

Nicole Cullen

MCFT

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2010 MCFT Social Action Scholarship Award

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My journey of making a positive difference in support of social equality began far before my journey at Lewis & Clark College could have ever been imagined. In fact, it began my first day in Kindergarten in my bilingual classroom when I realized that not every child spoke the same language as me. In first grade, my best friend, Peter, an African American male, and I would laugh in innocence as we would hold our hands together and examine our differences in skin tone. As life continued on I became aware of differences in gender, socio economic status, sexual orientation, and cultures. With each learning experience that deepened my awareness for the importance of social equality came an intense yearning to fight for justice, advocate for peace, and make a positive difference in the lives of others.

Therefore, under the sanctuary of Lewis & Clark College I began to take action to support social justice in our school, professional field, research, and community. Under the support of Andrea Brown I began researching the impact of media on African American male body image. Through this work I began to realize the implications that social media has on African American males. Further, came, the realization of the social messages that are sent to African American males through media outlets that affect self-esteem and body image. The lack of researched challenged me further engage my involvement within the project to go out into the community and listen to this populations stories around their body image. These personal body image stories that were shared spoke of stories that are not represented which reaffirmed the need for this research.

Through the community engagement I was experiencing I became drawn to working outside the walls of a classroom. I became involved in the 4th Annual Liberation-Based Healing Conference. I began working with community members to organize smaller engaging events to

help bring awareness to Lewis & Clark College's MCFT program, and the conference. These events included dinner events with minority professor's from local universities and colleges, networking events with local professionals, bowling events and local book readings and presentations with social justice themes. The community engaging events drew many connections from the local Portland community to the Liberation-Based Healing Conference. During the conference I co-organized conference events and also conducted video interviews with presenters regarding their thoughts around liberation-based healing.

Through the interactions with the community regarding social justice and healing I began to examine myself. Through this inward search and discovery I began to explore my own biracial identity and its personal impact on me within our society. This process inspired my participation in a panel entitled *Interracial Relationships, Adoptions, and Identity* at the 6th Annual Ray Warren Multicultural Symposium: Mixed: The politics of Hybrid Identities. This experience of presenting my own developmental process within being biracial taught me how to advocate for others using personal experiences.

Additionally, inspired from my personal experiences I was drawn to begin research investigating the possible influences of social class on family therapy trainees. Currently, this research is in the data collection stages and has uncovered some very important social justice awareness in academia. As a student it is imperative that professors be informed and model social equality to the best of their ability. This research amplifies the classism that harbors in our graduate student's classrooms today. Hopefully, the results of this research will provide new knowledge and awareness to those teaching and learning in our field which will in turn create a more collaborative learning environment.

My efforts have exemplified the MCFT program mission within several different realms. All of my work has been conducted through the systemic perspective from a want to deepen an understanding due to a lack of information or a desire to positively influence individuals, families, communities, societies, and cultures. Additionally, all my social action work has been put into a context of understanding how race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, abilities, language, country of origin, and other social identities/locations interconnect to one another allowing systems of power and privilege to continue in various ways. The hope is that through the information obtained through my research, community involvement, and social action that new information will find the words, wisdom, and power to spark change for justice and equality. Thus this work shall further develop and inform the practice of family therapy as a whole.

Through my work I have learned that diversity in some form touches every individual, family, community, society and culture. For, in a global system we are all connected. Therefore, within I harbor a deep need to learn, teach, and help others to challenge, create, and obtain social justice for themselves and the entire systemic population which they are involved in. However, the true learning experience for me has been the learning process of how to effectively advocate in a nonthreatening manner, to shatter barriers, to reach those that desire change and those that can work together to be the change. From this wisdom I will be forever grateful.

I thank you for this opportunity.

