

Counseling Theories through a Liberation Psychology Lens

Sample Text for Beginning of a Syllabus

Course Description:

This course is designed to expose students to counseling and psychotherapy theories. In this course, we are acknowledging the impact of white supremacy and colonialism on the way psychology has developed, disseminated, and taught theories of emotional development and well-being. We intentionally want to unpack, analyze, and re-envision whether and how to apply counseling and psychotherapy theories to broader communities. We are looking to introduce and amplify voices that are often not included, and sometimes specifically excluded, from psychology and theories courses (e.g., memoirs, literary and video resources). To achieve these goals, we are taking a liberation psychology lens to critically analyze major theoretical approaches to psychotherapy and counseling. It is important to recognize that this is the **beginning** of the work involved to truly liberate our approach to clinical work and well-being and students are encouraged to continue this critical analysis beyond this course.

Class Location:

[Optional: Share information with students about your institution's history and land location and history of colonialism. If you do this, please provide additional resources. In some cases, these instructions can be performative, and so we encourage a history deep-dive and consultation with communities in relationship with the university.]

Student Learning Objectives (options in addition to your pre-existing counseling theories objectives):

Students will be able to:

1. Identify and describe hegemonic ideas in society, psychology, and counseling theories.
2. Critically evaluate the contributions and limitations of each counseling theory from a liberation psychology perspective.
3. Compare and contrast the major theoretical approaches in the field of counseling psychology through a liberation psychology lens.

Teaching Strategies:

Earlier in the course, you will learn about hegemonic ideology and liberation psychology as a framework to liberate from the oppressive structures reinforced by hegemonic ideology. During the course, while discussing each of the theories, we will expect you to take a bookend approach by first examining how the values and goals of the theory support hegemonic ideas and concluding with re-envisioning the theory from a liberatory framework.

Course Expectations:

Everyone in this class is a cultural being with a set of interactive identities that brings privilege and/or marginalization, on both the interpersonal and structural level (e.g. education, healthcare). Systems of oppression permeate all spaces, including the classroom. Acknowledging the reality of this oppression, practicing self-awareness around power and behavior, and seeking to repair mistakes are collective responsibilities held by all class participants.

Addressing psychological and sociocultural topics can elicit a range of emotions, especially based on our own personal and cultural histories. In this course, first be mindful of your emotions, body sensations, and thoughts, and notice how they inform your understanding of the material. You are encouraged to do some grounding before class, and sometimes meditations and grounding will be offered. We will work to create a container where you can express and process your emotions. However, when there are times that such is not possible, you may express your emotions without having to explain tears or other non-verbal behaviors. Conflict is a normal part of engaging in difficult dialogues. You are encouraged to stay engaged in conflictual conversations because processing our experiences together is a step towards community-based healing.

Week 1- Setting the Stage

- **Community Guidelines/Setting the Stage**
- **In Class Activities:**
 - Social Identity Map: A Reflexivity Tool for Practicing Explicit Positionality in Critical Qualitative Research-
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1sUVkFqCG9xaXtATqiH75S374Bh_oS9ih
 - Mindfulness/breathing at end of class

Week 2- Liberation Psychology

Readings (to be completed prior to Week 2 class)

- Martín-Baró, Aron, Adrienne, & Corne, Shawn. (1994). *Writings for a liberation psychology*. Harvard University Press. - Chapters 1 and 2
- Menakem. (2017). *My grandmother's hands : racialized trauma and the pathway to mending our hearts and bodies*. Central Recovery Press.- Chapters 1, 3 and 4
 - Ch 1: Your Body and Blood (23 pgs)
 - Ch 3: Body to Body, Generation to Generation (18 pgs)
 - Ch 4: European Trauma and the Invention of Whiteness (9 pgs)

- Stoddart. (2007). Ideology, hegemony, discourse : A critical review of theories of knowledge and power. *Social Thought & Research*, 28, 191–225.
- Culturally humility blog
 - Niessen-Lie, H. A. (February, 2020). Humility and self-doubt are hallmarks of a good therapist. <https://aeon.co/ideas/humility-and-self-doubt-are-hallmarks-of-a-good-therapist>
- Katz, J. H. (1985). The Sociopolitical Nature of Counseling. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 13(4), 615–624. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000085134005>

Week 3: Evidence-Based Practice

Readings (to be completed prior to Week 3 class)

- Friedlander, M. L., Pieterse, A. L., & Lambert, J. E. (2012). *Theories of counseling*. In N. Fouad, J. Carter, & L. Subich (Eds). APA handbook of counseling psychology. (pp. 31-58). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- French, B. H., Lewis, J. A., Mosley, D. V., Adames, H. Y., Chavez-Dueñas, N. Y., Chen, G. A., & Neville, H. A. (2020). Toward a psychological framework of radical healing in communities of color. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 48(1), 14–46. <https://doi-org.proxy.mul.missouri.edu/10.1177/0011000019843506>
- Cushman, P. (2002). How psychology erodes personhood. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 22(2), 103–113. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0091217>
- APA Evidence-Based Practice
- Other potential explanations of “what is theory” in indigenous or other communities
 - <https://www.fourdirectionsteachings.com/interactive.html>
 - <https://www.fourdirectionsteachings.com/>
 - Healing is through the holistic lens of the medicine wheel...the "medicine" we use and the "diagnosis comes from the medicine wheel (pan Native in North America)

The remaining weeks will focus on specific theories (instructors can choose which theories to include). See the folders on the Drive.

The following are sample questions and in-class exercises that can be used in each module (some modules may have additional exercises/questions):

Bookend Questions:

Opening Questions:

- How do the values and goals of this theory support the hegemonic ideology? (Specifically, what is the ideology/ideologies that is/are supported by this theory?)

- How do the ideas in these readings subvert or problematize hegemonic ideology? (Specifically, which ideology/ideologies is/are problematized?)

Closing Question:

- How would you re-envision this theory to be liberatory?

Clinical Application Exercise:

Provide a vignette to the class.

- How would you apply the ideas from this theory and the readings (i.e., specifically, the decolonial/liberatory ways of thinking about this theory) to the case?
- How would applying these ideas deepen your understanding?
- How might they inform interventions? Specifically, what would interventions look like?
- What are some limitations or gaps in the application of this theory to the case and how might you fill in the gaps?

Potential Course Assignments

- Applying liberatory framework to a theory (transforming a theory) and applying it to a case conceptualization
- Self-reflection/Personal Story Paper: This is a personal historical recovery process to facilitate a *personal* connection to a liberatory framework. What is your historical context/ancestors (your before), current context (your during), and your future context/descendants (your after)? What is your personal story and connection to liberation psychology? How does this shape your view of healing and liberation?
 - This can be worked on throughout the semester as the student continues to reflect.
 - It can be in a google document that is shared with the instructor.