Creating a College-Going Culture for Economically Disadvantaged Students Through Social Justice Counseling

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The authors describe conceptual perspectives of social justice, detailing the importance of raising the consciousness of marginalized individuals and groups. Concepts such as action, equity, and access are discussed in relation to social justice-oriented counseling. The remainder of the article examines the equity and access gaps students of economic disadvantage face in educational settings, with examples of interventions and programs that have increased the academic success of students. The article explicates how professionals can utilize the American Counseling Association Advocacy Competencies and the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies when working with students of economic disadvantage. Last, the primary author provides a reflective analysis of how personal privileges and oppressions have influenced a commitment to advocate for economically disadvantaged students.

Keywords: social justice, advocacy, counseling, economic disadvantage, education

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Defining Social Justice

Conceptualizing a definition of social justice is a daunting task. For several years, laypersons, religious groups, politicians, philosophers, and academics have provided insights on what constitutes liberty and social welfare for all human beings. Significant overlap exists between the various perspectives of social justice. Scholars such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Paulo Freire, and John Rawls proposed that social justice must start with *unveiling* oppression (Du Bois, 1999; Freire, 2000; Rawls, 1999). The veil is a symbolic term that signifies how marginalized individuals are conceivably unaware of their oppressive conditions. Historically, marginalized individuals and groups have been indoctrinated with the hegemonic beliefs and values of dominant groups (e.g., White male, middle-class, heterosexual, Christian values) (Crethar, Rivera, & Nash, 2008). Social justice starts with raising the consciousness of the oppressed. Hereafter, marginalized individuals and groups are better able to engage in psychological liberation when they gain awareness of injustices (Montero, 2007).

While psychological liberation is necessary, it is not sufficient to eradicate injustice (Freire, 2000; Goodman et al., 2004; Martín-Baró, 1994). Actions are essential to promoting social justice (Freire, 2000). When people from oppressed groups gain awareness of the unfair practices and structures, along with the necessary skills to impart change, they are better able to eradicate systems that reinforce such inequities. In essence, a comprehensive definition of social justice represents bringing awareness to various forms of oppression and social inequities, as well as actively working to change social institutions, and political and economic systems that may perpetuate unfair practices in terms of accessibility, resource distribution, and human rights in an effort to enhance the academic, career, and

personal/social development of historically marginalized individuals and groups (Fouad, Gerstein, & Toporek, 2006).

Recently, scholars have espoused the importance of integrating the social justice paradigm into the counseling field (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2015). Social justice counseling entails the promotion of four critical principles: equity, access, participation, and harmony (Crethar & Winterowd, 2012). Equity refers to the fair distribution of resources, rights, and responsibilities and access is the ability of others to obtain the knowledge, resources, and services that allow for self-determination (Crethar et al., 2008; Crethar & Winterowd, 2012). Participation refers to the right all people should have in making decisions that impact their well-being, and harmony is striving for the best outcomes for all members of society (Crethar et al., 2008; Crethar & Winterowd, 2012). Counseling professionals with a social justice orientation focus on these principles collectively in an effort to address injustices faced by disenfranchised groups.

Children and adolescents from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, a historically disenfranchised group, are pervasively impacted by systemic inequities in the education system. In comparison to their peers from more affluent backgrounds, youth across the United States (U.S.) who experience economic disadvantage have increased challenges related to accessing quality compulsory education, as well as transitioning to and persisting in college (Welton & Martinez, 2014; Williams et al., 2015). The attainment of a college education is a key way for persons who experience economic disadvantage to achieve upward social and economic mobility that may enhance their overall personal, social, and economic wellbeing (Perna & Jones, 2013). Thus, the purpose of this article is to examine the equity and access gaps students of economic disadvantage face in educational settings and provide strategies to promote a college-going culture for economically disadvantaged students. In this regard, we present examples of interventions and

programs that have increased the academic success of economically disadvantaged students, in which social justice-oriented counselors and professionals working in educational settings can also adopt. Following, we provide an overview of the American Counseling Association Advocacy Competencies and the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCCs) and explain how professionals working with students of economic disadvantage can utilize these tools to promote a college-going culture. We also discuss implications for practice and future research related to increasing higher education attainment for economically disadvantaged students. Last, the primary author provides a reflective analysis of how personal privileges and oppressions have influenced her personal commitment to advocate for economically disadvantaged students.

Access and Equity Gaps for Students of Economic Disadvantage

Economic disadvantage is a broad term used to refer to low socioeconomic statuses, low income, and poverty. Liu et al. (2004) conducted a content analysis of 710 articles on social class from three counseling journals between the years of 1981 and 2000 and found that 448 different words were used to describe social class. Unlike race and gender, social class remains one of the most obscure, understudied, and least understood cultural constructs (Barratt, 2012; Liu et al., 2004). While the categorization of economic disadvantage is unclear and inconsistent, it is important to understand how socioeconomic disparities present barriers to equitable educational opportunities for students from low-income families.

Educational Access and Equity Gaps

Obtaining a college education has vast benefits. Acquiring a post-secondary education is linked to greater employment opportunities, improved health, and lower rates of drug use and incarceration; hence, attaining a higher education has been perceived as the best escape route from perils associated with economic disadvantage (Cady, 2012; Institute of Medicine, 2014). Yet, experiencing economic disadvantage significantly limits access to post-secondary educational opportunities (Benner, Boyle, & Sadler, 2016; Firfirey & Carolissen, 2010). For example, differences in college enrollment rates by family income continually persist. In 2015, the immediate college enrollment rate for persons from high-income families was 83% compared to 63% for those from low-income families (McFarland et al., 2017). Youth from economically disadvantaged families may be less academically and socially prepared for the demands of post-secondary education due to several factors (Welton & Martinez, 2014). Within the school setting, school counselors in high poverty schools are less able to provide adequate college readiness support due to large caseloads, limited funds, being assigned various non-counseling duties, having less training in culturally-responsive services, and having lower academic expectations for economically disadvantaged students (Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, & Colyar, 2004; Welton & Martinez, 2014; Williams et al., 2015). Additionally, the level of parental involvement in school and at home, as well as parents' and students' academic socialization, or messages received about school, are identified as leading variables in the preparedness gap between affluent and disadvantaged youth (Benner et al., 2016; Welton & Martinez, 2014).

Social Oppression

Few Americans recognize the structural forces at play such as discrimination, racism, and classism that influence and sustain economic

disadvantage and impact students' educational success (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001). Stereotypes, stigmas, and economic challenges complicate the educational experiences of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds at all levels (i.e., primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels) and affect their opportunities for equitable educational experiences (Barratt, 2012; Williams et al., 2015). The lack of multicultural awareness can create additional challenges for those living in poverty, as biases and limited knowledge and appreciation of cultural differences can lead to the development of false beliefs pertaining to the population and why they are placed at a disadvantage (Clark, Moe, & Hays, 2017). Rather than examining structural forces, researchers identified that many people believe that economic disadvantage is primarily attributed to internal attributes (e.g., lack of effort, laziness, drug use) (Cozzarelli et al., 2001). Moreover, counselors and teachers from dominant groups often overlook cultural capital present in high poverty communities such as the sense of community, high parental expectations, pride, and school-family-community partnerships that could contribute to students' academic achievement (Welton & Martinez, 2014).

Student Demographics

Although anyone is susceptible to economic disadvantage, researchers have identified that African American and Hispanic students experience the most insidious effects of poverty in educational settings (Holcomb-McCoy, 2010; Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004; Welton & Martinez, 2014). For example, African American and Latino high school students in high poverty schools reported that less access to rigorous curricula, school personnel's negative attitudes and low expectations of students of color, susceptibility to increased violence and unsafe communities, and poor relationships with counselors and teachers contributed to adverse schooling experiences and less engagement in

college readiness activities (Vega, Moore, & Miranda, 2015; Welton & Martinez, 2014). College readiness represents the level of academic, social, and cognitive preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed in courses offered at post-secondary institutions (Conley, 2007).

Furthermore, researchers indicated that economically disadvantaged students in rural areas in the southern U.S. experience significant gaps in access to community and academic resources that may support their advancement to college (Irvin, Meece, Byun, Farmer, & Hutchins, 2011). Students in economically disadvantaged rural areas are more likely to experience generational poverty (Irvin et al., 2011) and school administrators often have difficulty employing qualified counselors and teachers who are dedicated to the rural student body long-term. Subsequently, students may disengage in the learning experience due to the perceived lack of support from their counselors and teachers, limiting their aspirations of attaining a college degree (Irvin et al., 2011; Vega et al., 2015).

Personal and Social Challenges

Students of economic disadvantage report feelings of shame and humiliation due to their lower socioeconomic status, as well as being judged by teachers who made them feel alienated in classrooms (Firfirey & Carolissen, 2010). Reddick, Welton, Alsandor, Denyszyn, and Platt (2011) conducted a qualitative study to examine the academic and social challenges economically disadvantaged minority high school students faced on their path to post-secondary education. This research and other studies (Welton & Martinez, 2014; Williams et al., 2015) reported counselors and teachers often had low expectations of economically disadvantaged students and in return, the students had low expectations of the counselors, teachers, administrators, and of themselves. Firfirey and Carolissen (2010) reported students expressed they are often silent in classrooms because their

language and experiences do not match the middle-class language or experiences espoused by teachers. Milkie and Warner (2011) found that students in negative classroom environments, with low academic standards, and who lack material resources, have poorer intrapersonal and interpersonal functioning. The devaluation of economically disadvantaged students may lead to decreased feelings of self-worth and challenge students' academic self-efficacy (Reddick et al., 2011).

Transitioning to College

Roderick et al. (2009) identified the three most common ways of assessing college readiness as (1) coursework requirements for college admission, (2) achievement test scores, and (3) grade point averages. Students with higher test scores, grade point averages, and rigorous coursework are more likely to attend and graduate from college (Roderick et al., 2011). Research has shown that students from low-income families are overrepresented in less rigorous, lower track courses in secondary education (Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Reddick et al., 2011). Less rigorous curricula may not afford economically disadvantaged students the advanced academic skills that are necessary for college success. Furthermore, literature has shown that low-income students are frequently placed in remedial courses in their first year of college (Roderick et al., 2009).

Regarding college admission, unfamiliarity with this process may lead economically disadvantaged students to enroll in colleges which are less selective than they are academically eligible to attend, as researchers have identified that economically disadvantaged students are more likely to attend community colleges (Roderick et al., 2009). While any college attendance is commendable, researchers have questioned if economically disadvantaged students make a fully informed choice to attend community colleges. Many economically disadvantaged students are the first persons in their families to attend college and often have less access to

college resources such as the information, skills, and services to successfully navigate college admission processes and understand the college culture (Crumb & Haskins, 2017; Reddick et al., 2011; Roderick et al., 2009; Welton & Martinez, 2014). Reddick et al. (2011) speculated that students of economic disadvantage may unwittingly choose to attend community colleges due to limited access to information about four-year colleges and universities.

Understanding ways to finance a college education is also important for students of economic disadvantage and their families. Financial aid in the form of government and institutionally funded grants and loans has a positive impact on college access for low-income students (Douglass & Thomson, 2012). However, the American Council on Education estimated that the lowest-income groups made up 24% of non-applicants for government and institutionally funded financial aid in 2004 (American Council on Education, 2004). Low-income students need additional guidance from school counselors, teachers, and other non-familial adults in order to ascertain resources for financial aid for post-secondary education (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Irvin et al., 2011; Venegas, 2006). High school students who meet regularly with their school counselors to discuss college funding and scholarship opportunities are more likely to pursue higher education at four-year institutions after graduation (McKillip, Rawls, & Barry, 2012).

Social Justice-Oriented Programming, Interventions, and Outreach

Due to the stigma and shame attached to poverty, the hidden nature of social class, and the lack of resources, advocates for social justice must intentionally reach out to students of economic disadvantage and their families. Fortunately, there are interventions and programs that have been established to mend the gaps in equity and access to improve educational success for economically disadvantaged students.

The following sections provide examples of programs and interventions that have increased the academic success of economically disadvantaged students in secondary and post-secondary educational settings.

College Access Interventions

An ample amount of research has demonstrated that parental and family involvement in educational activities is essential for students who experience economic disadvantage (Benner et al., 2016; Holcomb-McCoy, 2010). Parental involvement has been positively linked to higher academic achievement, school attendance, and increasing aspirations for higher education (Benner et al., 2016). As noted, economically disadvantaged students and their families are more dependent on school counselors for access to college information (Bryan et al., 2011; Holcomb-McCoy, 2010; Irvin et al., 2011). Holcomb-McCoy (2010) conducted a study to explore how high school counselors working in high-poverty and high-minority schools involved parents in the college admissions process. Counselors in the study reported that working with parents of low-income students to increase college readiness was an important aspect of their job. Counselors reported sending parents calendars of college-planning activities and test dates, holding meetings with parents of 11th graders to disseminate college information, and organizing parent volunteers. Furthermore, Holcomb-McCoy recommended additional school counseling interventions to use when working with low-income students such as parent-to-parent advising. In parent-to-parent advising, counselors train parent volunteers about the college admissions process and the parent conducts workshops in the community to share information with other families (Holcomb-McCoy, 2010). Counselors working with marginalized populations should strive to understand the reasons why parents may be reluctant to participate in school activities (e.g., shame, inflexible work schedules). School counselors can

also help parents understand the types of programs of study offered in colleges and discuss various financial aid options.

Collegiate Programs

Parental involvement in post-secondary educational activities is linked to the academic success of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008). Recognizing the importance of parental involvement in college success, the University of Pennsylvania School of Dental Medicine created the Short Term Enrichment Program (STEP) (Wadenya & Lopez, 2008). STEP targets low-income, ethnic minority students to promote students' participation in the dentistry field (Wadenya & Lopez, 2008). High school students and parents participate in enrichment activities for three years that include educating the families about the dental profession, discussing stereotypes about the profession, explaining admission requirements and financial aid options, and participating in experiential activities (Wadenya & Lopez, 2008). The program pairs students with role models who are dentists from historically marginalized groups to support students' development of educational and career goals. STEP mentors work with high school counselors to assist parents and students in selecting the appropriate college preparatory courses to increase the students' ability to enter dentistry programs (Wadenya & Lopez, 2008). The five-year preliminary evaluation of STEP indicated that 38% of the students who participated enrolled in predental/dental programs, while 20% of students enrolled in other health sciences programs (Wadenya & Lopez, 2008).

Federal Programs

Federally funded education opportunity programs have had a significant impact on increasing equitable participation in higher education. Originating from President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, federal TRIO programs were created to provide equal educational opportunities for underrepresented students (Pitre & Pitre, 2009). TRIO is the term used to refer to the first three educational opportunity programs – Upward Bound, Educational Talent Search, and Student Support Services. Upward Bound and Educational Talent Search focus on college readiness and transitioning students from secondary to post-secondary education settings (Pitre & Pitre, 2009), while Student Support Services support college retention.

TRIO programs provide a host of interventions to increase college readiness for students of economic disadvantage, first-generation college students, ethnic/racial minorities, and students with disabilities such as providing assistance with college applications, admissions exams, tutoring, counseling, and cultural enrichment activities (Pitre & Pitre, 2009). The Upward Bound program has a residential component in which students stay on campus and attend college classes, providing them direct exposure to the college environment. The Educational Talent Search program targets middle school students. Staff and counselors travel to schools and engage students, teachers, and administrators in activities to cultivate a college-going culture by providing students with information about various vocational choices and conducting workshops focused on building self-esteem and goal setting (Pitre & Pitre, 2009). Nationally, 2,800 TRIO programs have served approximately 790,000 low-income students from grade six through college graduation (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2017). TRIO has continuously expanded to include additional education opportunity programs.

Community Programs

Researchers have emphasized the importance of considering contexts outside of schools that support the educational persistence of economically disadvantaged students (Boyd, Kamaka, & Braun, 2012; Irvin, Farmer, Leung, Thompson, & Hutchins, 2010; Timmermans & Booker, 2006). Specifically, low-income families are often affiliated with churches that offer varying types of educational support such as mentoring or financial assistance (Irvin et al., 2010; Reddick et al., 2011). As an example, Pathways to Possibilities is a pre-college program created by a partnership between a local college and 19 area churches in Grand Rapids, Michigan (Timmermans & Booker, 2006). The program targets 7th – 12th grade students living in impoverished neighborhoods. College faculty, college students, and church members collaborate to offer economically disadvantaged students pre-college activities, such as assistance with college searches, college admission processes, and financial aid instruction (Timmermans & Booker, 2006). Program staff also provide computer training, homework assistance, and motivational presentations. Eleventh and 12th grade participants attend a four-week residential college preparatory experience in which they stay on campus, attend college classes, and receive mentoring and academic coaching. An assessment of the Pathways to Possibilities program identified that 328 out of 467 participants have entered college since the start of the program (Timmermans & Booker, 2006).

Increasing college admission and retention for students who experience economic disadvantage is an important mission. To date, several programs have aided in the successful enrollment and graduation of economically disadvantaged students. Involvement with parents, communities, and religious groups has been effective in providing equitable opportunities for academic success. Counselors have served an important role in many of the programs by adopting a multicultural, social justice approach to school-family-community collaborations (Griffin & Steen, 2011). The social justice counseling movement calls for counselors to work

as change agents at the individual, community, and institutional levels (Ratts & Hutchins, 2009). Counselors can continue to create college going cultures for economically disadvantaged students through social justice advocacy.

Advocacy for Students of Economic Disadvantage

The American Counseling Association (ACA) endorsed the Advocacy Competencies as a framework to help counselors implement social justice advocacy and interventions (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002). In 2015, the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCCs) were developed to provide a framework for counselors to integrate culturally sensitive counseling and advocacy into their teaching, research, and counseling practices, further highlighting the dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression (Ratts et al., 2015). Together, these competencies help counselors address systems of oppression that negatively affect clients' wellbeing. Counselor-advocates are charged to take action to address problems such as poverty, unequal access to opportunity, and various other forms of oppression that adversely affect the academic, career, and personal/social development of historically marginalized individuals and groups (Fouad et al., 2006; Griffin & Steen, 2011; Ratts et al., 2015).

Social justice advocacy interventions that consider social class, classism, and poverty are largely absent from research (Liu et al., 2004; Smith, 2008). The aim of the following section is to present examples of how counselors can use advocacy strategies promulgated in the ACA Advocacy Competencies and the MSJCCs to increase equity in higher education attainment for economically disadvantaged students. The first section provides examples of how counselors can work with students on the individual level. Next, examples are provided to demonstrate how counselors can advocate within community systems. The final section includes examples of how counselors can engage in social and political

advocacy on the macro level. Each level contains two domains that emphasize counseling and advocacy interventions *with* or *on behalf* of the client (Ratts et al., 2015).

Client/Student Level Intervention

At the client/student level, actions are focused on the individual student. It is important for counselors to help students develop an awareness of systemic factors that influence their problems. For example, counselors can help students realistically appraise the origins of their problems. Within this domain, counselors can assess for internalized oppression, create a sense of awareness of environmental barriers, and develop self-advocacy plans (Ratts & Hutchins, 2009; Ratts et al., 2015).

Client/student Empowerment. An example of student empowerment might include a counselor who helps an economically disadvantaged student understand the structural forces of poverty. The counselor can explain factors that influence economic disadvantage (e.g., discrimination) in order to help the student understand his or her situation in context (Ratts et al., 2015). Externalizing the problem will help the student understand he or she is not the problem. Ratts (2009) recommended the use of cognitive restructuring to increase students' awareness of how their problems are connected to oppressive conditions. The counselor can also assist the student in identifying his or her strengths and resources. For example, the counselor can help the student develop a list of positive qualities and affirmations.

Client/student Advocacy. A counselor can use student advocacy in a situation in which the students are unable to attain needed resources on their own.

For example, an economically disadvantaged student may not have money for public transportation. The lack of funds may prevent the student from attending classes. The counselor may have knowledge of a program at the school that provides a small stipend to cover bus fare. The counselor can inform the student about the transportation fare program as well as other programs that are available to assist students with financial needs. The willingness to advocate for relevant services with or on behalf of the client as well as teach the client self-advocacy skills is a key intervention used in this domain (Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahan, 2010). The counselor may choose to contact the support program coordinators directly in order to expedite the process to prevent the student from missing classes.

School/Community Level Intervention

Actions within the school/community level move from the individual to the group level (Toporek, Lewis, & Crethar, 2009). Counselors may collaborate with clients, community leaders, or school administrators to bring awareness to oppressive conditions. The counselor's goal is to work toward systemic changes and teach clients how to become change agents.

Community Collaboration. A counselor functions as ally in this domain (Lewis et al., 2002). An example of community collaboration might be a counselor who helps students to form a working-class student support group. Counselors can collaborate with programs already working for change, such as the TRIO program, to connect students with additional resources.

Systems Advocacy. An example of systems advocacy is a counselor who recognizes that employed economically disadvantaged students are unable to attend

classes that follow the traditional daytime schedule. The counselor can bring this issue to the attention of school administrators. On behalf of economically disadvantaged students, the counselor can advocate for adding evening, weekend, or online classes to make school attendance more accommodating for students who have to maintain employment.

Public Arena Level Intervention

In the public arena, counselors act to address oppressive conditions at the macrolevel. The counselors' efforts are geared toward disrupting systems and ideologies that perpetuate injustices for disenfranchised groups (Lee & Rodgers, 2009). The counselor aims to influence public opinion, policy, and legislation. Counselors may engage in actions such as lobbying, grant writing, participating in action research, or supporting existing alliances working toward social justice (Goodman, Pugach, Skolnik, & Smith, 2013; Lee & Rodgers, 2009; Ratts et al., 2015).

Public Information. An example that calls for this level of advocacy could be if counselors recognize that college recruiters rarely visit high schools located in impoverished neighborhoods. The counselor can work with the students and the community to prepare written material to bring awareness to the issue. The community members may decide to contact the board of education and local media outlets to commission urgent attention to the issue (Lee & Rodgers, 2009).

Social/Political Advocacy. A counselor may recognize that her school has a pattern of increased enrollment of economically disadvantaged students who need supportive services. According to Pitre and Pitre (2009), federal TRIO programs are funded to serve only about 10% of eligible low-income families. The counselor

can galvanize allies and compose letters to legislators and policymakers addressing the need for increased funding for educational opportunity programs.

In summary, the Advocacy Competencies and MSJCCs provide a useful framework for counselors to impact change on individual, community, and systemic levels. Working within one area of advocacy often requires counselors to engage in other areas. While the domains are delineated above, social justice advocacy is an ongoing, cyclical process that engages families, schools, communities, and additional stakeholders (Griffin & Steen, 2011).

Implications for Practice

Given the scope of this article, we strongly suggest that social justice-oriented counselors readily support economically disadvantaged students on their paths to collegiate success. While graduate coursework and post-graduate professional development opportunities are crucial to establishing the need for counselors to adopt a social justice orientation, past realities suggest more is needed to accomplish this mission (Collins, Arthur, Brown, & Kennedy, 2015). There is still a limited demand in counseling training requirements that compel students and faculty to go beyond their personal biases and cultural privilege to advocate with and on behalf of persons from historically marginalized groups (Griffin & Steen, 2011; McKillip et al., 2012). Counselor training programs that incorporate the principles of social justice advocacy may train counselors who are prepared to address systemic injustices in order to advance the college going culture for economically disadvantaged students.

Furthermore, the cycle of college admission denial may continue unless counselors actively strive to mitigate potential barriers to higher education attainment for economically disadvantaged students. Early training in the aforementioned social justice counseling interventions is necessary for eliminating

the ideology of failure for economically disadvantaged students. Students who experience economic disadvantage could greatly benefit from tutoring, summer learning experiences, and academic enrichment programs, if counselors work along with parents that may have less knowledge and access to resources or lack the economic capital necessary to obtain these services (Williams, Bryan, Morrison, & Scott, 2017).

Although many counselors are not able to meet individually with the vast number of economically disadvantaged students they serve, counselors can partner with other school personnel and community stakeholders to share information about college and outreach programs to assist students along the pipeline to college. Teachers can also strive to provide college resources and integrate college-level rigor into all courses, not only those classified as Advanced Placement or College Preparatory courses (Millitello, Schweid, & Carey, 2011; Welton & Martinez, 2014). Last, all school personnel can implant college aspirations as early as the elementary level to ensure students' college knowledge and establish necessary supports to access higher education (Welton & Martinez, 2014; Williams et al., 2015).

Implications for Future Research

A cogent argument is made regarding how counseling professionals with a particular interest in social justice can utilize both advocacy competencies and multicultural and social justice counseling competencies when working with students of economic disadvantage. Furthermore, there is a need for more empirically validated studies to support the claims of efficacy in the areas highlighted. These type of outcome studies can answer unequivocally whether efforts at social justice across racial, ethnic, gender, or socio-economic lines can help improve the overall personal, social, and economic well-being of marginalized

groups in the targeted areas. Moreover, these type of research designs can further offer important information or findings in providing evidence-based support for the use of social justice counseling as a viable and effective intervention, over options that are less promising. For example, participatory action research may provide counselors, schools systems, and the community with information necessary to develop and implement programs that increase college readiness and enrollment for economically disadvantaged students (Dahir & Stone, 2009; Griffin & Steen, 2011).

Conclusion

This article brings attention to the idea that actions such as increasing awareness of systemic injustices as well as engaging in social justice-oriented counseling and interventions create a college going culture for youth who face economic disadvantage. There is an ever-present need to train counselors to practice effectively with economically disadvantaged youth within the educational domain as the residual effects of hopelessness and helplessness are all too common for historically marginalized groups (McKillip et al., 2012; Welton & Martinez, 2014; Williams et al., 2015). Moreover, the ACA Code of Ethics (2014) states, "When appropriate, counselors advocate at individual, group, institutional, and societal levels to address potential barriers and obstacles that inhibit access and/or the growth and development of clients." (A.7.a, p. 5). Though the above represents a call to the profession, translating this call to action is essential to increase college enrollment and retention for economically disadvantaged students. The infusion of social justice counseling may not only contribute to increasing higher educational attainment for youth that experience economic disadvantage, but may improve the educational trajectory (via intergenerational literacy) of all residents in low-income communities (Chaney, 2014).

Primary Author's Personal Reflective Analysis on Economic Disadvantage

My most salient identity is my social class status. Both of my parents worked low wage jobs. My father was a truck driver and my mother was a school bus driver. We were considered the working poor. I felt very fortunate as a child because low wage jobs were the norm. I have experienced the oppressive personal, social, and economic conditions associated with poverty. I have been silent in classrooms because of my vernacular. I had limited help navigating my educational journey; yet, I persevered.

One of my most impactful memories is not receiving free or reduced lunch in elementary school. How did that happen? Well, my parents were too ashamed and distrustful of the "system" to submit financial documents to the school. I can vividly recall the principal and teachers sending letters home begging my parents to submit the information that would allow me to have lunch at school. My parents refused. I stayed behind and washed the chalkboard while other kids went to lunch. The shame attached to being poor prevented me from asking others for help during most of my childhood. I did not realize my experiences were functions of social injustice. The veil that W.E.B. Du Bois (1999) and other scholars spoke of is real. Poverty has the capacity to consume the entire human experience; it becomes a mentality (Cady, 2012). Psychological liberation is a difficult process.

Nevertheless, I am grateful for the richness of poverty. Poverty has afforded me several privileges. I have a social class consciousness that makes me an outstanding counselor advocate for students of economic disadvantage. It is a privilege to work at a college in a low socioeconomic area and serve as a role model for my students. I provide students with guidance on how to navigate higher education and instill hope that they can succeed no matter how dire their economic circumstance may seem. I have personal expertise in negotiating marginalized identities and teaching my students to do the same. Helping students to identify

their strengths, resources, and abilities is easy because of my positionality. I am blessed to share my power with them in hope they are able to see their future through my success. I readily use my social capital to access a variety of resources for students and their families.

My ability to advocate with and on behalf of students is a privilege I have attained from learning about social justice. Before embracing social justice advocacy, I was guilty of being "only partially successful" (Goodman et al., 2004, p. 797). I was less involved with advocating for change beyond the confines of my counseling office. Most of my work was focused on the individual and seldom recognized the systemic factors that contributed to mental health issues. I am now able to make broader connections and have extended my counseling efforts outside of my office and work setting. My agenda is to bring awareness to the educational experiences of students from economic disadvantage.

Social justice counseling and advocacy are intentional and participatory. In order to transform the effects of oppression, it is essential to engage the students, parents, schools, religious groups, community partners, and colleges in the process. Liberating the student without liberating the family support system may be ineffective. Low-income families are often interconnected with churches or dependent upon community organizations for resources. Counselors, along with other school personnel across all levels of education must have a presence in the community and create meaningful partnerships if they aim to transform the culture of poverty.

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