Decolonizing Academia: Intersectionality, Participation, and Accountability in Family Therapy and Counseling

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In this paper we offer a framework for supporting decolonizing practices in family therapy and counseling that reflect values of human diversity, collaboration and participation, distributive justice, and self-determination. To this end, we propose a vision of social justice involving at least three foundational elements of professional development and organizational leadership: intersectionality, participation, and accountability. We include case examples throughout to illustrate our points and offer practical suggestions for decolonizing praxis in the academy. We conclude by revealing dilemmas we have encountered as a result of these efforts.

KEYWORDS feminist, family therapy, counseling, education, decolonization, diversity, academia, decolonizing praxis, intersectionality, accountability, participation

Over the past two decades, mental health programs in traditionally White institutions in the United States (U.S.) have been pressured to increase diversity (c.f., Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant, 2007) and rewarded when able to do so (Weinberg, 2008). This has led to contemporary academic landscapes portraying greater diversity through inclusion of women,
sexual minorities, and darkened bodies. However, superficial inclusion and visual diversity does not in itself reflect the type of transformation necessary to ensure that our fields, departments, and programs support cultural democracy and social equity.

Academic institutions are sites that not only reflect and reproduce—but have the potential to challenge—political, social, and economic structures in the broader society (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Spivak, 1991). Along with professional organizations, mental health training programs are charged with professional gate keeping, including shaping initial and continued education, steering the production of knowledge, and informing state regulatory practices. The healthcare industry bears pressure on professional organizations, the state, and the academy to produce therapists who can and will work within capitalist care-for-profit and state funded minimal-care structures. At a macro-level, these multiple systems (i.e., the academy, professional organizations, the health care industry, and the state) privilege western colonial perspectives including individual diagnosis, evidence-based research, rational scientific theories, and manualized treatments. A decolonizing agenda in the academy does not routinely dismiss Western science or the worthiness of existing mental health practices, but contributes to just practices and cultural democracy through (a) critiquing and challenging colonial agendas, (b) acknowledging the legitimacy of indigenous and previously subjugated knowledge and performance, and (c) centering liberation-based healing practices.

In this essay we offer a framework for supporting decolonizing practices in mental health education that reflect values of human diversity, collaboration and participation, distributive justice, and self-determination. To this end, we propose a vision of social justice involving at least three foundational elements of professional development and organizational leadership: intersectionality, participation, and accountability. The lens of intersectionality assists us to transcend conceptualizations of oppression organized around single axes of identity. Participatory processes, as a means and as an end, assist us to name and challenge systems of privilege and to provide alternatives for transformation. Accountability and justness across a wide range of social differences assist us to build a foundation for distributive justice in education. We offer case examples throughout to illustrate our points. We include suggestions for decolonizing praxis which can be adopted within the academy to promote participatory democracy in training institutions. Finally we reveal a number of dilemmas we have encountered as a result of decolonizing efforts.

The voices emerging in this essay are those of a heterosexual, presently able bodied, Latina, Mestiza, born and raised in Colombia in a middle class environment that provided the conditions for her to pursue a doctoral degree in the U.S., gain her citizenship through a job, and eventually chose to stay in the U.S. (Pilar); and a White-privileged, presently able-bodied,
A straight female, who was raised in the Southwest U.S. in a patriarchal middle-class family (Teresa). We recognize that our social locations afford us certain fluidity, depending on the contexts we are in, but our experiences have also brought to our awareness the stable salience of some of our social location dimensions. Although our individual stand points as authors are important as a filter for the uniqueness of our experiences, we seek to highlight those elements that allow us to build bridges across difference and shared paths of resistance.

A DECOLONIZING FRAMEWORK

We use the term colonialism to refer to the promotion of dominant group (i.e., colonizer) ideologies, beliefs, and cultural practices for the purpose of maintaining centered positions of cultural, social, and economic capital. The history of colonization in the U.S. includes attempts by European invaders to dehumanize, destroy, and/or assimilate indigenous, enslaved, and indentured populations. These efforts resulted in long term, intergenerational inequities in the distribution of wealth and entrenched systems (including education) which continue to maintain colonial agendas. Mignolo (2005) used the term “colonization of being” to refer to the ideas and practices which communicate that “certain people do not belong to history” (p. 6). Thus, their experiences, histories, and knowledge are disqualified. Mignolo added that the coloniality of being operates through conversion to the ideals of modernization and western democracy, referencing the adaptation of Creole-Metizo/a elites to the ideas of civilization and progress in South America. We acknowledge that conditions of colonialism have developed unevenly, however we find this lens helpful in examining political and contested processes of academia. We use the term decolonization to position ourselves within the colonial history of the Americas, and to challenge and interrupt knowledge production, reproduction, and the practices that emerge from colonialism. A decolonizing framework stands on a perspective of coexistence rather than opposition to Euro-centric thinking because unlike Euro-centric universal endeavors, decolonial projects seek to be pluriversal. Furthermore, we use the term decolonization to more specifically reflect our stance of supporting cultural democracy and distributive justice within contemporary power dynamics of competing colonial agendas. For example, most mental health graduate programs reflect colonial agendas via selecting and more fully supporting students and faculty who demonstrate competence in speaking and writing Standard English, display middle-class attitudes and mannerisms, and accommodate dominant, Euro-centered teaching and learning practices. Educational programs of today include faculty and students whose social locations are traditionally marginalized, whose ancestors experienced the status of the colonized,
and/or who have migrated to the U.S. as a result of neoliberal practices that make developing countries poor job markets. Those who position themselves as decolonizing intellectuals move across the boundaries of scholarship, politics, activism, nationalities, institutions, communities, and are concerned not only with speaking from the position of Third World scholars, but also with being listened to seriously by those with privilege (Spivak, 1991).

Mir and Sharpe (2004, p. 4) used the concept of hegemony to discuss the ways in which dominance is exercised as a condition “where persuasion momentarily outweighs coercion.” The term hegemony refers to a complex of layered cultural norms from which and where the rest of the world can be described, classified, understood, and improved. They seem natural and inevitable, yet are open to contestation (Gramsci, 1992). Colonial discourses and contemporary educational structures contain ambivalence or heterogeneity in which contradictions and inconsistencies emerge, providing opportunities to challenge hegemonic control. As a result, spaces of resistance and liberation open up, allowing the possibility for creating alternative practices and transformation. This is one departure point of a decolonizing analysis. Questions that can be posed from this perspective include: How do educators with strong identification with marginalized identities navigate traditional educational systems? How do they transform in the process? How do they create spaces of agency in traditional academic settings? And, how are democratic processes created in spaces of resistance?

In the following sections, we discuss struggles we have encountered relative to various educational program discourses on diversity and multiculturalism as well as structural and interpersonal power dynamics. We believe paths available to scholars in institutions of higher learning offer some fairly stable conditions and expectations that situate faculty in accordance with colonial agendas in spaces of recognition (or lack of), dominance and/or marginalization. We have been able to recognize these dominant stable conditions by identifying repetitive patterns along the pathway of our professional development.

EDUCATION AND THE COLONIAL PROJECT

The colonial project relies on the cultural beliefs, values, and traditions of the colonizer being centered and dominant. Indigenous and diverse life ways are devalued, marginalized, and associated with low cultural capital. Those in power institutionalize their cultural capital transforming it into social capital to secure societal resources and influence. Without active interruption, this breeds a lateral pattern of establishing social capital networks and a perpetual intergenerational inheritance of social influence and access to resources. Dominant cultural practices are thought of as “normal”
and, therefore, preferred and right. In the case of the helping professions, these include Euro-centered theories and practices as well as established social hierarchies based on systems of privilege and oppression.

Traditional academic structures and cultures typically include practices, patterns, rules, values, knowledge, and interpersonal styles that reflect and ensure the well being and cultural capital of those at the center of society who most benefit from the colonial agenda. In fact, the way most U.S. academic institutions “do business” has been passed down within their andro- and Euro-centric origins and history, privileging White male faculty, administrators, and students while placing those in marginalized social locations and those who hold and value feminist, critical multicultural, and post-colonial standpoints at risk. For example, in their article, “Professors at the color line,” Chait and Trower (2001) discussed how in the last 30 years the percentage of male and female professors has not changed. Almost 80% of full professors were males and mostly White. Furthermore, over time academic institutions have been moving towards functioning based on market rationalism in regard to finances and policy (Currie, 1998 as cited by Cannella & Manuelito, 2008). The risk increases for faculty of color who may be viewed as the embodiment of these perspectives (Alkebulan, 2007). Figure 1 reflects our analysis of the established territory of academic institutions. This diagram demonstrates how Andro-, Euro-, and middle-class centric practices maintain the social capital of those in power over those from traditionally marginalized and colonized groups.

In the training of mental health professionals (e.g., counseling, psychology, marriage, and family therapy), the initiative to “pass down” field knowledge and established practice protocols is in dynamic interplay with social constructionist and critical perspectives, including agendas of cultural inclusion and democracy. For example, it is generally accepted in the curriculum and classroom to encourage students to consider how knowledge is constructed and to critique therapy models as reflective of hierarchical relationships in history and society. However, program faculty may encourage or discourage these discourses, emphasize or deemphasize cultural equity, and struggle with each other over curricular and program decisions based on their social awareness, political and social agendas, and colonial/post-colonial perspectives. Those with the most influence in the system possibly hold these positions as a result of being conscripted to represent existing institutional power structures. These players often “outvoice” those whose marginal perspectives have greater potential to transform the center. A potent example of this dynamic was documented by Williams and Evans-Winters (2005). These authors pointed to the challenges that female faculty of color often face with largely White student bodies. They noted the common dynamic of White students complaining about faculty of color to White faculty who in turn encourage faculty of color to use less critical and challenging pedagogical approaches. Pacifying White
students is done at the cost of critical learning and silencing faculty and students of color.

Students from nations outside the U.S. and marginalized social locations within it are frequently faced with being required to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and attitudes in keeping with the colonial agenda. For example, in an article by McDowell et al. (2006) a student from Turkey described how a U.S. trainer repeatedly pressured her to use “I” language as
a therapist. This ran counter to values of her collectivist culture, yet failing to do so would mean being viewed as less than competent by U.S. (colonizing) standards. In a study of the experiences of international students, McDowell, Fang, Kosutic, and Griggs (in press) quoted a participant who echoed this point: “I think faculty and supervisors are trying hard to understand me and my different perspectives, but I can’t stop feeling that they are unconsciously training me to be a White therapist.”

There is significant potential for reproducing colonizing agendas through formal and informal expectations and demands placed on faculty and students inhabiting traditionally marginalized locations to assimilate or be expelled. Part of navigating this terrain involves tracking the backlash experienced by those who fail to act within its boundaries. For example, a faculty member was given the academic freedom to include feminist, critical, and colonial critiques in the design of courses and classroom discussions, however her own socially located identity, life experience, indigenous/marginalized perspectives, and teaching practices were routinely devalued by students and colleagues. Low course evaluations were used by colleagues and administrators as evidence of “incompetence” relative to established Western teaching practices and consumer driven education rather than signifiers of colonial-indigenous boundary transgressions. We refer to boundary transgressions here as acts of aggression that disregard cultural differences and/or interpret those who are marginalized as deviant or deficient. In the case just described, students first transgressed the boundaries of the professor. There was a second transgression when colleagues and administrators failed to use the opportunity to expand cross-cultural competence in favor of admonishing the instructor. Additional examples of transgressions include faculty members being told indigenous informed mentorship styles or show of emotion in class is not “professional.” Transgressions are acts of aggression that require responses within moral, reparative, healing frameworks. They are also indicators of territorial boundaries that must be renegotiated to reach goals of transformation.

Moving toward a post-colonial academy requires a critical systemic understanding of formal and informal processes—hiring and admissions policies, tenure requirements, acceptable classroom andragogies, use of written texts, human subjects and research practices, student grading and instructor evaluation processes, relational networks that lead to promotion, preferred work styles—and how these processes function to privilege some while marginalizing others.

TOWARD AFFIRMING DECOLONIZATION IN THE ACADEMY

According to Watts, Williams, & Jagers (2003, p. 187) liberation “requires vision—a transition from critique to creativity.” Creativity is necessary to
envision a better professional and cultural environment as well as a moral order. For these authors, liberation “involves challenging gross social inequities between social groups and creating new relationships that dispel oppressive social myths, values, and practices” (p. 187). To this end, space must be made for multiple voices to participate in non-consensus driven dialogue and to express multiple knowledges and epistemologies. This can be created within, through, and in spite of the formal, established academic system. Individual actors are crucial in efforts to create formal institutional space for transformation (e.g., diversity committees, round tables, conferences, policy reviews), as well as informal spaces of resistance and liberation (e.g., strategizing behind closed doors, bearing witness to counter-stories). These spaces can mitigate microaggressions (i.e., acts of individual racism in the form of cultural insensitivity, dismissal of relevant racial/cultural issues, and/or stereotypical assumptions) and counter the coercive control of “power over” boundary transgressions. Effective participation in these spaces requires acknowledging and being held accountable for our interconnected privileges based on gender, race, ethnicity, nation of origin, sexual orientation, abilities, institutional networks and promotion, and professional roles. Figure 2 illustrates our understanding of how a post-colonial academia might value cultural democracy by transforming exclusive Andro-, Euro-, and middle-class centered institutions to include and value the voices and life experience of all involved.

Cannella and Manuelito (2008) argued at length for an anti-colonialist research stance which would end the separation between how data is collected from communities and the intellectuals who write about them. They have advocated for research interaction guidelines that make transparent public conversations, as well as new methodologies that lend themselves to the development of public conversations. Finally, Cannella and Manuelito have pressed for practices that would “avoid the reinscription of economic power that results when the dominant also becomes the method for the elimination of oppression/colonialism” (p. 50). This framework can inform practices beyond the realm of research, including academia. This includes the promotion of open, democratic, transformative processes that support inclusion and equity. Our vision of a post-colonial academy involves the following elements: (a) using the lens of intersectionality to transcend conceptualizations of oppression organized around single axes of identity, (b) identifying and providing alternatives that transform White and other systems of privilege into fair participatory structures and processes for all, and (c) prioritizing considerations of accountability and justness across a wide range of social differences.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Monk, Winslade, and Sinclair (2008, p. 451) stated that the helping professions must embrace “an analysis of power in order to understand the
personal effects of cultural relations in people’s lives and to be effective in offering movement toward change.” According to Collins (1998, p. 205), the concept of intersectionality “highlights how . . . social groups are positioned within unjust power relations, but it does so in a way that introduces added complexity to formerly race-, class-, and gender-only approaches to social phenomena.” Collins used the concept of standpoint to identify the complexities of intersecting identities within social contexts. An understanding of one’s socially structured position in context—one’s standpoint—is an
important element in identifying potential power differentials at play in specific academic and professional contexts. Our ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, ability, age, and nation of origin afford us certain privileges and bring about real limitations to being heard and taken seriously, to connecting with others, and being valued for the work we do and for who we are. Almeida, Dolan-Del Vecchio and Parker (2007) argued:

Mindfulness of intersectionality interrupts the usual pattern of discussing differences in a unitary manner. It is impossible to adequately evaluate the impact of one’s race, for example, apart from one’s gender, class, sexual orientation, age, and disability status (p. 57).

From a decolonizing framework, identity dimensions which intersect most closely with those of the colonizer (e.g., light skin in countries colonized by Europeans; shared ethnic decent and national citizenship with colonizers) are awarded the greatest cultural capital and collective individual privilege. This includes enhanced freedom of movement in physical and intellectual space; safety within systems of authority; social networks necessary to garner resources and opportunities; and influence through the use of one’s voice. In the context of participatory and democratic ideals attending to multiple voices from the ground (e.g., faculty and students) and creating a culture of inclusion involves having spaces where input, visions, cultural norms, and values can be assessed and weighted to negotiate how differences will be handled, promotions will be granted, programming decisions will be made, curriculum will be developed, and so on.

PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES

Participatory democratic processes must ultimately include everyone regardless of her or his level critical consciousness, social location, or institutional status. Purposeful and proactive measures must be taken to level the field relative to the multiple ways in which gender, ethnic, sexual, class, and ability privileges play a role in department structure, program development, relationships among faculty and students, salaries, committee work, and research. Faculty and administrators must be held accountable to examine their own privilege and practices which contribute to academic hegemony (Clawson & Leiblum, 2008). Faculty, administrators, supervisors, and students can engage in transformative dialogue toward decolonizing academic spaces. For example, in a context where a heterosexual male faculty of color chairs a department and works with an all female faculty group, both lesbian and straight, immigrant and non-immigrant, White and of color, mindfulness of intersections of privilege would involve his respecting the boundaries and privacy of groups engaged in decolonizing efforts (resistance);
thinking through the demarcation of the space he occupies (e.g., recognizing that he does not have the right to inhabit all spaces at all times, not imposing conditions of how and when conversations occur); constantly working on accountability for his standpoint; not owning solutions for problems; and using institutional power only when the group decides it is important to do so.

To engage in conversations and collaboration across social locations is to essentially occupy space in borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987; Saavedra & Nymark, 2008). The concept of borderlands is useful within a post-colonial framework as it describes often highly contested geographical, institutional, and/or cultural space inhabited by groups with diverging agendas. Expanding borderlands as spaces to suspend decisions, engage in dialogue, increase understanding, engage in expression beyond what is considered logical and rational, and envision transformation is a critical step in moving toward decolonizing, multi-vocal, culturally democratic academic institutions. For example, Saavedra and Nymark (2008) used the framework of Borderland-Mestizaje Feminism to discuss how they integrated cultural practices of immigrants in high quality childhood programs into an early English literacy program. By creating a collaboration between the first author and a steering committee of non-academics, she was able to create an alliance that resisted the limiting demands of a narrowly defined project and opened it up to the concerns of the recipient community. The Borderland-Mestizaje Feminism is in itself an epistemology of resistance. As a paradigm of transcultural experience, it invites “hybrid forms of knowledge, (de)construction, meaning, and maneuvering” (Saavedra & Nymark, 2008, p. 257) and opens spaces for those of us who exist among multiple cultures, languages, sexual identities, and discourses.

In daily practice, the complexities of our intersecting identities and standpoints place us in ever changing positions with each other which require a continuous and discontinuous flow of ideas, connection, and influence. Faculty must prepare for difficult dialogical exchanges about multiple identities and worldviews to fully engage in participatory practices. Doing their own work first by using a collective of peers to address their own issues of empowerment and accountability is an essential first step. For example, several colleagues may share the goal of increasing cultural democracy in their academic setting. To do so, they come together in a safe, private space (i.e., space of liberation) to discuss their experiences with racism in the institution. This may lead to strategies for change, including collaborating to implementing a department wide diversity initiative. To be successful, they must enter borderlands to engage in dialogue with privileged colleagues who may not see a problem with racism. As a result of supporting and trusting each other members of this group may enter a large faculty meeting with a sense of solidarity which sustains them as the larger faculty debates the value of working on diversity initiatives. This space of liberation
can eventually enrich the entire system via feedback mechanisms at every level that incorporate the dialogue of faculty, students, and administrators. Liberation space should function within the ideals of creating cultural democracy in the workplace through valuing of a wide range of educational methods and strategies in the training of mental health professionals. Thus, philosophies and ways of healing involving the traditions of marginalized groups can be included in training curricula and pedagogical practices (c.f., McNeill & Cervantes [2008] work on Mestizo and indigenous healing perspectives; Ajamu, [1997] African-centered perspectives; Yellowbird [1995] First Nations ways of healing).

**FAIRNESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

According to Almeida, Dolan Del-Vecchio and Parker (2007, p. 107),

Accountability begins with the acceptance of responsibility for one’s actions and the impact of those actions upon others. Accountability moves beyond blame and guilt, however. It results in reparative action that demonstrates empathic concern for others by making changes that enhance the quality of life for all involved parties.

Simply acknowledging positions of privilege allows for “false accountability” that maintains individual advantage and systemic oppression. Decolonizing academic spaces in mental health training involves, in part, that we look at the past and the present to build a new future. Incorporating a historical perspective on the legacies of power and control struggles, exclusion and genocide is key to understanding the contemporary health issues of ethnic minorities (Miller & Garran, 2008). For example, the relationship between an individual’s experience of racism and stress has been examined and documented in numerous studies (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Utsey, 1999; Utsey & Ellison, 2000). Race based stressors produce anxiety and increased blood pressure (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Din-Dzietham, Nembhard, Collins, & Davis, 2004), and impact negatively youth academic performance (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000). In his review on racism and psychological injury, Carter (2007) argued that in spite of the differences in models and methodologies, “there is agreement among mental health professionals that stress affects both mental and physical health” (p. 27), that stress is a key dimension in various areas of life (varying from situations like poverty to daily events), and that how a person perceives an experience influences how a racial event is interpreted as stressful.

Most faculty and administrators in mental health training programs in the U.S. share central identity dimensions with historical colonizers (e.g., white skin, European ancestry) and must continually hold themselves...
accountable for unearned privilege. This accountability includes active use of privilege to support a post-colonial agenda and is most effectively and ethically used in collaboration with colleagues who share histories of being colonized and who can contribute to accountability measures. It is not uncommon for White colleagues to be eager to remedy the inequalities suffered by colleagues of color, resulting in liberal, patronizing actions that inadvertently further the colonial agenda by reifying those in the center as having power to solve “for” rather than “with.” This position fails to acknowledge broader systems of colonization in which members of dominant groups are embedded. This recognition can sometimes leave White academics paralyzed—uncertain of how to make a difference.

It is important for White academics to engage each other in conversations about race and White privilege, opening space for critiquing what is often invisible to those in the most privileged positions. The ability to inform and challenge other White colleagues can be important when processes that support social inequity are being argued and racial microaggressions occur. To engage in this open dialogue, we must all be prepared to make mistakes and to expose our own learning and growth processes. White colleagues can advocate for post-colonial positions with less fear of reprisal, calling for inclusion of critical multiculturalism in curricula, understanding diverse teaching and learning styles, and reviewing scholarship from post-colonial perspectives. White colleagues often have access to and greater influence on persons of power within institutions, but should not expect open access to all spaces of resistance in which colleagues of color gather and caucus. Members of dominant groups need to be continuously cognizant of the fact that they (we) don’t own or belong in every space or know all of the solutions. They (we) must, however, help support the process of making space and creating institutional change.

According to Almeida, Dolan-Del Vecchio and Parker (2007) White faculty can train mental health professionals from diverse cultures to work with clients from diverse cultures as long as there is a critical consciousness about self and other. Framing culture in a multiracial society necessitates the ethics of remembering fundamental historic events. For example, teaching modules integrating the discourse of White power, privilege, and multiculturalism could focus on: the seizing of Native American land and the genocidal policies that accomplished it; the enslavement of Blacks; the internment camps; the Asian Exclusion Act; conditions of the Asian workers building the American railroads, and of migrant farm workers and illegal aliens from Latin America.

**DECOLONIZING PRAXIS**

In this section, we include a number of suggestions for engaging in transformative decolonizing praxis within and beyond academic settings. We draw from
our own work and the work of others engaged in decolonizing efforts to illustrate the potential for institutional change, including caucus groups, cultural audits, accountability for White (colonial) privilege, dialogue groups, institutional decision making, and diversity action plans.

Caucus Groups

Accountability can be integrated at an institutional level through the use of caucusing (Tamasese & Waldergrave, 2008a, 2008b). For example, the New Zealand Just Therapy Team uses gender and ethnic caucuses to address imbalances of power held by men and pakeha (White) groups in their organization. Decisions impacting their internal dynamics and work with the communities they serve are processed first in conversations within each group and among groups. These caucuses are a structural part of the organization to protect and prevent gender and cultural biases on a day to day basis. This institutional space allows people to address their own issues, bring new perspectives and work out their differences. The values that guide this accountability practice are humility, sacredness, respect, justice, love, trust, and cooperation. The principles of reciprocity and responsibility are also embedded in the process for all participants. Caucuses from marginalized groups (i.e., gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity) use the space to develop a clear collective voice, heal, and build knowledge. Caucuses from dominant groups use the space to raise critical consciousness, develop personal and collective responsibility and build care and support. Caucuses are used as check points for balancing agency structures and addressing policy issues. The goal is to enhance equity between power differentials amongst groups.

Groups may also be formed within the academy to bring people together within and across dimensions of social location for the purpose of engaging in shared decolonizing projects. Examples include White privilege accountability groups, students and faculty of color consortiums, gender and sexuality inquiry groups; racial dialogue groups (McDowell et al., 2003); and international dialogue groups (McDowell, et al., 2006).

Cultural Audits

Tamasese and Waldergrave (2008a, 2008b) also discuss the use of cultural audits with organizations to address the needs of the marginalized populations they intend to serve, including how they use their funding and organizational structure to serve the interests of dominant populations at the expense of marginalized groups. For example, in their work with the New Zealand lottery grants board, they brought in the history of Pacific people in New Zealand within the context of colonial, political, and economic relationships, analyzed current legislation to identify how Pacific peoples had been excluded from the benefits that the lottery was supposed
to bring to the entire New Zealand population and delineated the ways in which Pacific peoples were consistently benefiting less from lottery funding in comparison with the pakeha population. They designed a strategy to ensure that funding to Pacific people was consistent with their representation of the population and addressed the level of deprivation experienced in various areas such as housing and health.

Cultural audits can be completed through the implementation of diversity action plans which are institutionally sanctioned. This can begin with institutional climate studies in which the history of hiring and retaining faculty of color, experiences of international students and students of color, promotion and tenure decisions, the curricula, and other institutional policies, procedures, and practices are evaluated. It can also begin with any unit willing to engage in change. For example, faculty within an academic program might decide to develop and implement a diversity plan that among other things sets benchmarks for inclusion of students and faculty of color, integration of decolonizing text into the curriculum, and collaboration with local groups representing refugee and immigrant groups. Sharing this plan with other department programs and university administrators invites others to follow suit.

Collaborating Beyond the Academic Institution

It is important to develop space with fluid boundaries and borders that allow for mobility, collaborations, and alliances with professional networks and non-academic institutions. This space provides the most opportunities for creating spaces of liberation through participatory action research projects, and community involvement. For example, Pilar created research teams with small groups of students to develop participatory action research and consultation projects (Hernández, Bunyi, & Townson, 2007). These projects involved training students in qualitative research methodologies, learning to work with community organizers and organizations, developing collaborations with non-profit organizations, mentoring students to write and present at professional conferences, and offering services to community members. Collaboration with community groups and like-minded groups within professional organizations are examples of relationships that can build and sustain decolonizing efforts. We hold our own collaborations with each other as an example of cross-institutional collaboration toward post-colonial praxis.

CONCLUSION

Navigating academic environments dedicated to training mental health professionals is a challenging task. We face multiple challenges from our
own colleagues, the larger system, and the students we train. There are a number of dilemmas that emerge through a decolonizing paradigm. For example, faculty of color may work in departments where they are the only representative of their ethnic group. They may be in situations that foster competition and the privileging of one marginalized group over another by the dominant group. If faculty members from marginalized groups don’t work collaboratively to resolve their own differences and develop a collective voice, the logic of colonization prevails—that is, the logic by which dominant groups divide and conquer by elevating one marginalized group over another. Other challenges involve dealing with faculty from marginalized groups who are in positions of authority (i.e., department chair, dean), and espouse progressive discourses on diversity and social justice, but misuse positional power. A number of dilemmas emerge at a systemic level. For example, scholarship on diversity issues increases the status of White scholars and privileges their standpoint. They may examine a variety of topics relative to ethnic minority groups with little or no questioning of their expertise as outsiders in these communities. Scholars of color who develop their scholarship mostly by examining their own ethnic group, however, become marginalized by their expertise and are questioned if they try to study other ethnic minority or dominant groups. Another disturbing development involves the ways in which diversity and social justice efforts are routinely co-opted by organizations’ mission statements and advertisements. Descriptions of mental health education programs highlighting their diverse faculty and curriculum are abundant in today’s marketplace. In spite of the accountability efforts by accreditation bodies, there is always the possibility of exploiting gaps between what is advertised or seen as the ideal and program training practices that are a far reflection from those ideals. For example, counseling programs portraying themselves as social justice oriented may have an internal structure where a White husband and wife team has the authority over who is admitted into the program, what faculty fits their agendas, what curriculum is taught, and so forth. While devoid of real accountability and participation, these programs successfully represent themselves on paper to the larger university and professional community. Moving toward decolonizing academia requires in-depth consideration of dynamics that emerge as a result of colonial distributions of power, including redefining what constitutes academic capital.

Social and cultural capital that privileges those in dominant social locations (e.g., maleness; Whiteness; middle-class backgrounds; Euro-centered speech, writing, teaching styles and research) is the universal currency of power and influence in academic systems. Most academics have spent their careers developing this type of “academic capital.” Changes that support values and practices of social equity and cultural democracy, that is, decolonizing efforts, support pluriversal capital which challenges the power of those most invested in the dominance of a single cultural framework. In
other words, it is advantageous for one’s cultural capital to be centered and to mirror what is most valued and rewarded. Even if this is not the case, being successful in the academy requires “playing by the rules” of the dominant culture. Decolonizing efforts transform the center and change the constitution of academic capital. This creates significant challenges as those most benefiting from, and invested in, the status quo struggle to maintain and resist sharing influence and privilege. Even those who are actively advocating for transformation can be unnerved as the rules for success change and academic capital is redistributed.

As we close, we acknowledge that faculty, students, and administrators around the globe are opening spaces of liberation and resistance, engaging in decolonizing dialogue, and taking action toward transforming educational settings. Most are working in relative isolation or at most in small “pockets” within large systems. Many activists, particularly those who are culturally marginalized, are at risk of losing their jobs, crippling their careers, or worse. At the beginning of this paper, we highlighted intersectionality, participation, and accountability. All of us need to participate within and across institutions to form alliances through which strategies for change can be developed and implemented. Those of us who have long benefited from our cultural capital being centered need to hold ourselves and each other accountable for the tendency to view our own values and ideals as universal and resist accumulating academic capital at the expense of others. We must also be accountable for recognizing that the centering of our cultural capital has enhanced our social capital, providing us the privilege of professional networks for the promotion of our careers. Finally, we must deeply value intersectionality—the complexities of our multiple and varied social locations and experiences—as foundational and indispensable in supporting cultural democracy in family therapy and counselor education.

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