Specifically, as the Counseling Theories Group, we took seriously the criticisms that decolonization must include the repatriation of land (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Thus, we chose a liberation psychology lens over decolonization to interrogate counseling theories, as a more achievable goal.

We met through virtual meetings between January 2021 and April 2023. During this period, one member completed a doctorate, two changed jobs, and one had a baby! Meetings tended to occur biweekly, and we had a core group of 7 people representing students, faculty, practitioners and intergenerational, ethnic, racial and sexual identities.

Our first few meetings focused on our own process. We explored our own positionalities and discussed how they impacted how we took up space in our meetings. Despite some initial hesitations, we functioned well as a cohesive group, and members expressed how uplifting and inspiring it was to speak with a group that cared about these issues. We strived to embody these values and practiced them as we built the curriculum together. We tried to live the liberation approach in our meetings, so that our group was a microcosm of what we hoped for the classroom experience.

The group was influenced by Dr. Reynolds’s suggestion at the CCPTP conference (Reynolds, 2022, March) that teaching practices use a bookend approach which requires that course content be interrogated with a critical lens both before and after teaching the material. We applied that approach within the counseling theories course more broadly and within each module. Applying the bookend approach to the course, the first few weeks of the course introduces the liberation psychology framework. The course culminates in a final project integrating liberation psychology into counseling theories. Bookend inquiries within each module include the following questions:

- How do the values and goals of this theory support the hegemonic ideology?
- How might we re-envision this theory using liberation psychology?

We reflected on a liberation approach to the process of the class, which integrates somatic experiences, emotions, the interpersonal process, and classroom enactments of sociopolitical systems. And we recommend attending to the likely emotional impact of the material,

destigmatizing and creating space for emotional responses and conflict, allowing emotions to inform the learning process, and incorporating grounding activities.

We created material that can be used in introductory as well as advanced theory or practicum courses, as we generated 23 modules overall. We provide specific suggestions for the first three classes, which covers liberation psychology, the socio-political nature of counseling, and the role of theories and critical reflection of evidence-based practice. We also provide suggested text for the start to a syllabus. In the theory specific modules, we strove to offer articles or information related to historical context, liberation critiques of theories, and the application of theories with a variety of populations. We also provided multimedia resources in some modules. The modules are designed for instructors' use, assuming that they will want to read and select materials for use.

The group brainstormed theories that they thought should be included and/or theories that have been traditionally taught in counseling and clinical programs. The practitioner in the group added theories that are not traditionally taught in academic programs and are primarily available through continuing education workshops. Praxis group collaborators volunteered for theory modules that they felt they had backgrounds in. This group's members rejected the white supremacist value of exploitive productivity and thus decided to focus on balancing our multiple roles, work responsibilities, self-care, and community care in addition to creating and envisioning a liberated syllabus. Therefore, there are meaningful theories that are not included in the modules. However, we encourage others who are interested in including other modules to contribute and add to our collective knowledge.

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