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Person-centered conceptualization of multiculturalism and social justice in counseling

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ABSTRACT

Person-centered therapy's cross-cultural relevance and nondirective stance have been doubted and challenged in counseling and social justice literature. In order to incorporate multiculturalism and social justice advocacy into effective and ethical practice, it is critical for person-centered counselors to be able to conceptualize, understand, and serve social justice issues through a person-centered lens. First, we present a brief overview of the person-centered dialogue related to multiculturalism and social justice advocacy in counseling. Then, we offer a conceptualization of several social justice-related issues impacting clients using person-centered terminology and philosophy in an effort to increase understanding. Lastly, we share perspectives on how person-centered counselors serve as social justice advocates within and outside of the direct counseling relationship. We incorporate multicultural, ethical, and legal considerations throughout the discussion.

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La pertinence interculturelle et l'attitude non-directive de la thérapie centrée sur la personne ont été mises en doute et contestées dans la littérature sur le counseling et la justice sociale. Afin d'inclure la cause du multiculturalisme et de la justice sociale dans des pratiques efficaces et éthiques, il est essentiel que les conseillers centrés sur la personne soient capables de conceptualiser, de comprendre et de servir les problèmes de justice sociale dans une perspective centrée sur la personne. Nous présentons tout d'abord un bref aperçu du discours centré sur la personne relatif à la défense du multiculturalisme et de la justice sociale dans le counseling. En utilisant une terminologie et une philosophie centrées sur la personne pour en améliorer la compréhension, nous proposons ensuite une conceptualisation de plusieurs problèmes liés à la justice sociale et qui ont une incidence sur les clients. Enfin, nous partageons des points de vue sur la manière dont les conseillers centrés sur la personne se positionnent en défenseurs de la justice sociale dans et en dehors de la relation directe de counseling. Nous

intégrons des considérations multiculturelles, éthiques et juridiques tout au long de la discussion.

Personzentrierte Konzeptualisierung und Multikulturalität und soziale Gerechtigkeit in der Beratung

Die kulturübergreifende Bedeutung Personzentrierter Therapie und ihre nicht-direktive Haltung wurde sowohl in der Beratungsliteratur als auch in Literatur zu sozialer Gerechtigkeit bezweifelt und in Frage gestellt. Um Multikulturalität und die Befürwortung sozialer Gerechtigkeit in wirksame und ethische Praxis zu integrieren, ist es für Personzentrierte Fachleute entscheidend, in der Lage zu sein, Themen von sozialer Gerechtigkeit durch eine personzentrierte Linse zu konzeptualisieren, zu verstehen und anzubieten. Zuerst geben wir einen kurzen Überblick zum personzentrierten Dialog, der sich mit Multikulturalität und der Befürwortung sozialer Gerechtigkeit befasst. Dann bieten wir eine Konzeptualisierung verschiedener Themen an, die mit sozialer Gerechtigkeit zusammenhängen, indem wir Klienten mit personzentrierter Terminologie und Philosophie beeinflussen, im Bemühen, das Verstehen zu vertiefen. Schliesslich berichten wir von Perspektiven dazu, wie Personzentrierte Beratungspersonen als Befürwortende sozialer Gerechtigkeit innerhalb und ausserhalb der direkten Beratungsbeziehung dienen. Wir integrieren multikulturelle, ethische und gesetzliche Überlegungen in die gesamte Diskussion.

Conceptualização Centrada na Pessoa do Multiculturalismo e Justiça Social em Counseling

A relevância transcultural e a atitude não diretiva da Terapia Centrada na Pessoa foi colocada em questão e desafiada, na literatura de counseling e de justiça social. De modo a incorporar o multiculturalismo e a defesa da justiça social numa prática eficaz e ética, é fundamental que os terapeutas centrados na pessoa sejam capazes de conceptualizar, compreender e servir assuntos relacionados com a justiça social através de uma lente centrada na pessoa. Em primeiro lugar, apresentamos um breve panorama do diálogo centrado na pessoa relacionado com o multiculturalismo e a defesa da justiça social em terapia. A seguir, propomos uma conceptualização de diversos assuntos relacionados com justiça que têm impacto sobre clientes que usam terminologia e filosofia centrada na pessoa num esforço de aumentar o seu entendimento. Por fim, partilhamos perspetivas acerca de como os terapeutas centrados na pessoa funcionam como defensores da justiça social, dentro como fora da relação terapêutica direta. Ao longo da discussão, incorporamos considerações multiculturais, éticas e legais.

Conceptualización Centrada en la Persona del multiculturalismo y la justicia en Counseling

La relevancia intercultural de la terapia centrada en la persona y su postura no directiva han sido cuestionadas y desafiadas en la literatura sobre counseling y justicia social. Para incorporar la defensa del multiculturalismo y la justicia social en la práctica efectiva y ética, es fundamental que los counselors centrados en la persona puedan conceptualizar, comprender y atender los problemas de justicia social a través de una lente centrada en la persona. Primero, presentamos una breve descripción del diálogo centrado en la persona relacionado con el multiculturalismo y la defensa de la justicia social en el asesoramiento de counseling. Luego, ofrecemos una conceptualización de varios problemas relacionados con la justicia social que impactan a los clientes utilizando terminología y filosofía centradas en la persona en un esfuerzo por aumentar la comprensión. Por último, compartimos perspectivas sobre cómo los counselors centrados en la persona sirven como defensores de la justicia social dentro y fuera de la relación de asesoramiento directo. Incorporamos consideraciones multiculturales, éticas y legales a lo largo de la discusión.

Considered a fifth force in counseling (Ratts, 2009), incorporating social justice into counseling and counselor education is essential (Chang, Crethar, & Ratts, 2010). Counselors are responsible for expanding their counselor identity to include a social justice advocacy role by implementing social justice advocacy strategies and interventions (Ratts & Hutchins, 2009). However, many counselors may experience difficulty aligning their current theoretical paradigm with a social justice paradigm (Torres-Harding, Steele, Schulz, Taha, & Pico, 2014). Few resources exist to help counselors to conceptualize multiculturalism and social justice advocacy within the context of, rather than additive onto, their established theoretical approaches to counseling, such as person-centered theory.

Partially due to misinterpretations of the nondirective orientation in classical person-centered theory equating to inactivity on part of the person-centered therapist (Bozarth, 2012), critics of person-centered theory demonstrate difficulty conceptualizing how a person-centered therapist could be an active social advocate (Elliott & Freire, 2007; Kensit, 2000). Person-centered therapists are, however, certainly not inactive in the client-counselor relationship, actively and consistently attuning to the experiences of their clients, possessing unconditional positive regard for their client, and conveying genuinely their experience in relationship with their client (Rogers, 1951). In an effort to maintain theoretical consistency and be optimally effective, it is critical that person-centered counselors consider how to conceptualize social justice issues through a person-centered theoretical lens.

Multiculturalism and social justice in counseling

The 2010 special issue of *Counselor Education and Supervision* called upon counselors to be active in incorporating social justice advocacy within their scope of practice (Chang et al., 2010). Social justice counseling is defined as taking into consideration the impact of oppression, privilege, and discrimination on the mental health of the individual with the

goal of establishing equitable distribution of power and resources through social advocacy to ensure that all individuals have the resources and the tools for a 'good life' (Chang et al., 2010; Crethar et al., 2008; Lee, 2007; Ratts, Anthony, & Santos, 2010; Speight & Vera, 2004). Counseling organizations continue to uphold this call to action by defining social justice definitely as a counselor's role through adherence to training, competency, and ethical standards (ACA Code of Ethics, 2014; ASCA Ethical Standards, 2016; CACREP Standards, 2016; Counselors for Social Justice Code of Ethics, 2011; Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies, 2015).

The 2014 American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics offered definitions of advocacy and social justice, specifically identifying social justice as a professional value of the counseling profession (p. 3). In the ACA Code of Ethics (2014), advocacy is defined as 'promotion of the well-being of individuals, groups, and the counseling profession within systems and organizations; Advocacy seeks to remove barriers and obstacles that inhibit access, growth, and development' (p. 20). Counseling professionals acknowledge advocacy as a necessary role to advance and/or inform clients, standards, society, and the counseling profession as a whole with the purpose of promoting client welfare. Ethical code A.7.a charges counseling professionals with the ethical responsibility to advocate at individual, group, institutional, and societal levels.

The 2016 CACREP Standards outlined requirements of counselors to acquire training in 'advocacy processes needed to address institutional and social barriers that impede access, equity, and success for clients' (p. 8) and 'strategies for identifying and eliminating barriers, prejudices, and processes of intentional and unintentional oppression and discrimination' (p. 9). The counseling profession as a whole has embraced social justice advocacy as necessary and continue to support counselors' attempts to uphold this designation (Counselors for Social Justice [CSJ], 2011). Crethar and Ratts (2008) explain that social justice has been a foundation of counseling practices since the beginning of the profession, guiding counselors to attend to principles of equity, access, participation, and harmony in recognizing oppression and disparity that impede client welfare.

Crethar, Torres Rivera, and Nash (2008) offered a similar definition of social justice counseling as a 'multifaceted approach to counseling in which practitioners strive to simultaneously promote human development and the common good through addressing challenges related to both individual and distributive justice' (p. 270). Advocacy is vital to counseling professionals' ethical and professional duties and responsibilities of maintain client welfare, avoiding harm, and influencing the counseling field and societal systems. Regardless of theoretical orientation, advocacy involves intentionality on behalf of the counseling professional to affect systems at the individual, group, family, institutional, and societal levels to support, inform, increase awareness, and gain resources for clients and the counseling field.

Person-centered literature on multiculturalism

In 1977, Rogers addressed conflict resolution at intercultural, interracial, and international levels. Clinicians have utilized person-centered therapy across diverse populations and geographic locations (Quinn, 2012). The goals of a person-centered counselor remain constant regardless of client background, orientation, or presenting concern (Cornelius-White, 2016). A person-centered counselor aims to offer genuineness, empathy, and unconditional positive regard in relationship with clients. The way these elements are

expressed and contextualized within each counseling relationship may vary between clients and contexts, depending on individual needs and experiences.

Spinelli (1989) argued that person-centered theory is confined and limited in applicability to the particular culture, time, and place in which person-centered theory originated, a valid point of person-centered theory largely influenced by Western culture. In 2003, Wilkins wrote a chapter called 'Self-Actualization: A Culture-Bound, Naïve and Optimistic View of Human Nature,' presenting both the critiques and supports for person-centered counseling being cross-culturally relevant. A strength of Wilkins' (2003) writing is that he addresses misconceptions of person-centered theory, for example, self-actualization as a process rather than a product of therapy (p. 52). The misconception that self-actualizing is an individualistic ideal would indeed spur critics to doubt the cross-cultural relevance of person-centered theory when working with clients whose values do not align with achieving individual goals. In fact, person-centered therapists view self-actualization as a constant process of becoming to move toward fulfilling and enhancing one's potential.

Usher (1989) further criticized person-centered theory for valuing individualism and voiced concern that person-centered theory made little attempt to incorporate client's support system into therapy and did not attend to external constraints on individuals. Hawtin and Moore (1998) cautioned that neutrality on part of the person-centered therapist should not result in failure to address or be aware of important issues, including diversity and oppression. Person-centered theory is not a culturally limited way of being; however, it is reasonable and congruent to acknowledge that each counselor brings their unique cultural being into the counseling session (Wilkins, 2003). Clients and counselors are products of complex cultural influences, including ethnicity, race, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, class, and gender (Wilkins, 2003; Sue & Sue, 2008). In 2016, Cornelius-White devoted a chapter of his person-centered text to the topic of multiculturalism in which he provided examples of his view of the concepts of privilege, power, microaggressions, and stereotypes contextualize within person-centered therapy.

Conceptualizing through a person-centered lens

Self-actualizing force

In his book *Client-Centered Therapy*, Rogers (1951) explained that the self-actualizing force is influenced by external factors. He explained this by stating:

"The child will actualize himself, in spite of the pain which is often involved in these steps. Even when he does not, because of a variety of circumstances, exhibit growth ... one may still rely on the fact that the tendency is present" (p. 490–491).

Although self-actualization is an innate force and always present, external factors interact with how a client accesses it and engages in its process. To this end, oppressive factors in a client's environment can challenge a client's ability to fully access and exercise one's self-actualizing force. Rogers explains that one's tendency to self-actualize is fully embraced in an optimal environment (1951). Rogers explains the influence of the environment further by stating:

"I have yet to find the individual who, when he examines his situation deeply, and feels that he perceives it clearly, deliberately chooses dependence ... When all the elements are clearly

perceived, the balance seems invariably in the direction of the painful but ultimately rewarding path of self-actualization or growth (1951, p. 490)."

Thus, when a client is able to become aware of oppressive factors and their impact on their self-concept as a form of internalized oppression, the client becomes freer to fully exercise one's self-actualizing force to its full potential. In person-centered counseling, the optimal environment is facilitated as the counselor is able to provide a relationship characterized by empathy, positive regard, and unconditional acceptance (Rogers, 1951). These conditions cannot be fully present if the counselor does not consciously understand the cultural values interacting within the client–counselor relationship.

Given that the self-actualizing force is viewed as an internal drive to fulfillment, this process is self-defined by the client and thus it must be understood from the client's cultural background. For clients who come from collectivistic cultures, self-actualization is defined within such collectivistic view. For example, for a client whose cultural background is from an individualistic culture, behaviors that lead to self-actualization may be more purposeful of independence from others. For a client who intrinsically values a collectivistic worldview, behaviors leading to self-actualization may be more purposefully seeking interdependence to achieve well-being. In addition to understanding self-actualization as a process inherently guided by the client's cultural view, it is important to understand how oppressive experiences challenge the client's process toward growth.

The self-actualizing processes of many clients can become somehow blocked or constrained due to systemic or relational oppression and biases. Consider racial profiling, for instance, in which an individual experiences prejudices by being reduced to just one externally observed and stereotypically categorized aspect of their total personhood – race. Many clients feel real powerlessness, pain, and invalidation as a result of being alienated from their self-actualizing process due to blocked opportunities, externally controlled institutions, biased conditions of worth, and/or lack of access to resources. Some individuals are not in power of their own self-actualizing tendency, blocked physically, economically, institutionally, racially, or otherwise from reaching their fullest potentials. The grim reality is that environmental factors act as oppressive forces and can make it more challenging for clients to engage the full range of their innate self-actualizing force. This is where advocacy outside of direct services becomes an imperative role for helping professionals.

Conditions of worth

According to person-centered philosophy, people always and inherently possess the capacity to grow to their full potential and are in a constant process of becoming more and more congruent (Tolan, 2012). And, humans possess an innate capacity to perceive their environments and engage in an internal valuing process to determine if their perceived experiences fulfill a need, are unrelated to a need, or inhibit the fulfillment of a need (Fall, Holden, & Marquis, 2010; Tolan, 2012). From infancy, humans develop a need for positive regard from relationships in their environment and a desire to feel valued and accepted (Rogers, 1980). As humans experience conditional regard from significant people in their environments, they can begin to deny parts of their organismic valuing process to maintain ascribed self-values and conditions of worth (Rogers, 1965).

A person develops conditions of worth based on the relationship between their self-concept and external experiences (Rogers, 1965; Tolan, 2012). Because of pervasive social justice issues, such as discrimination, oppression, and racism, factors external of an individual can exercise power in placing restrictions on an individual's true expressions of self (Cooper, O'Hara, Schmid, & Bohart, 2013). Conceptually, these restrictions can further influence an individual's self-concept by fostering internalized oppression, wherein a client starts to affirm negative stereotypes imposed by society (Sue & Sue, 2016). Examples of conditions of worth caused by internalized oppression may include, 'In order to be accepted, I need to be white'; 'In order to be seen, I need to be more masculine'; 'In order to be respected as an equal human, I need to be straight'. Many conditions of worth can and do result from power differentials between oppressed groups and a majority group (Cornelius-White, 2016).

As such, Van Kalmthout (1998) described person-centered as an interpersonal theory from which problems are conceptualized as relational; the relationship is of utmost importance to the process. Person-centered theorists believe that the degree to which individuals experience incongruence creates internal tension or conflict, a form of anxiety is characterized by one denying or distorting experiences that contradict one's self-concept (Rogers, 1980). Misalignment between an individual's self-concept (who they believe themselves to be) and an individual's external experience (who the outside world believes them to be), as result of discrimination or oppression, can culminate in very real, congruent feelings of anger, depression and invalidation, chronic stress and fears, and low self-esteem (Cooper et al., 2013; Mearns, 1997).

When a person experiences environmental or relational conditions that are not supportive of their growth and development (conditions of worth) and misaligned with their internal experience of self (incongruence), their self-actualizing process can become thwarted or blocked. Although a person's self-actualizing process is never inactive or nonexistent (Rogers, 1965, 1980), one can experience greater difficulty and frustration in their process of achieving their fullest potential. Furthermore, many individuals may not be able to relieve tensions resulting from valid and real unacceptance, discrimination, and pervasive external constraints that restrict their self-actualizing processes (Quinn, 2012). Individuals may then experience a constant sense of anxiety due to several different possible and valid responses to this absence of exercisable autonomy and lack of access to utilize the full spectrum of one's inner, let alone external, resources. Because of invalidation or denial of their organismic valuing system due to inconsistent or pervasively restrictive external messages, some individuals may adjust their internal sense of self to match the discriminatory or racist beliefs (e.g. internalized oppression) or distort their self-worth/internal experiences (Cooper et al., 2013). From a multicultural perspective (Cornelius-White, 2016), this incongruence is not a fault of the individual person, rather a reality of one's lived and/or internalized experiences not aligning with one's inherent worthiness as a human being.

Of note, clients of similar cultural identifications and backgrounds may experience tension or anxiety that leads them to seek counseling services for completely different reasons. For example, one gay male client may experience incongruence between self and not identifying with some aspect of their culture, for example, a predominant religious belief held by the family of origin. Another gay male client may experience incongruence due to not feeling good enough or wanting to be a better at practicing religious beliefs of their family. Yet, another gay male client may present to counseling

experiencing anxiety about something unrelated to religious beliefs conflicts. As such, person-centered counselors strive to deeply understand each individual's lived experience, as opposed to set a goal of changing the individual's way of being in some way.

Relatedly, Hannon (2017) passionately urged humanistic counselors to uphold the holistic view of clients, and all of humanity, being irreducible. Hannon (2017) further described irreducibility as not narrowing perception of clients to a single identity, rather embracing the entirety of clients' beings in the world. Often, counselors with well-intended efforts to be culturally responsive can inadvertently dilute clients to just one or two identities as being most impactful on their current functioning or counseling concern. While it is helpful to be mindful and assertive in acknowledging common values, needs, and constraints on particular subgroups of people, in sincere effort to increase empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard, person-centered counselors do not want to further stereotype individual clients based on common experiences of a particular subgroup to which they identify. If person-centered counselors approached all multicultural counseling in a reductionist or formulaic manner in an effort to avoid all misconceptions, they would perhaps miss the totality of the individual client – an irreducible human with numerous identities that intersect to construct their unique worldview (Hannon, 2017). Thus, understanding a client's worldview can only happen when the counselor understands the impact of the client's intersectionality of identities in totality.

Theoretically, a counselor approaching multicultural counseling or advocacy with a set agenda of what to expect from particular groups of clients, the counselor would inherently be placing additional conditions of worth onto clients prior to witnessing the client's true experience. Albeit, gaining knowledge of and experience within distinct cultural group can deepen understanding and potentially strengthen the counseling relationship, not to mention is ethical and responsible practice (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014), it is also wise and critical to remember that the client is the expert of their unique experience within an intersecting construction of many identities and experiences within diverse cultures. For example, it would actually be discriminatory to assume, simply based on the fact that they are impoverished, that a client living in poverty needs another form of counseling other than person-centered (e.g. behavioral intervention). The needs of a client are inherently unique to that client, not just a particular group affiliation. Living in poverty, for example, does not exempt clients from needing to receive the core conditions and wholehearted honoring of their self-actualizing process in relationship with their counselor.

Person-centered counseling relationship

Establishing a therapeutic relationship, in which client and counselor share power and client is expert of their experiences (Goodman et al., 2004), offers clients a sense of control and responsibility for the nature and direction of their use of counseling and allows clients to define social justice within their worldview. Hawtin and Moore (1998) acknowledged the therapeutic power shift in person-centered counseling; therapists do not attempt to define the experience of clients rather shift power to clients to gain their own self-understanding. Throughout this process, clients can become more aware of internalized oppression and how such messages have created conditions of worth that cause internal incongruence.

A change in self-acceptance occurs as (a) internal self-concept and (b) outwardly expressed self (e.g. lived experiences) become more aligned (Rogers, 1980). In the counseling relationship, clients can become less reliant on external validation and place more value on their internal, organismic valuing system. However, it is valid that some clients may not experience external validation outside of the counseling room due to various laws, prejudices, systems, and biases occurring systemically. Philosophically, within the counseling relationship clients can process their experiences openly without fear of retaliation or invalidation and move toward greater congruence, despite real and valid social oppressions experienced outside of counseling. For example, during counseling clients can experience acceptance and genuineness in relationship with counselor and clients can freely and openly process frustrations and experiences in a way that is congruent to their true self (Quinn, 2012). Theoretically, clients can increase acceptance of their true selves despite contradictory external messages or experiences that have led to internalized oppression.

At the client-counselor level, counselors aim to establish a relationship in which clients can feel safe to experience or process incongruence, between internal self-concept and external lived experiences. In counseling, clients can feel free and safe to be their genuine self without fearing repercussions from a majority group. Rogers (1965, 1977) believed counselors needed to view clients from each client's internal frame of reference. A counselor does not define the client's experience, rather facilitates the client's exploration of their experience and strives to understand from an accurately empathic perspective. Given unconditional positive regard and safety present in the therapeutic relationship, clients can feel increasingly freer to express themselves and not deny their organismic environment, thus encouraging congruency between internal and external realities (Mearns, 1997). Both experience and knowledge of clients' cultural settings and actual experiences are necessary to truly understand clients who may have been the product of very different cultural influences (McDougall, 2002). Each individual client determines their social, cultural, historical definitions of normal (Glauser & Bozarth, 2001; Rogers, 1977).

From a person-centered perspective, new experiences can challenge the self-structure. When external threats to the self-structure are low, clients are freer to assimilate new information and experiences into their self-concept. As such, when clients are not distracted by pleasing others or displaying themselves in a structured manner, they have the freedom to assimilate the information and process experiences in a way that is most genuine. Counselors aim to create a climate in which clients can experience themselves within a new relational experience characterized by warmth, acceptance, and genuineness. It is the job of counselors to recognize and address the impact of power and privilege that may affect accurate empathy and unconditional positive regard for clients, especially clients who are from different backgrounds, and to not recreate oppressive dynamics within the counseling relationship (Cornelius-White, 2016). Denial of power is inherently a privilege and invalidating to those who feel less empowered. A congruent therapist is aware that their worldview stems from their circumstances, which may include prejudices and stereotypes (Cornelius-White, 2016), and continual self-exploration is critical (Barstow, 2008; Goodman et al., 2004).

Thus, Rogers objected to a counselor occupying a position of power and expertise, advocating that the position of power in the client's experience in counseling lies within the client (Cornelius-White, 2016). A person-centered counselor fosters relational experiences characterized by open and honest communication, genuine interactions, and

validation of clients' experiences. Counselors' attitudes toward their clients is valued over 'doing' an intervention or imposing suggestion onto clients' experiences (Glauser & Bozarth, 2001). Rogers (2001) described client empowerment from a person-centered framework as:

"By genuinely hearing the depth of the emotional pain and respecting the individual's ability to find his or her own answer, we are giving clients an opportunity to empower themselves and discover their unique potential" (p. 232).

In an optimal therapeutic environment created in the counseling relationship, clients are able to have more full range of access to their self-actualizing force and to more fluidly rely on their internal valuing system (i.e. less rigid conditions of worth). Clients can begin to internalize awareness of limitations the environment may be placing on their self-actualizing process, which can then materialize into awareness of internalized conditions of worth and, with new awareness, develop into a sense of empowerment. Feeling empowered, genuine, and aware of external restrictions on their self-concept, clients are more able to feel as though they have more choice to accept or reject discrimination and/or internalized oppression experienced outside of sessions.

Social justice advocacy

The purpose of social justice advocacy from a person-centered perspective is to acknowledge and work to alleviate institutionally, economically, politically, socially, or historically oppressive systems and/or experiences that block clients of all cultural backgrounds from the internal or external resources needed to reach their full potential. From a person-centered framework, counselors work to support current and future clients' processes of freeing their self-actualizing potential from external constraints and conditions of worth so they can more freely engage the full range of their potentialities and experience less anxiety as they move toward greater congruence.

The social justice literature emphasizes how counselors engage in advocacy by acknowledging oppression, identifying client strengths, empowering clients to be self-advocates when able, and providing information, education, or collaboration for support services in the community (Bradley, Werth, & Hastings, 2012; Lewis, Ratts, Paladino, & Toporek, 2011). Aligned person-centered values of client-led processes in counseling, Lamberger and Lamberger Truelove (2016) explained that the advocacy process has to evolve in conjunction with clients 'as coactors' (p. 576) to avoid defining for clients the concept of just. To this end, the person-centered therapeutic process seeks to allow clients to self-define the meaning of just.

In 1977, Rogers described the value of a person-centered counselor as striving to understand clients' experiences in the world and aiming to see people from the inside without imposing values onto their experiences. He continued to explain counselors' roles in clarifying clients' feelings and validating clients' experiences within the context of a safe, trusting, and fully accepting relationship as the crux of demonstrating caring concern for the dignity of all people (Rogers, 1977). As presented above, the fundamental and pervasive component of person-centered theory is a deep trust in an innate self-actualizing process (Quinn, 2012). This belief continues to pervasively guide person-centered counselors in social justice advocacy efforts.

Counselors of all theoretical orientations can engage in client advocacy by affecting the greater societal context in which individual clients and various clinical populations live (Buhin & Vera, 2009). and Speight (2003) encouraged counselors to expand their role as advocate beyond direct service delivery to oppressed groups and further foster social change through advocacy, prevention, and outreach with grounding in teaching and research. Advocacy identity is easily integrated in a person-centered counselor's genuine way of being, genuinely believing in people's inherent goodness and potential (Bohart, 2012). As such, examples of societal advocacy may include, community outreach and collaboration, participating in relative public policy and legislative decisions, increasing access to services, combating the stigma of mental health, and emphasize social justice initiatives within organizations (Lewis et al., 2011).

In his writing, Rogers did not explicitly dictate skills or steps to utilize to gain cultural awareness or competency, because, philosophically, that would be inconsistent with person-centered counseling and advocacy. From a person-centered framework, social justice advocacy is an external expression of counselors' congruent internal desire to contribute to social change, rather than specific or general actions taken by a counselor (Cornelius-White, 2016; Glauser & Bozarth, 2001; Rogers, 1980). Social justice actions spring from genuine identification as an advocate and increased awareness and a deep experiencing and attunement to the struggles of oppressed individuals and groups of people (Rogers, 1977). It is important to highlight that this attunement can only happen when counselors are open to clients defining just within their own worldviews (Lamberger & Lemberger Truelove, 2016). This view is consistent with the idea that counseling for social justice, as Lee (2007) articulated 'is more than a professional obligation; it's about living one's life in a manner that is dedicated to promoting access and equity' (p. 1). Through acceptance and relationship, even with people who hold differing opinions (e.g. political differences related to legal policies, which affect various marginalized populations), counselors can express concerns and emotions which have the opportunity to be received in order to deepen understanding.

Fundamental to person-centered philosophy, counselor attitude toward their clients rather than doing an intervention or imposing suggestion onto clients' experiences is theoretically consistent and results from internal motivation on part of the counselor. Theoretically, it is genuine for person-centered counselors to voice concerns and share their perspective on how systems or discriminatory actions harm people (ACA, 2014, p. A.4.a.). Being able and willing to express authentic beliefs or point out the impact of inequalities in policies, laws, microaggressions, prejudices, and so on, allows the person-centered counselor to remain congruent and not deny a part of their valuing system. By not actively advocating, person-centered counselors might actually experience incongruence, a rift between their true experience (e.g. inequality exists) and their external experience (e.g. I must stay quiet). Unconditional positive regard (UPR) in person-centered theory does not equate to neutrality. An important point related to advocating in lieu of opposing views, a person-centered counselor can retain UPR for the worthiness of a person and genuinely disagree with their views on political or social issues.

Underlying all social justice advocacy efforts, the person-centered counselor's hope for their current and future clients is that people are able to access and exercise their full range of potentialities most optimally in their environments. It is congruent, genuine, and

theoretically consistent for a person-centered counselor to identify as a social advocacy advocate, exercising genuine passion and motivation to contribute to reducing external constraints and injustices affecting current clients and all potential clients.

Conclusion

Practicing person-centered counseling from a social justice framework requires for counselors to be aware of how the intersectionality of their identities and their clients' identities influence the client–counselor relationship. Person-centered counselors aim to understand clients' unique worldviews while being genuine in the relationship. Additionally, a social justice framework requires person-centered counselors to account for the impact of oppressive experiences on clients' development of self-concept and on clients' natural self-actualizing tendency to fulfill their potential. This type of conceptualization calls for counselors to understand how external constraints and blocks, some overt (e.g. policies and discrimination) and some more covert (e.g. profiling and stereotyping), affect clients. Further considerations and extended discussions related to multiculturalism, advocacy, and social justice issues need to be included into person-centered literature, conceptualization, and training. Within and outside of the counseling relationship, person-centered counselors can be effective, active, theoretically consistent social justice advocates.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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