

# Social Justice and Race in the United States: Key Issues and Challenges for Couple and Family Therapy

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*Social justice tends to be narrowly defined as equality without due recognition of human dignity and respect for those whose daily lives continue to be adversely impacted by race. This article seeks to explore key issues and challenges at the intersection of social justice and race for couple and family therapy. These include: (a) defining social justice; (b) diversity and inclusion; (c) power and privilege; (d) witness; and (e) personal responsibility.*

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Social injustice impacts both quality of life and life chances (Shultz & Mullings, 2006), indelibly marking the lives of millions of people. Constructed on difference, social injustice dramatically shapes the psyche of individuals, groups, and nations (Stevenson, 2014). At its most basic level, social injustice is about the distribution of wealth, power, resources, and opportunities (Rothenberg, 2007), resulting in marginalization, disenfranchisement, and exclusion.

Socially constructed systems of inequality based on differences are mutually constituted, interrelated, and vary as a function of each other, which may make it difficult to establish the contribution of a single factor. For instance, gender and class may take on a different meaning when raced (Shultz & Mullings, 2006). Although awareness of systems of inequality as interconnecting entities that affect all individuals and groups is necessary for social justice, this paper is primarily focused on race and the expression of racism despite claims of social justice.

To build wealth and power in the United States, newly settled European whites implemented the system of slavery, whereby race was used to enslave and deny black people their humanity. Thus, racism is a complex problem in the United States that persists from slavery, preserving the established distribution of power and privilege based on race.

Racism is perpetuated in many ways. Despite calls for social justice to ameliorate the suffering caused by racism, social justice, like racism, is complicated. Along with varying perspectives on social justice, each racial group has a personal stake in the way it is considered and represented. Consequently, one racial group may attend to aspects of social injustice ignored or denied by another. Moreover, social injustice may go unnoticed or accepted as “the way things are” because of institutionalized and/or unconscious racism. Institutionalized racism is evident in the current immigration policy of President Donald J. Trump,

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The author thanks the students who provided witness to their inequality and injustice.

which seeks to ban nonwhite immigrants and those from predominantly Muslim countries who also happen to be darker in hue from entry into the United States (LeBow, 2018).

A growing body of literature in the field of couple and family therapy (Addison & Coolhart, 2015; Bean, Perry, & Bedell, 2002; Beitin & Allen, 2005; Chenfeng, Kim, Wu, & Knudson-Martin, 2017; D'Arrigo-Patrick, Hoff, Knudson-Martin, & Tuttle, 2017; Giammattei, 2015; Harvey & Stone Fish, 2015; Malpas, 2011; McGeorge & Carlson, 2010; McGoldrick & Hardy, 2008; Nealy, 2017) has helped to expand our understanding of culture and the sociopolitical context on family development and family functioning. Families are embedded in a broader network of social systems subject to shifts in the economy, legislation, and politics that differentially hinder or advance their movement. Notably, racism contributes to policies and practices that wreak havoc on individuals, families, and communities of color.

Social justice and racism are co-existing and interlocking concepts. While the field of couple and family therapy embraces social justice oriented work, there has been little discussion about racism and its effects on that work. Some clinicians, professors, supervisors, and training programs are inadequately attuned to individual, cultural, and institutional manifestations of racism. Believing in their own cultural, emotional, intellectual, social, and moral superiority (Watson, 2013), white people espousing social justice may engage in intentional or unintentional acts of racial microaggression.

Regardless of the field's prosocial justice stance, people of color may find it difficult giving voice to experiences of racial injustice due to issues of safety and connectivity. Conversations on racism tend to be avoided, negated, or redirected to other forms of injustice (e.g., sexism, classism). Hence, the dialogue on social justice touches only the surface of the pernicious problem of racism. This article seeks to highlight some of the key issues and challenges in the cross-hairs of social justice and race. These include: (a) defining social justice; (b) diversity and inclusion; (c) power and privilege; (d) witness; and (e) personal responsibility.

## **DEFINING SOCIAL JUSTICE**

The discourse on social justice is rousing, yet what is it? Although widely used, social justice is rarely defined. Most commonly equated with equality or equal opportunity (Scherlen and Robinson (2008), social justice appears to be unidimensional. By virtue of diversity and inclusion, social justice may be assumed, masking and/or justifying racial injustice. More to the point, individuals and organizations uphold diversity and inclusion on a daily basis without ample knowledge, understanding, and empathy for the enormity and trauma of ongoing racism (Adams, 2013).

### **Theories of Social Justice**

Miller (2001) argues that social justice must be understood contextually, offering three basic components: need, desert, and equality. Need suggests the absence of basic necessities causing harm or the danger of harm and/or impediment to one's ability to function. Desert implies reward based on performance, not status or bias. Equality embodies the democratic ideal that all humans are created equal and therefore should have equal access to goods and services.

Rawls (1971) advocates two principles of justice, both egalitarian: All persons should have access to and enjoy the same liberties; and inequalities should be to everyone's advantage and organized so that no one individual or group is prevented from occupying any position. Even with the egalitarian focus, Rawls acknowledges that more attention should be given to individuals born with fewer resources and less social status.

These two major theories of social justice focus on equal opportunities and access with no mention of human dignity and respect. Lack of attention to dignity and respect for people of color having been dehumanized and devalued seems to fly in the face of social justice. To effectively countermand racial injustice toward a vision of social justice, attention must be given to how we treat people of color—the historically disfavored and disrespected (Stevenson, 2014). Social justice requires sensitivity to people of color and inclusion of their beliefs, knowledge, and values. Toward this end, social justice has to go beyond multiculturally informed clinical practice and diversity and inclusion in couple and family therapy.

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Diversity and inclusion are not more than first-order change. Diversity and inclusion do not automatically erase taken-for-granted knowledge about people of color or change racism. Beliefs in innate or natural differences between races are deeply embedded in the American psyche, contributing to racial injustice. Accordingly, to advance social justice, room for new knowledge has to be created and cultivated along with diversity and inclusion. Otherwise, diversity and inclusion are little more than a deadly fantasy of social justice.

### Qualified Minorities

The concept of *qualified minorities* has been critical to the diversity and inclusion approach to social justice. Deconstructed, qualified minorities are those who have assimilated to the dominant culture or have the best potential for conforming. Dr. Kenneth V. Hardy (2008) coined the term *GEMM*, good effective mainstream minority, to convey the dominant group's expectation of members of disadvantaged social groups being moved from excluded to included. Thus, the beneficiaries of diversity and inclusion, especially people of color, experience a watershed moment in dominant places and spaces. They, once included, find their ways of knowing, doing, and being compared to dominant (white) standards and judged unacceptable—inferior.

On the stage of social justice, the newly included must not be made over in the image of those in power. What is at stake is human dignity and the freedom to honor one's own cultural heritage and traditions, which do little to counterbalance the scales of social injustice. For this reason, standpoint is relevant in social justice. What we know, what we believe we know, and whose knowledge is legitimated is essential to the discourse on social justice. In the diversity and inclusion approach to social justice, you do not need to guess whose standpoint, ethics, or ideals are considered law.

### Legitimized Knowledge

In couple and family therapy, people of color are subjected to white people's socially legitimated knowledge when they, in fact, know too little about minorities to competently work with them. Nonetheless, people of color are expected to accept groundless white judgments and instructions with humility and graciousness. Any challenge to the dominant structure that legitimizes white knowledge is usually met with a personal attack on the character of the lesser valued person of color (Hardy, 2008).

The legitimization of white knowledge essentially has robbed people of color of the ability to have "power to" their own lives, such as the power to tell their own stories or the power to have, share, and publish their own views. The centrality of white knowledge is at play even when overt power is not being exercised because it is the norm against which any other knowledge is assessed. Specifically, knowledge is rank ordered on the basis of

race, gender, class, and other systems of social inequality, documenting the political and powerful quality of knowledge. Hence, diversity and inclusion of people of color in traditionally white spaces (e.g., academia) without valuing people of color's knowledge and ways of knowing do little to affect people of color's sense of marginalization and racism.

Knowledge and/or the lack of knowledge are both political and powerful. For more than 200 years, African Americans risked death if they were caught reading (Stokes Oliver, 2018). In the context of slavery, this was a "natural" way for white slave owners to keep black slaves in the dark while maintaining their dominance and control. In the aftermath of slavery, history failed to record the accomplishments and contributions of African Americans, again using knowledge as a weapon to further the dominant story of white superiority and black inferiority (Watson, 2013). Thus, knowledge historically has been used politically to retain power over black and other people of color.

Knowledge largely is political because the mechanisms for producing and dispensing knowledge are mostly composed of members of dominant groups who serve their own interests. However, social structures themselves have the power to serve the interests of dominant groups regardless of who (people of color or white people) fills the individual positions within the system. The ideological basis upon which society's structures are founded can and does reproduce the same social injustice. A "both/and" approach is therefore vital to understanding that human agency and social structures operate collectively to benefit dominant groups (Purdy, 2015).

The imposing of white knowledge onto people of color in spite of diversity and inclusion continues the unequal social power dynamic in society. Asserting social justice while doing so is not more than white people pacifying their own conscience and protecting their playing field—the one they created and own. They still have the advantage.

## POWER AND PRIVILEGE

Dyson (2018) states "that politics, and the state, exist to defend white interests and identities" (p. 53). Correspondingly, white people can expect to be given the benefit of the doubt whereas people of color can expect not to be given the same benefit in social and moral situations. Democracy from its beginning was fashioned for white people—the humans—while other groups (e.g., blacks and Native Americans) were seen as depraved savages and excluded. White people can count on formal political and sociocultural structures to ensure that their hard and not so hard work will pay off. They are surrounded by plenty of incentives to encourage and reinforce their belief in America as a land of great opportunity and meritocracy. On the other hand, people of color find themselves without merit in the claim to American democracy. Though numerous people of color succeed despite not having the same built in societal protections that white people enjoy, the social, emotional, and physical toll can be a heavy burden.

White interests are disguised as American interests, obstructing social justice. At the core of democracy, "whiteness is the default position of American identity and humanity" (Dyson, 2018, p. 55). For example, football players kneeling during the singing of the National Anthem in protest of white police killings of black and brown people was made an American issue, one of disrespecting the flag and the military. President Donald J. Trump leads the charge, demonstrating that politics and the state are culpable in serving white interests and maintaining the status quo.

## Social Identity

From racist, classist, heterosexist, and colonialist positions have come oppressive knowledges, stereotypes, and structures of inequities, impacting social identity. The

elevation of social identity for dominant groups and the parallel devaluation of vulnerable groups have led to internalized superiority for dominant groups and internalized inferiority for vulnerable groups. The effects of internalized superiority and internalized inferiority result in white people over-estimating their human value and people of color under-estimating their worth. Resultantly, white people can become destructively entitled and takers while people of color can experience a pervasive sense of shame, failure, and loss of hope.

White identity is cloaked in American identity. Often, when asked to identify themselves racially, white people say, "American." White social identity is inextricably linked to the founding of America, exaggerating white people's sense of entitlement to an American identity, unencumbered by race. White people inherited a legacy of achievement based on their ancestors' false claims of making America great through sheer will and rugged individualism, solidifying their social identity as American (Dyson, 2018). In addition, an American identity reflects democratic ideals of fairness, equality, and justice that are affirming to the internalized view of the white self.

The myth of white superiority and other inferiority is a threat to human dignity. Due recognition is required for human dignity and the myth of white superiority and other inferiority denies people of color due recognition of their human value and right to goods, services, and protections mandatory for well-being. Besides, the myth of white superiority and other inferiority leads to white people's justification and tolerance of people of color's suffering and unequal access to material resources and economic mobility. Beyond that, it leads to institutional disregard whereby people of color's contributions are ignored, demeaned, and/or not recognized as valuable.

In essence, the myth of white superiority and other inferiority is damaging to social justice because it biases self-appraisals and relational preferences, and evokes resistance to equality challenges from people of color. On the one hand, these outcomes accumulate to direct white people away from empathy and their own humanity. On the other hand, they accrue to brainwash people of color into believing their humanity is lesser.

## **Social Status**

Social injustice is about more than power and resources. It is also about status. Social constructs, such as race, gender, and class, are used to determine cultural beliefs about group differences regarding who is more valuable. Higher respect and regard are then given to those groups deemed more valuable, structuring injustice on the basis of social categories (Ridgeway, 2014).

An individual's or group's social location generates advantage or disadvantage. As a result, social status is as significant as material goods. For example, white people are at the top of the racial hierarchy, transforming the cultural belief of whites as superior into white privilege. In turn, white privilege influences resource and power inequality in society. As well, cultural beliefs about who is better in society lead to bias around competence and authority, affecting relationships in the workplace, schools, health centers, and other social environments (Ridgeway, 2014).

Consequently, members of higher status groups are given positions of power and authority in organizations while members of lower status groups are held back (Ridgeway, 2014), particularly people of color. The ensuing social injustice is concealed by a cultural belief in white superiority and other inferiority (Watson, 2013), rendering the individual person responsible for her or his inclusion or exclusion rather than the structural inequality of status that affects a person's chances of being included or excluded.

## WITNESS AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Social injustice is made to seem normal, so much so that even the most overt examples of racial microaggressions go unchallenged. Marginalized peoples are disparaged for questioning and/or resisting social injustice, triggering fear and silence. Also, social injustice is so commonplace that members of dominant groups deny that it exists. Thus, fear, silence, and denial contribute to social injustice being self-maintaining and self-reinforced.

### Witness

Witness is a term that describes a person, observation, and/or testimony (giving voice). Witness is used here as an action or strategy for dealing with injustice. People of color have something to say about how they are being treated, something that the field cannot do without. By opening up space for witness, efforts toward social justice might be nurtured and amplified. As a form of knowledge, witness provides data of the internal experiences of suffering by marginalized persons. Witness therefore can be transformative, offering a view of what an experience means and how it affects a person, which can be eye-opening for members of dominant groups and validating for members of subordinate groups (Dyson, 2018). Witness, therefore, can be a bridge to connection and empathy.

Witness accounts help to spur change because they validate social injustice and can lead to policy change. They reveal immoral and inhumane treatment of fellow human beings. Such a revelation might lead to fundamental change in the way individuals in power see themselves and how systems of power operate (Dyson, 2018). For example, the recent incident at the Starbucks in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, that was captured on video along with witness accounts led to Starbucks changing its policy around not allowing nonpaying customers to use its restrooms, and to racial bias training for all of its stores in the United States.

Two black men were in Starbucks awaiting a third (white) man for a meeting. While waiting one of the black men asked to use the restroom. He was refused and they were asked to leave because of no purchase. Because the two men did not leave as requested, the white female manager called the police to have them removed. The police arrived, handcuffed the two black men, and took them to jail despite other customers' outcry and the arrival of the third man for whom they were waiting. In response, there were immediate protests demonstrating the role of activism in bringing about social change.

Since there were white people who confessed that they had used the restroom without purchase, the above incident shows that individual perceptions often shape how and when laws and policies are applied. Also, the police murders of unarmed black and brown people attest to individual perceptions that result in unequal treatment and application of law. Hence, social justice requires more than policies and laws, particularly since such laws already exist.

Without question, the field of couple and family therapy has made strides toward social justice. Regardless, clarity concerning social justice is inconsistent across programs, leading to differences in support for social justice and disparities in training. Significantly, couple and family therapy programs' promotion and/or execution of social justice may be hampered by the structures supporting them. Further, couple and family therapy faculty and supervisors may neglect social justice due to political pressure, fear of retribution (Thomas, 2002), and/or lack of racial sensitivity.

Faculty, supervisors, clinicians, and students of color tend to share personal racial experiences with each other, not the wider community. Dr. Kenneth V. Hardy, founder of the Eikenberg Academy for Social Justice, has addressed the need for people of color to have an open space to give voice to their experiences of racial trauma and have their knowledge legitimized by creating an annual conference dedicated explicitly to people of color and white allies.

Racial disconnections and violations are a danger to social justice. When racial experiences are unspoken, invalidated, and/or unacknowledged, people of color often feel disconnected, isolated, and/or question their own perceptions. Choosing silence in order to maintain a superficial relationship with white people puts people of color at risk for poor mental and physical health. Being involved in social justice is a personal choice and commitment. Witness provides an opportunity for self-interrogation, which means acknowledging racism and white privilege, questioning unintentional racism and/or abuse of power and privilege, and making a conscious decision.

Witness is exemplified by the following stories in hopes of promoting racial sensitivity and creating a daily environment that is more welcoming, comfortable, and friendly to people of color. *What It's Really Like Inside the Dragon* is the author's story in the author's own voice, *Reflections on Being a Student of Color* is Amanda's story, and *Go Tell it on the Mountain* is Mindy's story. Both Amanda and Mindy are current doctoral students in couple and family therapy and their stories are in their own words giving them voice. Their names have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

*What it's really like inside the dragon*

During my annual evaluation, the chair stated, "the interim dean [a white woman] has directed me to direct you to increase your workload by 12 credits, effective immediately." I assumed the chair, another black woman, distanced herself from the directive because of the human indignity in the command. University policy states that 9-month tenured faculty are responsible for 15 teaching credits per year. Yet I was being directed to nearly double my teaching credits—immediately. I felt deflated—devalued and marginalized. But being tired and giving up are not viable options for marginalized peoples.

Discussions about my productivity had happened without due recognition of me or my scholarship, which was not surprising to me as a black woman. Black people are perceived as lazy, our achievements downgraded, and our intellect and knowledge disavowed. I was disregarded after 23 years of hard work. My mind flashed to a painting of slaves picking cotton and I heard famed author James Baldwin exclaiming, "*I am not your Negro!*"

I sent a letter to the university's president. The president's office immediately tasked the Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs (a white woman) to meet with me. She informed me that "my letter to the president had raised a red flag about race and that she was asked to investigate." (I highlighted race and feeling marginalized.) That aside, she proceeded to insult me saying, "I can't do anything about your 'dissed' feelings." She then lectured me on how difficult it was for the chair, a former student, to talk to me about workload, which I found ironic given that the chair had just been promoted to Associate Dean of Health Professions.

The meeting ended with her telling me that she would provide a verbal, not written, report to the provost (a black man). However, she emailed the interim dean and chair asking that they "provide as much information as possible to help clarify the way in which teachings loads are determined relative to the overall contributions faculty make."

Prior to meeting with the interim dean and chair, I informed them of having retained counsel. With coaching from my counsel, I prepared for my meeting. Unexpectedly, the interim dean began by acknowledging my contributions. Without apologizing, she expressed budgetary concerns and *asked* me to voluntarily increase my workload by three credits in the interest of my department's future.

The senior vice provost saw me as merely emotional or an angry black woman but it was much more. It was the sum of my racial experience. It was the effect of devaluation on the black psyche—a lifetime of pain and trauma. But as Cornell West (2013) states, "When ordinary people wake up, elites begin to tremble in their boots. They can't get away with

their abuse. They can't get away with subjugation. They can't get away with exploitation. They can't get away with domination. It takes courage for folks to stand up" (p. 626).

*Reflections on being a student of color*

I never really felt a place of "safety" or belonging. I was shocked that my white teachers compared my writing to my white classmate. I was ALWAYS being compared to her, which sadly caused me much resentment. I also strongly disliked being in class and, due to the limited representation of my race, automatically being the spokesperson for my race. All heads would turn toward me. Why put me on the spot rather than enhancing cultural competency in the white students? I even took it more personal because I identify as Nigerian and, just because my skin is black, does not necessarily mean my experience is the same. Instead of asking questions and being curious, I was automatically put in a box, my personal experience dismissed.

Overtime, I learned that as a student of color, I was not going to get that support I desired. What truly hurt me was that my own chair would not push me as hard as she did her white students. Not only was I compared to my white classmate for years, she is finishing FIRST where the other students of color like myself are left behind again, with little to NO support. I was never prioritized like she was. I was ALWAYS at the bottom. I hate that we have to work three times as hard to get to the top where it's so easy for white students.

I was repeatedly asked, "Why don't you speak up more, we want to hear your voice!" But when I spoke up, I was NEVER validated or honored! I was never told, "Say more about that." Why would I speak up? As a minority, it is hard to have a voice. I remember when they were asking for my voice during the time of a police shooting of an unarmed black man, and being asked if I would be more comfortable talking about the situation with a group of minorities. I do not know why that offended me. Why can't whites talk about this too as I'm sure it will affect their clinical experience in some way? I'm at the point where I'm afraid to speak up. If I don't, I'm seen as too quiet. If I do, I'm told I'm defensive. I walk around having to put up this wall and have it all together. It is quite sad-denning to me. I have learned to accept it, though. I guess that's what comes with being a student of color.

*Go, tell it on the mountain*

My first exposure to racism in my program was very mild and innocuous. My culture was fetishized because of the fantastic food, famed spirituality, and "exotic" elements of my dark, wavy hair or olive skin. Not fully realizing the implications, I felt proud but also knew I was being tokenized.

As an international student, I could not work off campus. In desperation and with wounded pride, I asked for a raise in exchange for working more hours. My advisor often asked why I brought a thermos of coffee to the office. I told him that saving a few dollars a day could go a long way. He laughed, saying something about my "immigrant mentality." Despite this interaction, I took the risk. I felt the conversation went very well. In a few days, I found myself in an intimidating meeting with my advisor, the academic coordinator, and a representative of the international student's office. They looked very stern, proceeding to tell me that when I applied for my student visa, I showed a bank statement indicating sufficient financials for my visa's approval. They threatened if I had lied about this, I would be deported. I broke down, explaining I used my parents' retirement savings as collateral but could not rely on that money. I seethed at the white entitlement I encountered in the room. Memories flooded through my mind—times when we wore the same school uniforms year after year, bought second hand textbooks or borrowed them from our classmates. The meeting ended. It was 3 am back home. I called my mother, voice shaking. "I might have to come back. I'm so sorry." I felt so betrayed by my advisor, the

bureaucracy, and lack of “social justice” the program was renowned for. Eventually, the department head, a woman of color stepped in, sympathized with my plight, and put out some fires.

The next big hurdle was cultural differences. I told my advisor excitedly that I wanted to work with South-Asian Americans and their experiences of therapy. My advisor scoffed, calling it a “flimsy” project and insisted that he had plenty of data on hand. I floundered through it, severely anxious and depressed, telling myself that maybe despite me being a bright student earlier on; I probably was not as bright as I thought. My English dialect was not “real English.” I received feedback in bold, larger than life, red comments! I got so anxious about every thought I expressed, writing 32 drafts of my first research manuscript. It would have been okay if the comments were not intrinsically condescending and demeaning. “This is not how we write in real English.” “You cannot write the way you think, read each sentence aloud to yourself.” “You better seek help from the writing center or you will never finish.” I wrote eagerly and frenetically, sending back drafts within hours of receiving feedback, only to feel disheartened when my mentor took weeks to respond, cancelled meetings without letting me know, and saying how “needy” I was. The more I pursued, the more he withdrew. I began to feel I was not good enough for anything, not even his time.

My therapy sessions were questioned. “We didn’t expect you to be so underprepared, so non-directive.” “Are you sure you did therapy and saw clients before this?” My inner pendulum swung wildly. On one end, I felt my insignificance and inability to be “good enough.” On the other end, I felt invigorated and so much resonance when working with clients of color. I was beginning to realize the oppressive power of whiteness. I was being whitewashed slowly but surely if I did not fight back.

I expressed being gender-questioning, presenting as androgynous. I experimented with neutral pronouns and found this request wasn’t upheld. Eventually, I stopped speaking up or correcting people. As a Muslim, Friday prayers are crucial. Even though on other days we may pray alone, one’s prayers on Fridays or “Jummah” are exalted in congregation with others. Fridays were the days of research lab meetings. When I wanted accommodations, it wasn’t well received. My culture was not respected; my traditions were not upheld.

As students of color, we were disheartened when faculty did not address microaggressions that occurred in classrooms with white students or white faculty. When we raised this, our white peers got upset, faculty exalted their emotions and we would have to explain why we brought all this up in the first place. Some of us tried to become “model minorities” by separating from one another. I recall my advisor saying “You don’t have to compare yourself to so and so black student. Don’t set yourself that low a bar.” “That \*racial slur\* Asian postdoc can’t even speak or write English, they can’t help you with your research.” Juxtaposed with this, we saw our white colleagues get opportunities, support, admiration, and attention while we were ignored or berated.

We persist.

## Personal Responsibility

Social injustice is maintained at the individual level by attitudes, thoughts, behaviors, and feelings of individual persons. Whether conscious or unconscious, the effects of individual persons’ attitudes and behaviors can contribute to social injustice. Although social justice on a structural level is needed to enable individuals to access, assert, and enforce their rights, individual persons’ actions have the potential to be equally destructive.

Individuals frequently hide their sociopolitical positions, leading to bias. Acknowledgment of one’s personal views can help to unmask any implicit bias in those views, allowing

a more critical and sensitive analysis. Also, individual claims of neutrality are problematic for social justice because they, too, have the effect of hiding bias. Thus, individuals can take personal responsibility for owning and examining their attitudes and behaviors as members of advantaged groups toward disadvantaged groups. For advantaged group members to understand how and why their attitudes and actions may affect disadvantaged group members is one thing but internalizing the other's anxiety, pain, fear, despair, hatred, and powerlessness as a result of your actions is far more impactful and, hopefully, connecting on a human level.

Members of advantaged groups can become allies. Being an ally is about permanence—stamina and solidarity, not convenience. For example, white allies may walk away when their promotions, finances, and status are threatened or their feelings become hurt. As evidenced in the Civil Rights movement, allies from dominant groups are essential to eliminating injustice. Allies may have different motives but what is important is their solid commitment to social justice.

Members of disadvantaged groups can become empowered. They can confront internalized inferiority, externalizing it as the result of being targeted. Facing internalized inferiority is freeing and helps to connect individuals to other members of their group. At its best, it motivates individuals to become actively involved in efforts to create social change.

Individuals must have personal conviction to hold themselves accountable for social justice. As allies, they must listen to members of disadvantaged groups without personalizing or becoming defensive. As empowered individuals of disadvantaged groups, they must speak boldly and courageously of their oppression and insist on justice.

## CONCLUSION

### **Can We Develop Principles of Social Justice that are Applicable and Acceptable to all Groups?**

For instance, is the imposition of “Standard English” a form of injustice? Does it promote a lack of respect and appreciation for another's culture? According to hooks (1994), Standard English represents the oppressor's language. Therefore, Standard English as the only acceptable method of verbal and written communication may compound a student of color's sense of inferiority. But where should we draw the line?

The idea of justice is predicated on a society committed to exchanging and sharing equitably but that is not the American way. In a capitalistic and race-based society, is it even possible for there to be agreement and cooperation? For social justice to be a reality, it may be that greater emphasis must be placed on human dignity, not competition, wealth, and status as in capitalism and racism. To say the least, the challenge of undoing the ideological and structural systems of injustice is daunting. However, we are bonded together by our humanity and have a moral obligation to one another to be just.

Social justice is more encompassing than equality. By necessity, human dignity and respect must accompany diversity and inclusion of people having long been hated, vilified, and dehumanized. The field of couple and family therapy must hold scholars of color in high esteem, be willing to challenge, push, and hold accountable individuals and structures supporting injustice, and encourage ongoing self-work for faculty, supervisors, clinicians, and students.

People of color must give voice to injustice and white people must do more than talk the talk. People of color face overt and covert racism, including inappropriate questioning of their knowledge, authority, and credibility. Many persons of color find themselves aching from the racial wounds inflicted consciously and unconsciously in “so-called” socially just environments. Multiculturalism and social inclusion do not by themselves counteract racism. Attention must be paid to the climate in couple and family therapy and how people of color are treated.

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