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# PEACE CHRONICLE

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JUSTICE STUDIES ASSOCIATION

# PEACE CHRONICLE

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

ROBIN COOPER &  
TANNA KREWSON

## **Belonging**

Be-longing

Longing to be

To be seen

To be heard

To be respected

To be accepted

To be loved

Belonging is the feeling of connectedness to a group or community—the sense that you are an accepted part of something. However, belonging is more than just being part of a group. It is an innate need that is critically tied to social identity and our sense of ideological alignment within families, workplaces, communities, and nations. Its impact is far reaching, playing a role in how we handle conflict, the stories we tell to make meaning of our lives, and our overall health and wellbeing. From a global perspective, it is critical to the formation of healthy societies, specifically because the social ties that accompany belonging are a protective factor. These ties help us manage

challenges and stress and create space for increased resilience, happiness, longevity, and mental and physical health.

As we continue our recovery from the social isolation created by COVID-19, the upheaval surrounding the war in Ukraine, and continuing incidents of political and racial violence, taking time to comprehensively understand the impact of belonging—including what happens when it is in short supply—is critical to the sustainable promotion of peace and justice worldwide.

If you are reading this, you are right where you belong. You are part of a community of thinkers, scholars, teachers, and activists working to be inclusive and co-create an equitable world we want to be a part of.

In this issue, you will discover a treasure trove of stories, inspiration, research, art, and hope focused on belonging and its meaning to different segments of society.

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We have compiled a rich range of submissions, which are grouped into three broad categories: belonging and conflict, stories of belonging, and belonging and wellbeing. The gorgeous cover art, as well as the artwork leading off each section, are provided by talented photographer-artist Christopher Burnett with our heartfelt thanks.

We hope that the issue will inspire you to reflect about what belonging means to you and how it shows up for others at different stages of life. Enjoy!

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Section I:

Belonging  
and  
Conflict

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# BELONGING AND INDIGENOUS CIRCLE PRACTICES IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

ISMAEL MUVINGI & KIMBERLY J.  
HAMILTON-WRIGHT

## Introduction

There is a yearning for fresh ways of practicing conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and deploying solutions that creatively curtail and solve problems. This comes in tandem with increased culture claims, accelerated interconnectivity, mobility, and human translocation that have been such a feature of globalization. Increased mobility and intermixing of peoples are simply the realities of the contemporary world. Globalization indeed brought commonalities and greater interconnectivity – but it also instigated peoples' self-awareness through the explosion of information highways and contact with others. A proliferation of cultural claims has been articulated through the rapidly changing global and domestic perspectives. Not only does this bring new forms of conflict, it also avails more ways of understanding and approaching conflict

and its resolution from more knowledge and practice traditions.

Transference of knowledge and practices from other cultures has, however, not kept pace with mobility and translocation of peoples. Intervention processes from the mainstream Eurocentric foundations of the field have remained dominant even while genuflecting towards cultural sensitivity. Leading scholars in our conflict resolution and peacebuilding field, such as Kraybill, Lederach, Avruch, Black, and Galtung, have thus decried the hegemony of Western scholarship and practices in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. They critique as myth the assumption that our own culturally derived conceptualizations and our practices are universal, and that we can resolve conflicts everywhere using our (value-free) negotiation, mediation, and facilitation methods. Indigenous scholar Polly Walker

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put it more forcefully – to quote her, “I suggest that power imbalances in conflict resolution research and practice perpetuate colonization through ontological violence, marginalizing Indigenous worldviews and ways of transforming conflict” (Walker, 2004).

### **Culture Claims**

Today, most places are a complex mosaic of people from many cultures and backgrounds. Belonging and its *sine qua non*s, inclusivity, and equity, challenge our ability and preparedness to be open. Yet, a sustainable, just, and peaceable society lies in that sense of belonging. As a field of scholarship and practice, we have done well in acknowledging our diversity and the inextricable connections among us, both locally and further afield. We have been much slower in accepting and integrating other ways of knowing and being. This has not only limited our repertoire of intervention methods; it leaves those from other knowledge traditions feeling excluded and marginalized. Younger generations, though, are leading the clarion call in challenging the boundaries of marginalization and exclusion. They do so through breakthrough interpretations of celebration and preservation of culture and belonging, exemplified by the Montagnard Vietnamese youth in North Carolina dancing their native routines on TikTok, and wearing handwoven indigenous Vietnamese attire (Weingarten, 2022). They are going further and connecting

on social media around traditional Montagnard cuisine and other indigenous practices (Weingarten, 2022). Likewise, Filipino-American Georgia Tech students have been performing the traditional tinikling folk dance to hip-hop music (Philstar News, 2022).

### **Inclusivity and Belonging**

How though, to be inclusive in conflict resolution, the precursor to belongingness? Belonging goes beyond inclusivity; it is the sense of affiliation that comes from the reciprocity of acceptance into a group, society, and even a field of scholarship and practice. One cannot have a sense of belonging when excluded or treated inequitably. Inclusivity, equity, and belonging can only be attained through a mutually adaptive process by all; those already in the inner circle and those in the periphery. Mutual adaptation entails intergroup and cross-cultural acceptance and transference of knowledge, traditions, and practices to benefit all. There are and can be many spaces for mutuality in our conflict resolution and peacebuilding field. The indigenous “circle” can serve as such a space. The circle offers a unique platform for inclusivity, equity, and belongingness through its internal dynamics and the opportunity it offers for accepting and including a resolution process that is core to the traditions of the “others.” Including the circle in our repertoire will not just increase and widen our means of resolving conflicts (a



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significant benefit in its own right). It will open the conflict resolution space so indigenous people feel they belong here.

### **The Circle**

Getting to that point does have its challenges. Circles are not a “technique” or a set of instructions. They are a process or way of being and doing, deeply grounded in fundamental values and relationships. Circles are platforms through which participants engage in intentional conversations about common concerns. Everyone is assured access to speaking. Sharing of values and agreement on circle guidelines precede speaking. The objective is to create safe spaces for people to share views and feelings – even on difficult issues. All reflections belong in the circle as long as they are given from the heart. Through circles, we experience the world from others’ perspectives, draw from the diversity of those experiences, and explore options beyond what any one person can generate.

The circle is symbolic of the interdependence of all forms of life. The circle has no hierarchy, no beginning, and no end. Everyone can see everyone else in the circle, unlike in the mainstream courtroom, where seating is hierarchal. Participants should normally introduce themselves at the beginning of the circle. Every voice must be heard with no interruption and no judgment.

Indigenous circles, especially in North America, are facilitated dialogues wherein every person has an equal opportunity to participate and experience support. In that process, the talking piece is critical in creating the space for participatory engagement. The talking piece can be anything that can be passed around. In some places, the piece has symbolic value. Participants in the circle should receive an explanation of the talking piece and agree to its use. The talking piece goes in one direction, and participants can speak or pass. Whoever is holding the talking piece can speak while the others listen, and usually, the keeper of the talking piece gets the ball rolling with a discussion of the process. The key is to build and/or maintain relationships.

The circle embraces respect. This includes respect for others’ need and right to also be able to share, thus not monopolizing the speaking time. Even the wrongdoer must be respected because they remain human even in their misdeeds. Everyone is asked to speak in a good way, to be authentic, and respect the agreed-to-rules for the circle. This is meant to foster understanding of the world from more perspectives than our own and enable drawing on diverse knowledge and experiences to generate options. Decisions should be made by consensus. Whether in North America or Africa, time’s importance is viewed differently from mainstream considerations. Circle practices amongst the

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Shona people of Zimbabwe are called the *Dare* – for which there is often no timeline. Discussion and persuasion continue until there is agreement or consensus.

### **Wide and Varied Use of the Circle**

The circle is a feature of many indigenous practices. It has many variations and different names, yet it has commonality in the foundational principles. North America has many circle iterations; talking circles, healing circles, sentencing circles, etc. It is widely used among Aboriginal communities in Canada, e.g., The Cree of Peguis and The Ojibwe First Nations in Manitoba incorporate the circle in dealing with issues such as grief, violence, and trauma. In the Seminole community of South Florida, the circle is the site of healing, as exemplified in the 2019 “Healing the Circle in our Tribal Communities” symposium on Native trauma. Approximately 100 people from 16 states attended that symposium in Hollywood, Florida (Scott, 2019).

*Dare* takes inclusivity to extremes. Even a stranger passing through the community must be allowed to offer their thoughts. In the *Dare* forum, there is little consideration of class and hierarchy. As Mano puts it, among the Shona, “a university professor may learn to solve his marital problems from a peasant farmer and vice versa” (Mano, 2004).

### **Core Differences from Mainstream Practices**

There are some important differences in approach between the circle and mainstream practices. Indigenous practices generally seek to address the conflict in ways that heal relationships and restore harmony to the group. In contrast, current dominant conflict resolution methods prioritize reaching an agreement between parties over mending relationships that the conflict has damaged.

Conflict is viewed holistically, not focusing on short-term goals or the narrow immediate circle. Being holistic entails perceiving the universe as an interconnected and interdependent whole in which all forms of existence are fundamentally connected and part of a larger, unified system—being holistic means that the shadow of the future is present in all actions and deliberations. This differs from dominant resolution approaches and processes that tend to be analytical and linear, driven by the intent to meet interests defined in rational choice calculus. Such processes are primarily driven by strategizing to problem solve to reach an agreement. In the circle, the focus is on reflexivity and seeking shared meanings.

As a consequence, there is often a spiritual dimension to the processes. Spirituality is not separated from the every day, and the people

of the spirit world are taken as present in the everyday. That does not fit with the rationality of Eurocentric epistemology.

### **Imperatives for Mainstreaming the Circle**

The intentional study and practice of indigenous practices and the merging of uncustomary connections of indigenous practices into the field would make the field more relevant in more spaces. It would also enhance and facilitate understanding and caring for sustainability, given the indigenous worldview of humans, inextricable interconnectivity with the natural world, and concern for future generations.

Currently, Western problem-solving models are frequently imported into Indigenous communities with few modifications. That doesn't work well. Students trained in Western institutions often return to their communities equipped with one toolkit, and they sometimes encounter rude awakening when locals eschew those methods. It would work better if our students are educated in broader knowledge and practice ways.

### **Conclusion**

Already in other fields, the circle process is taking root. "Mainstream" expansion of the circle is in evident in healthcare, education, legal systems – with winning outcomes across populations. Cornell University's Industrial and Labor Relations (ILR) Hopi & Navajo Mediation Engaged Learning

Program introduced students from the ILR School to the dispute resolution processes used by the Hopi and Navajo Nations in Arizona and New Mexico (Koyn, 2020). The program teaches beyond judicial and adjudicative conflict resolution methods, and embraces restorative relationships (Koyn, 2020).

Native American primary care settings incorporate traditional talking circles as a "culturally derived practice" to address stress-related and other life problems while reducing health care costs (Mehl-Madrone & Mainguy, 2014). Environments such as schools, group homes, and English as a Second Language programs are applying talking circles as a means to "...effectively foster respect, model good listening skills, settle disputes, resolve conflicts, and build self-esteem" (Mehl-Madrone & Mainguy, 2014 & Girls Action Foundation, 2014).

Resolving conflict requires a willingness to engage in dialogue, compromise, and creativity to find mutually beneficial solutions that consider the needs and perspectives of all parties involved. Ways of knowing and being abound. It is in the ways we think about and open spaces to different ways of knowing and being that belongingness can flourish. Mainstreaming indigenous conflict resolution practices such as the circle will give content to inclusivity and actualize belongingness in

our field – beyond just good-sounding buzzwords.

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# BELONGING THROUGH THE POWER OF INTENTIONAL COMPASSION

SUZZETTE A. HARRIOTT

## Introduction

Belonging is a fundamental human need essential for our well-being and mental health. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, belongingness, and love needs are ranked third, just below physiological and safety needs (Maslow, 1943). In today's world, people are more connected than ever, yet we are also more disconnected and lonely (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Brené Brown states, "A deep sense of love and belonging is an irreducible need of all people. We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong" (Brown, 2010, p. 25).

Loneliness, in particular, has become a pervasive problem in our modern society. The COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated this problem, as physical distancing measures and lockdowns forced people to isolate themselves from their social networks (Luchetti, Lee, Aschwanden, Sesker, Strickhouser, Terracciano, and Sutin, 2020).

As a result, 61% of adults reported feeling more lonely and isolated than before the pandemic (Walsh, 2021). Despite easing restrictions, the pandemic has left a lasting impact on our sense of belonging, as we have realized the importance of social connections for our well-being.

So how can we create a sense of belonging in a world that seems to be pushing us apart? The answer lies in intentional compassion. Intentional compassion involves deliberately showing kindness and empathy towards others, and it has been shown to positively impact our well-being and sense of belonging. Research has found that practicing intentional compassion can increase social connectedness and a greater sense of purpose and meaning in life (Krause, 2015; Poulin, Brown, Dillard, and Smith, 2012). Intentional compassion has also been linked to reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety (Kok, Coffey, Cohn, Catalino, Vacharkulksemsuk, Algoe, Brantley, and

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Fredrickson, 2013), improved physical health (Post, Johnson, and Neill, 2018), and a more empathetic and compassionate society (DeSteno, Gross, & Kubzansky, 2013). By practicing intentional compassion, we can create a safe space for people to be their authentic selves and, in turn, feel like they belong.

### **Intentional Compassion and Its Importance for Connection and Belonging**

Intentional compassion involves deliberately choosing to show kindness, empathy, and understanding toward others, even when it is difficult. By being mindful of others' emotions and experiences, we can respond with compassion and empathy, creating a sense of connection and belonging. Especially in today's digital age, intentionally demonstrating compassion may be more critical than ever as loneliness and social isolation continue to rise.

Practicing intentional compassion can come in many shapes and sizes. Acts of kindness, such as holding the door open, complimenting someone, or volunteering your time, are simple ways to practice intentional compassion daily. Another way is through mindfulness meditation, which involves cultivating compassion and empathy toward oneself and others.

By making intentional compassion a daily habit, we can create a more empathetic and

compassionate society where people feel connected and supported.

### **The Ripple Effect of Intentional Compassion**

Intentional compassion has a ripple effect that can lead to a more empathetic and compassionate society. When we show compassion towards others, it creates a sense of connection and belonging, leading to a more positive and supportive environment where people feel empowered and supported.

Practicing intentional compassion can also promote a culture of kindness and understanding, inspiring others to demonstrate the same behavior and creating a positive feedback loop. By reducing feelings of anger, frustration, and aggression, intentional compassion can lead to a more empathetic and compassionate society (DeSteno, Gross, & Kubzansky, 2013).

Research has found that practicing intentional compassion can increase feelings of social connectedness and a greater sense of purpose and meaning in life (Krause, 2015). With these benefits, it is clear that intentional compassion is an essential part of creating a more connected and compassionate world.



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## **Real-life Examples of Intentional Compassion in Action**

Intentional compassion can profoundly impact individuals and communities, as demonstrated by real-life examples of intentional compassion in action. One example is the "Run for Boston" movement, which emerged after the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing. This movement, which began with a group of runners, quickly spread nationwide as people organized runs and walks to show support and solidarity with the victims and their families (Associated Press, 2013). The "Run for Boston" movement exemplifies how intentional compassion can help individuals and communities come together in times of crisis. It allowed people to show support and solidarity and helped to create a sense of community and belonging. The movement also had a ripple effect, inspiring others to demonstrate compassion and support for those affected by the tragedy (Associated Press, 2013).

Another example of intentional compassion in action is the "Free Hugs" movement, which started in Sydney, Australia, in 2004. The movement began with a man named Juan Mann offering free hugs to strangers on the street to spread love and kindness in the world (Field, 2010). Since then, the movement has spread worldwide, with people sharing hugs with strangers to promote connection and kindness. This movement is a powerful

example of intentional compassion in action, as it shows how a simple act of kindness can have a profound impact on the lives of others.

Real-life examples of intentional compassion in action demonstrate the power of intentional compassion to transform individuals and communities. These examples show that intentional compassion is not just a nicety but necessary for creating a more empathetic and compassionate society. By choosing intentional compassion in our daily lives, we can create a ripple effect that inspires others to do the same, leading to a more compassionate and connected world.

## **Practical Examples of Intentional Compassion in Daily Life**

Intentional compassion can take many forms, from simple acts of kindness to practicing mindfulness and empathy towards ourselves and others. By intentionally choosing to practice these acts of intentional compassion, we can positively impact ourselves and those around us, foster a sense of connection and belonging, reduce loneliness and social isolation, and create a more compassionate and empathetic society where everyone feels valued and understood.

### ***Acts of Kindness***

When we intentionally choose to do something kind for someone else, it not only makes them feel good but also positively impacts our well-being. One practical way to show intentional compassion is through acts

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of kindness. Research has found that performing acts of kindness can increase happiness and life satisfaction (Nelson, Layous, Cole, & Lyubomirsky, 2016).

### ***Mindful Meditation***

Another practical way to show intentional compassion is through mindful meditation. Mindful meditation involves being present in the moment and cultivating an attitude of compassion and empathy towards oneself and others. By practicing mindfulness and intentional compassion, we can become more aware of our thoughts and emotions and respond to others with kindness and empathy. Mindful meditation has been shown to have a range of positive benefits, including reduced stress and anxiety, increased well-being, and improved emotional regulation (Khoury, Sharma, Rush, & Fournier, 2015).

### ***Active Listening***

In addition to acts of kindness and meditation, intentional compassion can be practiced through active listening. Active listening involves giving someone our full attention and listening with empathy and understanding. By actively listening to someone, we create a safe space for them to share their thoughts and emotions, which can help foster a sense of connection and belonging. Active listening can also help reduce loneliness and social isolation, which have become increasingly prevalent (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

In a world that can often feel disconnected and lonely, intentional compassion is a powerful tool for fostering a sense of belonging and connection. By practicing intentional compassion in our daily lives - through acts of kindness, mindful meditation, and active listening - we can create a ripple effect that inspires others to do the same, leading to a more empathetic and compassionate society. The power of intentional compassion has been demonstrated by research studies and real-life examples, from Virginia Satir's theory about the importance of hugs to the Free Hugs Movement, which has spread love and kindness worldwide.

In conclusion, intentional compassion is vital to our well-being and sense of belonging. By showing intentional compassion towards others, we not only positively impact their lives but also enrich our own lives and create a world where everyone feels valued, seen, and understood. As we navigate the world's complexities, let us choose intentional compassion and create a brighter, more connected future together.

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Image by Hansuan Fabregas from Pixbay

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# UNDERSTANDING THE CONTINUUM OF VIOLENCE FACING GENDER AND SEXUAL MINORITIES AS A DISRUPTION OF BELONGING

CHRIS PAIGE

**Content warning: Includes references to  
sexual violence**

This article highlights the continuum of violence experienced by gender and sexual minorities (GSM) through the lens of conflict studies. I write as a long-time transgender religious organizer who co-founded an organization to support LGBT+ folk seeking asylum in the United States. My initial frame was thinking about international forced migration, so this project's original title included "in regions experiencing fragility, conflict, and violence." However, I am acutely aware that U.S. citizens are now experiencing forced migration within the United States due to widespread transgender antagonism and other political shifts. Even as I live relatively comfortably as a white, transgender, and nonbinary scholar

and religious professional in New Jersey, this continuum of violence is increasingly a domestic and international concern.

Gender is an integral part of understanding conditions in regions experiencing fragility, conflict, and violence, but it's also an important part of belonging, more generally. Everyone has a gender and sexual orientation: men and boys, women and girls, and gender and sexual minorities (GSM). The continuum of violence faced by GSM fundamentally disrupts belonging through formal and informal dynamics and implicit and explicit forms of violence by a range of actors—which may be amplified in contexts experiencing fragility, conflict, or violence. A

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thorough gender analysis of such regions necessarily needs to look intersectionally at all of the entangled cultural considerations around sex and gender and the specific places of male, female, and GSM populations within that context.

### Historical Context

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) policy framework was adopted unanimously through a United Nations Security Council Resolution in 2000 following years of formal conversation about these themes since 1975 (United States Institute of Peace). These efforts highlight the impact of conflict and war on women and girls and the importance of including women in peace-building processes. However, “the words ‘gender’ and ‘women’ are often used interchangeably [...] in implementing the WPS resolutions and operationalizing the WPS architecture” (Hagen, 2016, 318). To fully understand the role of gender in situations of fragility, conflict, and violence means also considering impacts on men and boys and diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

The *Gender Inclusive Framework and Theory Guide* suggests three relevant areas for gender analysis: Women, Peace, and Security; Peaceful Masculinities; and Intersecting Identities (Kuehnast and Robertson, 2018). This third category of intersecting identities examines how cultural

factors around gender may “reinforce or challenge norms that contribute to violence” (Kuehnast and Robertson, 2018, 14). Analysis of women, girls, men, and boys without attention to sexual orientation and gender identity misses various critical dynamics. Language about sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) is often used to explore these dynamics. However, I primarily will utilize the language of gender and sexual minorities (GSM) to designate a wide range of intersecting identities which may be labeled variously across different cultural contexts.

Unfortunately, this third category of intersectional analysis remains largely an outlier in international conversations about WPS. In 2016, Jamie Hagen argued:

*After 15 years of advocacy and policy action related to the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) architecture, the continued silence about homophobic and transphobic violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) individuals in conflict-related environments is alarming. (Hagen, 2016, 313)*

In a 2017 literature review, Moore and Barner argue that “The conflation of ‘women and girls’ with ‘gender’ is reflective of a narrow understanding of gender violence and results in the binary gender categories that dominate the rights-based discourse of post-



conflict transformation” (Moore and John R. Barner, 2017, 34). Further, such limited analysis imagines women and girls only in heteronormative family structures while ignoring how conflict and conflict-related violence may impact lesbians, bisexuals, transgender women, and other GSM, such as *hijra* or *waria* (Hagen, 2016, 315-316).

The questions surrounding application of human rights to GSM is a core concern in terms of root causes. The 2007 Yogyakarta Principles (supplemented in 2017) provide a robust framework for discussing sex and gender in International Human Rights Law (available at <https://yogyakartaprinciples.org/>; see also Quinn, 2010). Existing human rights legislation can also be leveraged to support GSM (Rossouw, 2020). However, since homosexuality is still illegal in many countries worldwide, it is complicated to extend protections for GSM more explicitly (Margalit, 2018). In other words, human rights mechanisms *can* be deployed in support of GSM, but those human rights commitments are not held unilaterally around the world. Indeed, such principles around rights may be highly contested or actively negotiated.

### **Sex and Gender in Conflict**

Concern for GSM in regions experiencing fragility, conflict, and violence is more than a question of semantics about “gender” language. The impacts of sex and gender are

deeply entangled with cultural assumptions and stigma around GSM, which shape conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). CRSV humiliates, imposes domination, and exerts power and control over men and boys, women and girls, generally, and diverse GSM specifically. Even if men and boys are heterosexual with a normative gender identity for their cultural context, the “stereotypes that motivate these abuses rest on the notion that men and boys are emasculated and feminized as a result of sexual violence” (Kiss et al., 2020, 11). Regardless of a male victim’s perceived identity, the motivation behind the violent act is to gain power and dominance. In other words, “by imputing a feminine identity or ‘homosexual behavior” (Margalit, 2018, 240) they seek to bring dishonor to the victim. In many ways, the victim’s actual identity (GSM or not) is beside the point.

These dynamics create bias and marginalization and motivate specific kinds of CRSV to humiliate, terrorize, or control those seen as enemies, traitors, or potential liabilities. Explicit violence through such informal dynamics may reflect the assumptions of a particular society at all levels of social functioning. In addition, stigma and social isolation may follow the victim(s) due to such violent acts, imposing additional implicit violence, which will have lasting psychosocial impacts beyond the particular act of sexual

violence itself. This lingering humiliation and social isolation disrupt belonging, often the point of CRSV against men and boys and actual GSM.

Meanwhile, sexual violence is not just a concern on the battlefield. Abuses based on actual or perceived status as a GSM include “forced stripping, rape and forced anal or vaginal examinations, perpetrated both by government forces and by armed groups, particularly in detention facilities” (Margalit, 2018, 239). “Torture and forced medical treatment (forced psychiatric hospitalization, sterilization, castration) in state facilities ... are carried out by police and prison guards under the guise of the criminalization of homosexuality” (Moore and Barner, 2017, 35). These forms of explicit violence are carried out through formal mechanisms across structural power differentials. Those power differentials may be enhanced with the context of fragility, conflict, and violence as various competing structural forces seek to secure a position of dominance.

Not only are there significant risks to GSM at the hands of combatants; peacekeepers and humanitarian staff may also perpetrate sexual violence (Kiss et al., 2020, 12). The distinction between “militarised and opportunistic sexual violence in conflict is blurred” (Kiss, 2020, 11). Destabilized community and state judicial processes and

power differentials around security and service provision mean there may be few consequences for such violations in settings of fragility, conflict, and violence. “Survivors often fail to report due to stigma or further abuse” (Moore, 2017, 34), since the perpetrators and enforcement agencies often overlap and/or share similar values.

Thus, pre-existing vulnerabilities faced by GSM may be amplified within destabilized settings. Mechanisms of sex- and gender-based violence more generally include social exclusion, sexual assault, sexual exploitation and abuse, domestic violence, denial of services, harassment/sexual harassment, blackmail, and extortion. The mechanics of precarity for GSM creates this “continuum of violence” before, during, and after periods of fragility, conflict, and violence (Daigle and Myrntinen, 2018, 103-120). To be clear, these dynamics are not unique to explicit moments of destabilization. However, in displacement, forced migration, or societal flux, GSM may lose whatever familiar coping mechanisms they may have while being placed at increased risk (amid the mechanisms designed to manage destabilization) (Myrntinen and Daigle, 2017, 9).

In destabilized settings, families of origin may or may not be a source of solidarity for GSM. Where GSM have created family structures, it may not be safe for those families to make

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themselves visible for services that might otherwise be provided to heteronormative families. As such, survival may mean navigating a variety of uncertain resources.

“In post-conflict settings, LGBT people often experience harassment and need to hide their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics. Abuse and violence by security agents, local community members and other asylum seekers or refugees is common” (Kiss et al., 2020, 13).

When fleeing a conflict zone, the new host community, the community of refugees, and humanitarian staff may all present unique risks to GSM. Even if GSM do not experience explicit violence or denial of services, they will likely experience social and economic challenges as they try to navigate a new environment post-conflict without any pre-existing material or psychological sense of belonging. Language barriers and cultural differences may cause additional struggles on top of anxiety in a context where resources are uncertain and potentially violent. GSM may be forced into extreme circumstances amid this continuum of violence. Sex work (and other survival economies) may provide options where no others seem to exist (Myrntinen and Daigle, 2018, 27). While such efforts put GSM at further risk of exploitation, criminalization,

and moral judgment, the realities of poverty, violence, and social isolation may make such options attractive and advantageous.

Neither CRSV nor survival sex work represent a proclivity toward “promiscuity” on the part of GSM. Rather, the precarity of the continuum of violence facing GSM may lead to bargaining strategies as a coping mechanism based on vulnerabilities and power differentials. Again, this precarity may be instigated based not only on actual identity but also on perceived sexual orientation or gender identity and related stigma. GSM may experience or engage in sexual activities to survive. These encounters may or may not amount to organized trafficking, but the resulting range of sexualized traumas and legal risk is significant.

### **GSM and the Public Imagination**

In addition to material risks, the rhetoric and political climate during conflict may further escalate precarity for GSM. In other words, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia are not a neutral sort of bias disconnected from the politics of a region experiencing fragility, conflict, or violence. These attitudes are typically embedded in larger nationalistic, ethnic, and religious worldviews.

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As noted by Richter-Montpetit (2016), instances of toxic homophobia, misogyny and masculinity are prevalent in nationalist, imperialist and militarist movements, indicating deep-seated beliefs that the female body is inferior, weak, and profane. Sexualized violence against women (and men) attests to this in wartime when feminizing and homophobic rhetoric is used against the opposing or minority ethnic community to remove power and instill fear. (Moore and Barner, 2017, 34)

GSM may be accused of threatening the social order being defended during conflict—and thus seen as traitors by one side or the other (Myrntinen and Daigle, 2017, 25-27). Such framing may distract from other interests and motivations in conflict. Or, this framing may serve as a proxy for larger sociocultural forces (e.g., religion, ethnicity, political alignment). For instance, in formerly colonized countries, the history of forced assimilation to the values of the Global North may be associated with GSM, who are assumed to be afflicted with “a Western disease in need of eradication” (Moore and Barner, 2017, 35). In other words, differing perspectives on GSM may fall along ethnocultural fault lines actively contested in a conflict zone—or they may be utilized to enhance a polarized alignment by those with other interests. Meanwhile, in the United States, we can trace the relationship between gender violence, white nationalism, and Christian nationalism.

These are not just questions of individual identity or experience. They are questions of meaning and belonging applied to people who may be perceived as or accused of being GSM. GSM may become a symbol of “deviance”—or, alternately, a symbol of “progress.” Neither position necessarily prioritizes the actual needs and priorities of GSM. Making GSM a prop in a larger socio-political drama is a form of inclusion and visibility which may or may not serve the interests of GSM. Again, survivors of CRSV may also suffer from politicized stigma—or at least grapple quietly with fear and shame related to such dynamics—regardless of their actual gender identity or sexual orientation. Stigma and fear may prevent people from disclosing their experiences and accessing care to address their mental, physical, or spiritual needs after traumatic experience(s), even where those services are otherwise available.

Lest we imagine that Western society constitutes less of a threat to GSM, it is important to remember that many indigenous societies do have understandings of gender that do not align with the male/female binary but are little known by Western actors. When Western humanitarian aid is constructed around heteronormative and cisgender assumptions about men and women without accommodation for other cultural identities, GSM may be unable to access support in those systems.

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For example, *aravanis* or non-binary individuals (neither male/man nor female/woman) were denied access to toilets and showers in evacuation centres after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami as they were designed exclusively to cater to male or female persons. (Hagen, 2016, 328)

Meanwhile, European colonizers specifically targeted Native American GSM (now referred to broadly as two-spirit people) in the Americas. The legacy of these historic influences remains in many cultural contexts within the Western world, as was seen in the 21st-century abuses by U.S. forces at Abu Ghraib. Even within a modern Western human rights framework, various perspectives remain in Western engagement with GSM. The Western world is not immune from using sexual violence and the stigma associated with GSM as a form of torture and humiliation. Certainly, sex-segregated facilities, from public bathrooms to domestic violence shelters, mean that GSM often face similar precarity even within the United States.

Various social risks conspire to marginalize GSM from social and material supports, including employment, housing, and health care. Unless humanitarian engagement is thoughtful about all the intersectional identities involved, there is a real risk of escalating harm amid such politicized

complexities. Even well-meaning efforts to serve the needs of GSM may have unintended consequences if all of the ethnocultural or religious dynamics around the conflict are not considered carefully. It is important to consider where GSM live in the public imagination: outsiders needing regulation? Members of the community in need of protection? Dangerous deviants to be kept from “our” children? Parents and children in search of a better life?

### **Frameworks for Thinking about GSM**

It is important to remember that GSM includes a wide range of experiences. In the Western world, there are increasingly common conversations about gay men and lesbian women, bisexuality, transgender and nonbinary experience, and intersex sex characteristics. People with these (or similar) identities or experiences may be young or old. They may have children, parents, or other family members they care for or take responsibility for. They may or may not identify with the LGBTI+ community. In particular, many transgender people and/or people with intersex variations identify as heterosexual—not gay or homosexual, or even gender nonconforming. Meanwhile, many cultures have different indigenous words for similar experiences—people who fall outside the traditional cisnormative and heteronormative categories of male and female. GSM may or may not be able to blend

in as men or women, depending on the social context and conditions. The image of white, cisgender gay men with two incomes and no familial responsibilities should not be the assumed norm for GSM worldwide (or even in the United States).

Perceptions can also be misleading. For instance, a couple consisting of a transgender woman in a (heterosexual) relationship with a cisgender man may be perceived as homosexual by some based on physical characteristics. In a cultural context where there is acceptance for hijra, waria, or other identities that might be labeled trans-feminine in the West, this couple may function fairly comfortably in society as a heteronormative couple. However, in fragility, conflict, and violence, political or humanitarian actors may not take their identities seriously or validate their relationships. Appropriate health care or other crisis services may not be accessible, particularly if the trans-feminine person is considered “male” by service providers. Indeed, such a couple is still commonly referred to in public health, even in the United States, as “men who have sex with men (MSM)” (CDC, 2021).

The USAID guide on Women & Conflict highlights “Cultural Context & Sensitivity (Status & Role of Women in Society)” as the first key issue to consider. A similar approach

centering cultural context can be applied when thinking about GSM. In the following quote, “women and girls” is simply replaced with GSM:

Understanding the culture and currently prescribed role of [GSM] in a society is absolutely necessary when working on gender-specific programs. This remains true during conflict and in its aftermath. [GSM’s] role and status in society will determine best practices and the appropriate means of intervention in order to empower – rather than endanger – [GSM]. (United States Agency for International Development, 2015, 3)

Given the precarity outlined in this exploration, it would be easy to think of GSM simply as victims or victimized. However, the USAID guide points to women as “agents of change and peacemakers” as well as being “combatants and participants” (United States Agency for International Development, 2015, 3-7). Likewise, GSM may be involved in all parts of conflict and/or conflict negotiation. In some cultures, GSM may traditionally mediate conflict or, alternately, lead combatants.

Like women, GSM are highly vulnerable during conflict situations. Special care may be required to ensure GSM have access to secure shelter, health care, and basic sustenance. In particular, a trans-feminine person may have what is perceived as a “male body” but may have all the other vulnerabilities of a



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cisgender woman if she depends on her husband to negotiate a patriarchal social context. GSM are also at risk of trafficking in a way that is similar to women and girls.

Any shift in political dynamics due to conflict or fragility (e.g. regime change) may have an outsized impact on GSM if their acceptability or respectability shifts in the new post-conflict political climate. Insofar as GSM may be considered “acceptable” targets for violence, special attention should be paid post-conflict as aggressive impulses may seek out alternate outlets. Additionally, in post-conflict settings where belonging is re-negotiated, suspicion may subject anyone perceived as different to increased scrutiny, being perceived as a threat, or being subject to “moral cleansing” (Myrntinen and Daigle, 19). Securing the rights of GSM may be closely tied to securing the right to dissent from cultural norms more generally. Thus, peacebuilding work should take GSM's continuing vulnerabilities seriously even after hostilities have ceased or the population has relocated. Like many other marginalized groups, GSM networks may rely heavily on practices of mutual aid and chosen family. Community-based interventions supporting GSM resilience strategies may require underground networks and online communities (Hagen, 2019, 61-76).

In particular, those serving communities impacted by fragility, conflict, and violence must ask questions about sexual orientation and gender identity. However, a priority must also be placed on “do no harm” with sensitivity to the potential for backlash against an already vulnerable population amid specific conflict scenarios and cultural contexts (Myrntinen and Daigle, 2017, 7). In every case, special attention to safety, security, and confidentiality is key (World Bank, 2020).

### **Conclusion**

Gender has been recognized as an important part of analysis in regions experiencing fragility, conflict, and violence. However, the impact of stigma, CRSV, and politicized cultural alignments around GSM is rarely considered enough to understand how belonging might be (re)established. The continuum of violence facing GSM (and those perceived to be GSM) includes explicit violence and the implicit stigma and social isolation that may disrupt social belonging in a particular cultural context. The continuum of violence includes informal abuses by combatants and formal abuse within structures, such as detention facilities using state mechanisms. Post-conflict settings and humanitarian aid workers are not immune from opportunistic violence.

Taking gender seriously in regions experiencing fragility, conflict, and violence

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means including GSM in peacebuilding efforts. Prioritizing the safety, security, and confidentiality of those impacted is paramount (World Bank, 2020). Seeking out informal and underground support networks may be especially important when serving GSM. Meanwhile, awareness of GSM precarity at all stages of the continuum of violence is critical (even in areas that are not experiencing fragility, conflict, and violence). While such efforts may be counter-cultural in some settings, the rights of GSM may be seen as a way to test broader priorities around allowing for dissent from cultural norms in peacebuilding writ large.

As we understand how belonging and lack of belonging shape the experiences of GSM in regions experiencing fragility, conflict, violence, and/or forced migration, we will learn about how the continuum of violence may also stretch into regions perceived as more stable. Sexual humiliation and related stigma are key barriers to belonging. Gender plays an outsized role in sexual violence, impacting men and boys, women and girls, and various GSM. Meanwhile, GSM occupy contested spaces in the public imagination worldwide, with serious questions about access to public spaces, bathrooms, schools, health care, and crisis services in the Global North, as much as anywhere else. To address belonging for GSM, regardless of context, means drawing on GSM leadership and

community organizing expertise to ensure safety, security, and confidentiality are available to all.

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# PROBLEMATIC DEPICTIONS OF BELONGING IN THE TV SERIES “HUNTERS”

LAURA FINLEY

Created by virtual newcomer David Weil and produced by Nikki Toscano, with support of executive producer Jordan Peale, “Hunters” debuted on Amazon Prime in 2020. It tells the story of a ragtag group of individuals in 1970s New York City who come together to hunt Nazis. The group, led by Meyer Offerman (Al Pacino), uses manipulation, coercion, bullying, and violence to find, apprehend, and in many cases, execute Nazi officials living in the US. The style of the show is unique—part action thriller, part comedy via the dialogue between the characters, and comic book-style graphics. It also features realistic flashbacks to the Holocaust that are disturbing. While it received mixed reviews, the show continued for a second season that debuted in January 2023, but Amazon Prime announced season two would be its last.

I watched both seasons with my husband, who is Jewish and whose grandparents left Poland to flee persecution. Several of his

father’s family perished in concentration camps. We found the show to be interesting yet deeply disturbing. Some of the acting is quite good, yet the show’s premise bothered us. Rather than belonging to a group that supports one another as loved ones who have experienced deep loss, their belonging is about vengeance. Herein I present a brief overview of the show and main characters and critique its glorification of vengeance. I conclude with implications for peace educators. NOTE: Spoiler alert—several scenes are described in some detail.

Season one begins with comic book nerd/slacker Jonah Heidelbaum (Logan Lerman), who is devastated by the murder of his grandmother Ruth Heidelbaum (Jeannie Berlin), a Holocaust survivor. His eagerness to avenge her death draws the attention of Offerman, a fellow concentration camp survivor during the war. He explains that a cabal of Nazis is in the US, hiding in plain sight as America’s rich and famous. The

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group, Hofferma n believes, is organizing to do something big and dangerous. It turns out that Ruth belonged to the group, so Jonah replaced her. Hofferma n already has a team of his own, which includes an older married couple, Mindy (Carol Kane) and Murray Markowitz (Saul Rubinek), who lost their son in the Holocaust. They are also arms specialists. Another member is the ultra-violent nun Sister Harriet (Kate Mulvaney), a German Jewish refugee born Rebekah who was raised in a convent to escape the war. She became an MI6 agent and used her spy contacts to help the group. Joe Mizushima (Louis Ozawa) is a Vietnam war veteran with PTSD, while Josh Radnor plays schmoozy actor Lonny Flash, born Leonard Flazenstein. He is known for his disguises and for bringing comedy to the group. Rounding out the team is Roxy Jones (Tiffany Boone), sporting a Blaxploitation-style afro and style, who specializes in counterfeiting, forgery, and driving the getaway car for the group. Later the group merges with another Nazi-hunting team led by Chava Apfelbaum (Jennifer Jason Leigh).

Not only are there Nazis organizing to commit significant atrocities, but Adolf Hitler (Udo Kier) and his wife Eva Braun are still alive in the story. Braun is known as The Colonel (Lena Olin) and is a vicious Nazi helping her husband to organize the Fourth Reich. Biff Simpson (Dylan Baker) is the Undersecretary of State for the Carter administration but is a

secret Nazi. He and many others escaped to the US under Operation Paperclip. This actual program took more than 1,600 scientists, engineers, technicians, and professionals from Nazi Germany to the US after the war. Early on, Simpson is recognized at a backyard barbecue as "the Butcher of Arlem," and realizing that he has been outed, he kills everyone at the event. Before killing his outer, who he calls "swine," he brutally announces, "I'm so glad I didn't gas you in the camp. This is so much more delicious. What a hungry boy I've been. We've all been," (Mangan, 2020) and expresses to her that Nazis are everywhere (Schager, 2020). Travis Leich (Greg Austin) is The Colonel's right-hand man. He is extremely violent and likely psychopathic. FBI agent Millie Morris (Jerrika Hinton) learns about the Fourth Reich during the murder investigation of NASA chemist Gretel Fischer (Veronika Nowag-Jones), who she believes has been gassed. In investigating, she comes across a photo of young Gretel with Hitler. She tries to pursue the murder but is blocked by racist NASA supervisors. Initially concerned about the Hunters brutal techniques, she eventually joins forces with them.

The series features torture regularly, both in flashbacks to the Holocaust and in use by both the villains and the Hunters. In some places, brutal violence is depicted in comedic fashion. In episode one, Offerma n explains to Jonah that what they're doing "is not murder... this is mitzvah." He explains that the Talmud

was incorrect; "You know what the best revenge is? Revenge." Then he proclaims, "We have trials ahead. A growing list of vermin. So let us get to cooking these Nazi c---s." (Schager, 2020). The Hunters' first kill in episode one is of Heinz Richter (Kenneth Tigar), who was purportedly the Nazi official that played a lethal chess game with victims in the concentration camps. Jonah realizes Richter killed his grandmother and hunts him down at the toy store he operates. Richter responds and tortures Jonah, but Offerman shows up and saves him by stabbing Richter in the neck, cooing and taunting him. Offerman tells Jonah that he and Ruth had been collaborating to exterminate some "goddamn, gold-digging, grade-A Nazis."

"Hunters" received criticism from several Jewish groups, including the Auschwitz Memorial, which referred to it as "dangerous foolishness" and "caricature." Mangan (2020) wrote that the show is "too cool and self-conscious for its own good, and seems to revel in any and all deaths on screen, regardless of whether the victims are "guilty" or not," while Fienberg (2020) referred to the show as a master of "Jewsploitation." Another critic wrote about "Hunters," "for every conversation about justice and vengeance, morality and responsibility, right and wrong, there's a fake ad about spotting Nazis or a dance sequence set to "Staying Alive." The balancing act works pretty well if you can

stomach each extreme; it makes for a grisly reckoning of the past, with only the pretense of thought to the present" (Travers, 2020).

Stephen Smith, genocide scholar and director of the Shoah Foundation, a nonprofit organization that records the testimony of Holocaust survivors, said, "I believe it's the most egregious distortion of Holocaust history in my lifetime. The series, created by the well-intentioned grandson of a survivor, does not serve the memory of those it purports to respect. And I fear its pernicious blend of fact and fiction risks being weaponized by Holocaust deniers." He implored Amazon not to renew it for the second season, although his request fell on deaf ears. Smith summarized the problem, noting that the belonging that the Hunters have as survivors or loved ones of people who have survived horrible things drives them to do the opposite of what is really in Jewish teaching. "The problem is the premise. Survivors of the Shoah sought justice, not revenge. Not so in "Hunters." The series' specious spectacle of eye-for-eye justice (a term one of the characters uses in the fifth episode) collapses all meaningful differences between victim and perpetrator. There's a scene in the pilot in which Pacino's vigilantes gas a former Nazi chemist in her shower, presented with all the dramatic flair of an action movie. Jews never gassed Nazis. Period. That I must even make this point is proof enough how perilous this slippery slope can become" (Smith, 2020).

One critic wrote that the series depicts the lifecycle of rage. He wrote, "Having suffered through the Holocaust, what is a Jewish person to do now when they witness the re-emergence of Nazism? That anger, in turn, bleeds onto the viewer, who may soon cheer on the Hunters as they exact violence against their tormenters" (Romano, 2020). Weil, who grew up hearing stories from his grandmother, who survived the Holocaust, expressed, "It is a story about grand good and grand evil, but very slowly the colors begin to desaturate, and it becomes this story that lives not in black and white, but in the grey and that murky morality. If we hunt these monsters, do we risk becoming them ourselves? This story is really about the cost of what happens to our heroes when they do take up that mantle and hold that dagger and go after these Nazis. Do they sacrifice their souls to make the world a better place, to rid evil from the world?" (Romano, 2020). About his character, Lerman explained, "[Jonah's] definition of morality is clean cut: right and wrong, good and bad. What we explore in the show is, what is right? What is wrong? Do you have to be bad to preserve what you think is good in this world? Does it take the extremist version of justice? I don't have an answer for it, but I like playing around with that moral dilemma" (Romano, 2020).

In sum, "Hunters" is interesting and also troublesome. I do believe, however, that it

could be a valuable tool for teaching about belonging, vengeance, justice, and forgiveness. Given the increased antisemitism in the US in recent years, popular culture like "Hunters" could help students grapple with how to respond to and prevent it. Educators can also help students identify where "Hunters" presents historically accurate information and where it takes liberties, which can strengthen their understanding of history and the legacy of the Holocaust. Further, peace educators can introduce students to groups they can join that counter hate by promoting peace, justice, and understanding.

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# SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE IN THE CLASSROOM: HOW A EUROCENTRIC CURRICULUM EXCLUDES & MARGINALIZES MINORITY STUDENTS

NAHUM JEAN-LOUIS AND MARY CLISBEE

## Introduction

As a fundamental element of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, Symbolic Violence (SV) refers to non-physical and invisible violence exerted on an individual in a dynamic of power relations that aims to obtain his/her compliance in a subordinate role (Bourdieu, 1991). Historically, SV has been a problem with which Black students have had to deal since the inception of the U.S. public school system. However, despite its prevalence in school settings and in the curriculum, it nevertheless remains an elusive concept to the public. To a large extent, the elusiveness of the phenomenon resides in its ability to use subtle forms to express itself. Practices of SV are carried through less obvious channels that ensure its invisibility such as microaggressions, stereotypes, and racial biases. In contrast to physical violence which can be easily detected by the visible scars it

leaves on the victim's body, SV is rather characterized by the psychological stigmas it leaves on the victim's psyche. The invisibility confers a distinctiveness to SV as a phenomenon that, while being undetectable, may still be harmful to its victims and continues to function as an integral part of a seemingly legitimate structure. Writing on this specific characteristic of the phenomenon, Waters (2017) argued that the ability to conceal SV in "school rules, structures, relationships, and cultural practices" creates a dynamic that contributes in "marginalizing some young people from full participation in education" (p. 27). Equally important is also the dynamic that the phenomenon creates to secure the unwitting complicity of its victims. As Bourdieu (1998) rightly suggested, "Symbolic violence is violence wielded with tacit complicity between its victims and its agents,

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nssofar as both remain unconscious of submitting to or wielding it” (p. 17). Summarizing this practice, Banks (1991) wrote that “School and societal knowledge that present[s] issues, events, and concepts primarily from the perspectives of dominant groups tends to justify the status quo, rationalize racial and gender inequality, and to make students content with the status quo” (p. 128). He further added that “An important latent function of such knowledge is to convince students that the current social, political, and economic institutions are just and that substantial change within society is neither justified nor required” (p. 125). These factors create a dynamic of unequal power relations through which minority students have a scant chance to succeed in the school system.

### **Symbolic Violence in School Settings**

Since the term’s first use in the 1970’s by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, the interest in educational research relating to SV has gained significant credence both among scholars and policy makers (Bourdieu, 1991; Brar, 2017; Bujorean, 2014; Saltman, 2014). Underlying this growth has been an interest to explore the extent to which the phenomenon has permeated the U.S. school curriculum and whether it has played a role in minority students’ lagging academic performance and sense of belonging in the classroom (Carpenter & Ramirez, 2007; Jia et al., 2016; Madaus & Clarke, 2001; Rumberger,

1983). In this regard, the concept of SV has been instrumental in helping researchers apprehend the dynamics of power relations at play in school settings and how it intersects with school curriculum to impede minority students’ academic success (Baker, 2005; Murphy & Hallinger, 1989; Walsemann & Bell, 2010). At the center of this unequal power relation is a continuous exchange between minority students and the school authorities who produce a curriculum that normalizes and legitimizes practices of SV. Thapar-Björkert et al. (2016), asserted that “Domination that arises from symbolic violence is less a product of direct coercion, and more a product of when those who are dominated stop questioning existing power relations, as they perceive the world and the state of affairs in a social activity as natural, a given and unchangeable” (p. 148). Through racial biases, denigration, and humiliations, these practices achieve to exclude minority students’ cultures and values from their own learning experience while imposing on them the European perspectives and knowledge as universal. As Bourdieu noted, SV involves a “process whereby power relations are perceived not for what they objectively are but in a form which renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. xxii). Summarizing the process, Grenfell and James (1998) noted that “Misrecognition operates in the education system, through an arbitrary curriculum that is ‘naturalized’ so that social classifications are transformed into

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academic ones. The result is that instead of being experienced for what they are (i.e., partial and technical hierarchies), such social classifications become 'total' hierarchies, experienced as if they were grounded in nature (Grenfell & James, 1998, pp. 23–24). However, despite its negative effects on minority students' educational experience, SV would not be as effective without Eurocentrism as an instrument through which it is articulated in the curriculum. Beyond the expediency it provides to the phenomenon, Eurocentrism also ensures the legitimization and longevity of SV in everyday school practices.

### **The Articulation of Symbolic Violence in School Curriculum through Eurocentrism**

Deeply embedded in the U.S system of education, Eurocentrism is one of the most effective mechanisms through which SV is articulated in school curriculum. Both in the scope and the range of its curricular and pedagogical reach, the Eurocentric curriculum is, unfortunately, the ideal instrument that both normalizes the phenomenon of SV and contributes to perpetuate a false narrative of racial superiority that has kept White domination over other racial groups alive for centuries. Pokhrel (2011) described Eurocentrism "as a cultural phenomenon that views the histories and cultures of non-Western societies from a European or Western perspective" (p. 321). Historically, Eurocentrism has been a tool

that reliably embodies the practices of symbolic violence in the curriculum which limit minority students' ability to reach their full potential in the school system and beyond (Asante, 2012; Mulder, 2016). Asante (2012) argued that "Eurocentrism is not simply racism; it is a superstructure that seeks to impose European consciousness onto other people's consciousness" (p. 38). From cultural exclusion to systematic racial denigration of minority students' heritage, SV contributes to deny minority students full participation in the educational process. Castenell and Pinar (1993) described the scarcity of Black perspectives that characterize the curriculum as a "willful ignorance and aggression toward Blacks" (p. 1). They further remarked that "The absence of African American knowledge in many American schools' curriculum is not simple oversight. Its absence represents an academic instance of racism" (p. 325). Although discarding Black history and perspectives in the curriculum have been a reality that has withstood the test of time since the foundation of the U.S. public school system, in recent years there has been a renewed and sustained effort from conservatives across the country to eradicate Black history and perspectives in the curriculum, completely. This attitude has been recently illustrated by the Florida College Board's decision to withdraw African American studies as an Advanced Placement course, by the insistence of Governor Ron Desantis who cited that the subject violates

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state law and that it “lacks educational value” (Ceballos, 2023, para. 1).

As an expression of symbolic violence, Eurocentrism creates a dynamic that functions at two levels: while on one hand it serves to promote European achievements and centuries of domination, on the other hand it serves to destroy other cultures and knowledge by diminishing their educational values. This is mainly done by obscuring the history relating to acts of cruelty committed on indigenous people while brandishing European achievements and knowledge as universal. Mulder (2016) argues that Eurocentrism is “a pervasive ideology that sneaks into every aspect of life, attempting to erase the diverse histories of peoples” (p. 1). She further added that “The curriculum is Eurocentric at the expense of other knowledges and the implicit class dynamics in education perpetuate an unequal socioeconomic hierarchy with limited chances of upward mobility for the many while privileging the few from the higher social classes (p.17). From this perspective, Eurocentrism represents a serious challenge that alienates minority students and contributes to impeding their success both academically and professionally.

### **Academic and Life Impacts of Eurocentrism on Minority Students**

For decades, minority students’ academic progress in the U.S. school system has been

the subject of sustained debates among scholars in the education field (Baker, 2005; Murphy & Hallinger, 1989; Walsemann & Bell, 2010, Woodson, 1933). At issue is the recurring concern over the impacts of Eurocentrism on the academic performance of and sense of classroom belonging for minority students and, hence, their life prospects. Woodson (1933) was perhaps one of the earliest writers who brought the attention of the overwhelming presence of Eurocentrism in the curriculum and its potential harmful effects on minority students. He lamented that “Minority students are required to learn the culture of the dominant group to succeed, but their own experiences are often excluded from the academic discourse, which can make their learning experience alienating” (as cited in Wiggan, 2007, p. 318). Nearly a century since he expressed this concern, Eurocentrism remains the norm in the curriculum, and the academic gap between minority students and their White counterparts continues to be a racial marker that separates students in U.S. schools. Since the publication of the Coleman Report in 1966 on the “achievement gap”, numerous attempts to reform the educational system have not been able to fix the problem. As revealed by data collected over the past 30 years, many of these reforms have shown to be inequitable, and in many instances, they have shown to adversely impact Black students’ success (Balfanz et al., 2014; Brathwaite, 2017, Hargreaves & Skerrett, 2008;

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Madaus & Clarke, 2001; Murnane, 2013) and actually widen the achievement gap. More concerning is that research conducted over the past few decades on the topic has consistently linked the persisting academic achievement gap to practices of SV that minority students have historically been subjected to in the school system (Baker, 2005; Waters, 2017). From lack of engagement to poor attendance and early dropout, recent studies have demonstrated a strong correlation between minority students' low academic performance and Eurocentrism as an articulation of SV in the curriculum (Baker, 2005; Brar 2017; Bujorean, 2014; Taggart 2017; Torres, 2017). As Baker (2005) argued "Schooling covertly presents African American children with a disposition to undermine their desire to succeed, reinforce[s] low self-esteem, and emphasize[s] the credence of failure" (p. 244). Writing on the negative effects of the phenomenon on minority students, Saltman (2014) argued that in a context of symbolic violence "a working-class student may learn to judge herself as inferior, lazy, and undeserving of social rewards" (Saltman 2014, p. 125). Waters (2017) further added that "students from low socioeconomic backgrounds often disengage from education because of their perceived failure as students" (p. 27).

Beyond their struggle to perform in the school system, minority students who drop

out of school also face professional challenges that occur beyond their school years. Studies have shown the negative ramifications that academic failure can have on minority students after they leave school (Blomberg et al., 2012; Henry et al., 2011; Hyman et al., 2011; Lumby, 2012). From low employment to a high rate of incarceration, the negative consequences can be dramatic. As a result, Black students face the prospect of decreasing earning potential due to unemployment and a higher rate of incarceration compared to other ethnic groups (Bloomberg et al. 2012; Doll 2013; Ferra, 2015). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are strong correlations between students who dropped out from high school and high unemployment rate (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Indeed, the unemployment gap between those who graduated high school and those who did not have their diploma is nearly 20% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). As a direct consequence of unemployment, poverty becomes rampant among high school dropouts who have poverty rate of 25.9% compared to individuals who hold bachelor's degree who have a poverty rate of 12.7% (Statista, 2020).

### **Conclusion**

As an expression of SV in school curriculum, Eurocentrism affects minority students' lives on multiple levels. From diminishing the minority students' sense of belonging in the

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classroom and undermining their academic progress to diminishing their life prospect, SV creates a dynamic that reverberates far beyond the school grounds. By engaging in a Eurocentric curriculum in which their history, experiences, and aspirations are excluded, minority students are deprived of the opportunity to fully participate in their own learning. Instead, they are subjugated to assimilate contents from which they can barely relate. Academically undermined and portrayed as a group that has nothing to offer in the educational process, their life prospects become greatly diminished. Over time, they become ostracized and pushed to live at the margin of society. As an underclass, Black youth are at risk of reliving the same traumatic school experiences they experience during their educational journey. As adults, their trauma is transpired through unemployment and an incarceration rate greater than any other ethnic group.

Although various factors contribute to produce minority students' academic underachievement, rampant inequity and lack of diversity seem to stand out as two of the most important causes. In a recent report on the topic, the Government Accounting Office (GAO) acknowledges the lack of diversity in U.S. schools as one of the most important challenges for minority students' learning. According to the report "Schools remain divided along racial, ethnic, and economic lines throughout the U.S. - even as

the K-12 public school student population grows more diverse" (GAO, 2022). This reality stands in sharp contrast to efforts that had been initiated to create a more diversified school system in the wake of the 1954 Supreme Court's landmark decision *Brown v. Board of Education* to diversify K-12 education.

Despite the slow progress and setbacks to build a more equitable U.S. school system, appropriate measures can still be taken to reverse the situation and create an environment in which minority students would be able to thrive both at school and then later in their lives, as professionals. One of these measures can be achieved through constructing a diverse curriculum in which all students' affinities would be reflected. As Quinn (2013) noted, cultural underrepresentation combined with poor socioeconomic are critical factors that often lead minority students to dropout from school (p. 96). To remedy the problem, the author stressed the need to create a curriculum that addresses "diversity and equality, as well as an emphasis on the social and cultural factors that shape drop-out." (p. 95).

However, implementing these measures alone can only have limiting effects in steering the problem in the right direction. It will take a concerted effort of every educational stakeholder involved in the

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students' life to correct the injustices. These partners include first and foremost the students and their parents, school leaders, policy makers, and the community at large. Each in their own capacity can bring to bear their resources to make a positive impact on minority students' lives. Correcting the problems in the educational system would not only contribute to creating a better learning environment for minority students at school, but it will also ensure them a better future in society. For too long, they have been denied basic justice and fairness in the U.S. school system. From a larger standpoint, fixing these schoolhouse injustices would also be a positive step toward the creation of a more equitable society in which all its members belong and live in peace with dignity.

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# BUILDING A CULTURE OF BELONGING AND EXCELLENCE: A STRENGTHS-BASED AND VALUE-BASED APPROACH

TERRY MORROW NELSON

As our society becomes more diverse and issues become increasingly complex, organizations are tasked with empowering individuals and equipping teams to leverage their full capacity to meet the needs of their stakeholders and communities. The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) describes boundary-spanning leadership as “leadership that bridges boundaries between groups in service of a larger organizational vision, mission, or goal” (Earnst & Yip, 2009).

One approach to building bridges and encouraging each individual to contribute with excellence involves identifying the talents that each member brings to the team. The Gallup organization has focused much of its research and consulting practice on helping individuals, organizations, and communities perform at their best. Signature strengths include attitudes that promote or sustain effort, behavior patterns

that make us effective, beliefs that guide us, motivations that propel our efforts, and thought patterns that make us efficient.

Many of us tend to focus on our weaknesses – the areas in which we aren’t as strong as others or the areas we need to improve. While remediating our areas of weakness is valuable, focusing on our weaknesses usually leads to smaller increments of growth. Conversely, if we focus on our strengths, we are more apt to grow in leaps and bounds and feel energized by the process.

## **Strengths and High Achievers**

High achievers excel because they focus on purposefully developing their strengths and talents and look for ways to apply them in their daily lives. Essentially, they seek to find their unique calling and ways to develop and live out that calling in their daily professional and personal pursuits.

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Take a moment to reflect on the top five strengths that come naturally to you. Are there areas where you get positive feedback, tasks or actions you tend to gravitate towards, or behaviors that come naturally to you?

We each view life through a unique lens and respond accordingly. Consider those on your team, in your family, or your organization. What might be their top strengths? As you consider your strengths and those of others, you will more fully understand why you tend to gravitate toward certain activities or respond in specific ways. You may also better understand the actions and reactions of others.

As each member is recognized for their unique contribution and can apply her unique strengths to accomplish common goals, research has shown that engagement and performance increase. A sense of belonging emerges when everyone aims their strengths toward the success of the group's overall health and goals. In short, everyone's contribution matters.

### **Recognizing our Values**

Just as identifying and leveraging individual strengths promotes a sense of common purpose and belonging, identifying and discussing the unique values of each team member allows each individual's identity and roots of purpose to be recognized and

honored. We are more than our tasks, positions, and contributions. We are human beings with a core need for meaning and purpose in our professional and personal lives.

Which values energize, inspire, and/or guide you? Why are they important to you? Can you think of how you actively pursue and fulfill them in your professional and personal pursuits? What are the top 5 values of others you know?

Values are at the core of meaning and purpose. As team members recognize the values that are most meaningful to them and share them with others, they begin to be able to find ways to integrate them into their daily lives and identify opportunities to encourage others to do so, as well. Finding others that share our values also promotes a sense of belonging. We find "our tribe" when we find others with similar values. When our values align with those we work with, we are more fulfilled, invested, and loyal to the individuals and their shared common goals.

### **Conflict Prevention and Management**

Understanding the lens through which we view and respond to the world helps us prevent and manage conflict effectively. Let's consider one scenario. An individual with "deliberative" strength is more likely to focus on taking their time to think through the details of a situation and be diligent about

considering the pros and cons of a decision before moving forward. A person with the “activator” strength may be more focused on making a decision quickly and taking action. Without the language of strengths, the activator may feel frustrated with the deliberator because she is taking too long to decide or wants to continue to consider the many options and is not yet comfortable moving forward. The deliberator may become frustrated with the activator because it seems he is not taking the time to fully think through the situation and is acting prematurely. Similarly, if I know autonomy is important to you and accountability is important to me, we can intentionally craft win-win approaches to working together that fosters an environment in which both values can be achieved.

When we understand the lens through which we view life – informed by our strengths and values- we can recognize why we see things as we do and why others may perceive things differently than we do. What’s most important to remember here is that their team needs both strengths. To be successful, the team needs someone to push them to consider the many aspects of the issue or the consequences of possible decisions. They also need someone that is going to propel them toward action.

## **Collective Excellence and Belonging**

Excellence is not achieved in a silo or isolation. While it is lauded to be a “well-rounded” individual, individuals can't have all that is needed to consistently respond with excellence. Each individual has a piece of the “Excellence” puzzle, and every person on the team has a valuable role to play in the team's overall success.

In creating a workplace where strengths and values are identified, leveraged, and honored, we can foster a collaborative environment where each person feels a sense of belonging as a valued and valuable contributor. When we know our strengths and values, we are empowered and energized to live into our unique calling.

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Everyone  
is different



Artwork by Emily Nelson

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# COMMUNITY CIRCLES: A PLATFORM FOR BELONGINGNESS

KIRA NURIELI

I came upon the practice of Circle Conversations/restorative justice by chance. I had been in conflict transformation for over ten years and considered many alternative approaches to dispute resolution. I was already an established mediator, trainer, and organizational consultant and had worked internationally with individuals, partners, and teams. I had helped hundreds of clients build better relationships, communicate and negotiate more effectively, and improve their leadership skills.

I hadn't expected Circle practices to feel so profoundly different and become my passion project. When I first heard the term "restorative justice," I thought it was just the newest fad in our field. However, once I witnessed and experienced several Circles, it was clear that they offered something that was inherently missing in coaching, consulting, and mediation.

At their core, Circles create a sense of community, responsibility, and

belongingness. Within minutes, they foster healthy listening and compassionate relationships and can be applied to enhance employee relations, boost innovation, or build trust to get past conflicts. They also help ease loneliness and create rich and deep bonds while guiding participants to strengthen their soft skills and emotional intelligence. This leads to healthier conversations and improved listening skills. In my many years of experience in dispute resolution, I had never encountered a methodology so successful at engaging participants and transforming relationships as Circles.

In order to appreciate the power of Circle connections, it helps to first understand what Circles are as a methodology. At their core, Circles are platforms for conversation where participants gather together and sit in a physical circle format. One designated individual serves as the "Circle Keeper" and facilitates the discussion. This Circle Keeper sets the tone of the Circle, collaboratively establishes the conduct for engagement

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together, and asks questions or shares prompts for the rest of the Circle participants to answer. Then, the Circle Keeper passes the turn to speak, by way of passing a physical item, which is popularly known as the “Talking Piece”. The rules around the talking piece are deliberate, as they help define the speaking and listening cycles for the conversation.

Once the Circle Keeper has passed the Talking Piece to the first participant, that person has authority to answer the prompt or question as s/he sees fit. Individuals are invited to share as much or as little as they would like, so long as their response is from their own perspective and refrains from accusing, shaming, or judging others. Once they complete their ideas and have shared what they want to share, they pass the Talking Piece to the next person. This pattern continues until the Talking Piece lands back with the Circle Keeper, who may or may not answer the prompt themselves. This method of sharing perspectives and stories continues until the Circle Keeper determines that the Circle will close and invites participants into an idea or practice that indicates completion of the process.

From the start, there is something different about the interconnectedness felt when first experiencing a Circle conversation. Participants come away feeling a shift—a

change—in their feelings, demonstrating greater empathy for those around the Circle, a profound sense of their place in the group, and responsibility and accountability to others. Some participants are moved to tears, and the raw humanity and vulnerability impact many during moments of connection.

We must explore basic human needs to understand why Conversation Circles are so powerful. At our core, we are herd animals; through millennia, we have relied on others for survival. As such, we maintain a fundamental need to understand and be understood—to connect with others deeply and meaningfully.

However, over the last century, it seems that those of us in the West may have lost our sense of herd and tribe. Broadly, we often exist as solo robots: we work in a cubicle, face a screen all day, go home to a lonely apartment, and watch a screen until bedtime. This lack of connection leads some people to cycles of selfishness and greed, fostering anxiety and depression.

But then, someone experiences a Circle.

In Conversation Circles, we satisfy our primal, basic need to belong to something larger than ourselves, allowing us to care deeply for others and foster interconnectedness. We tap into our shared humanity and the common

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ground of our struggles. We listen openly as we otherwise rarely do, and we share and welcome a vulnerability usually hidden within us.

For the anthropologist, Circles make sense. Circles unite the community in a way that validates each individual and allows members to feel supported and protected. Many indigenous communities worldwide implement some form of Circles when they face a challenge or threat.

Today, Circles are applied in a variety of ways. The judicial system uses Circles to unite perpetrators and victims in healing conversations aimed at restorative justice. In the education system, Community Circles foster trust and respect between students while building their emotional intelligence. Open-Space Technology also uses Circles to bring organizations together to tackle challenges, better manage change, and develop new systems and protocols. Moreover, Lean-In and similar minority-group Circles empower disadvantaged people to find the support and guidance they need to get ahead and break through socio-political barriers.

Still, there is more opportunity and need. Our society suffers from loneliness, depression, anxiety, and a lack of belongingness. Adolescents and teens struggle with mental

illnesses, and suicide rates are rising. Circles provide a solution for those seeking meaningful connections, a way to feel heard and hear others, and opportunities to foster common identities based on trust. I hope and pray for more schools, communities, and workplaces to adopt Circles worldwide.

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A serene sunset scene over a body of water. The sun is a bright orange orb just above the horizon, casting a shimmering reflection on the water's surface. The sky is a gradient of warm orange and yellow, with a few wispy clouds. In the foreground, the dark silhouettes of two people are sitting on the shore, looking out at the water. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

# Section II: Stories of Belonging



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# BELONGING AS AN ASIAN AMERICAN WOMAN

JASMINE PHAN

In elementary school, my dad had to sit me down for “the talk.” Not the sex talk, but the racism talk. The talk where he had to explain to his only daughter that there WILL be people who ask questions. “Con,” he’d say, that is child in Vietnamese, “there WILL be people who want to know where I am from, there WILL be people who ask ‘what are you?’, there WILL be people who will try to belittle you because of how you look, the eyes you have, your skin color, that you look nothing like your peers, and that your dad has a thick Vietnamese accent.” But that does not make him less than. Not in the least. If anything, it made him a highly intelligent human being. He was fluent in several languages, and if anyone had a problem with that, that showed their colors of how ignorant they are to make fun of someone for speaking the only language they know and understand.

In high school, my dad had to sit me down again for another talk. He told me to always be proud of being Asian. He told me not to let people get me down for looking different. He came to this country for me; he came to

this country for my brothers; he came to this country for a better life – for himself and for us. He made it known that he loved I looked like his mom, my bà nội (grandma), and his little sister, my di Van (Aunt Van), and that my middle name was the same as theirs. He would proudly call our family in Vietnam and update them on how well I did in school and what I had achieved. He’d say, “Bong Lai đang học tốt” Jasmine is doing well in school. While he may not have said I love you as it is not consistently stated in our culture, I knew I was loved. He’d make sure I was fed, he was proud of my grades, and that I was on the National Honor Roll; I was living proof that everything he went through was worth it. He would be proud of what I have accomplished and will continue to accomplish.

Yet, admittedly, I was ashamed for a long time to be Asian. I always wanted to be “more white” to fit in. I was hurt that I couldn’t find Barbie dolls that looked like me or TV shows with people who looked like me. I would stay inside so my skin wouldn’t get darker. I didn’t want to hear, “Oh, you’re not Mexican?” or “Are you Chinese, Korean, or maybe Hawaiian?” Or

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being hypersexualized, dehumanized, and fetishized in being told, "You're pretty for an Asian," or "Me love you long time," or "You look exotic, what are you?" or being touched and grabbed on inappropriately – as a child and as an adult – or "I've always wanted to know what it's like to have sex with an Asian" or "I don't find you people attractive/I'm not attracted to Asians." Or strangers asking my mom where she adopted me. Or feeling foreign and deplorable and unwelcomed in the country I was born in, hearing "Where did you come from?" or "It's your fault we had the Vietnam war" or pointing to me and whispering, "She's Asian!" as the person slowly backed away or "since you're Asian, are you part American?" or "go back to your own country" or "do y'all's people eat cat? Or dog? Or bats?" or made fun of for using chopsticks or people pulling their eyes to look like mine and say, "you like fry rice?" in some false Asian accent, or "look, more Asians, aren't those your cousins?" pointing to other Asian Americans regardless of their descent or "Jasmine, you should know the answer because you're Asian" or mocked for my culture or someone shove their buggy into my stomach a couple times at a grocery store while nine months pregnant with an over 10-pound baby.

While these may or may not be the experience of all my Asian American brothers and sisters, it is what I have experienced,

heard, and internalized. If my dad were alive today, it would crush him, and quite frankly piss him off, to hear these stories his only daughter had to experience in the country he immigrated to and was a refugee in so that his children could live a better life than he had.

Unlike many Asian immigrants, my dad did not try to defer me to becoming a traditional Vietnamese woman. Did he want me to know how to cook for my future husband? Absolutely. Traditionally, a woman's place is to care for the home and the children and remain docile and submissive while the husband fights to protect the family and works to provide for the family. Even Disney's *Mulan*, Chi Fu said, "You would do well to teach your daughter to hold her tongue in a man's presence."

It is not the woman's place to speak up or speak out. And here I am, speaking up and speaking out. Our immigrant parents undoubtedly kept their heads down, tried to fit in, kept out of trouble, assimilated, and did everything in their power to not cause trouble and avoid any conflict, if possible. Actress and activist Olivia Munn said it best: "Being invisible and keeping our head down has not protected us."

Did my dad want me to have my own career? Absolutely. This was a forward way of thinking

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for him to want his daughter to make a name for herself professionally, and he knew I was up for that challenge.

Many of us first-generation kids of Asian immigrants want to please our parents. We work as hard as we do because we want our parents to be proud of us; we want to live out their American dream. We want to bring honor to our families. The last thing we want is to bring dishonor and disgrace or do anything that would tarnish our family name. Commonly, a woman brings honor to her family through marriage. We're taught at an early age to work hard, fit in, and mind our own business. However, times have changed. Our families came here for us; now we're fighting for our elders. We are a new generation of Asian American women who bring honor to our families by dismantling systemic racism and speaking out against white supremacy and the micro-aggressions we receive. We are standing with one another against the model minority myth and the yellow peril myth. We are united.

Systemic racism and white supremacy is a genuine issue in this country; we have a big problem and must work through it together. The racial triangulation theory conveys the distinct racial hierarchy between Whites, Blacks, and Asians based upon racial valorization (model minority myth) and civic ostracism (yellow peril myth).

Silence is complicity, meaning just as guilty. We don't like it, and we don't want any part of it. There have been protests all over for the attacks on Asians. The problem is the media won't show it because of the model minority myth perpetuated by white supremacists to create a social and economic divide between blacks and Asians. The myth essentially says it gives white supremacists a chance to say Asians are doing it, so blacks should be able to do it, too, whether it be financial gains, executive positions, education, etc. It's designed to be divisive. It also minimizes our experiences and racism, and it isn't accurate as there's a high percentage of Asians in poverty. Furthermore, it encourages systemic racism by downplaying our experiences, erasing and eradicating our history. Moreover, it was created by white supremacists to create an anti-Blackness within Asian communities.

The yellow peril myth opposes the model minority myth in that it views us as perpetual foreigners, threatening the system's stability and order. White supremacists also created this myth to enhance a white identity and make us appear disposable and exploitable. We are looked at as dirty and diseased.

Even though I am a Ph.D. candidate in Conflict Analysis and Resolution, I co-founded a conflict analysis and resolution firm, and even though I volunteer within my

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community, I am still viewed as foreign, deplorable, less-than, and statistically insignificant. Studies present us Asian Americans as "others." We are not "others." We are Asian Americans, we are human beings, and we belong. We are part of the United States of America and do not need to prove that; we have the right to be seen, heard, and validated.

As a mother of two young children in 2021, I fear for my safety, I fear for my children's safety, I fear what my children have to see and hear towards me in public, I fear that my daughter will be touched inappropriately because of her eye shape, I fear for the hatred my children will receive, I fear that they too will have challenging moments in school because of their eye shape or have to receive comments about how their mom looks and have to answer questions why their mom is Asian and where is their mom from. I fear my kids will be told their mom doesn't deserve to live here. I fear my kids will be asked if they were adopted or if I am really their mother because of their fair skin. I am disheartened that these are the conversations that I HAVE to have because of the hatred of others. These microaggressions are not micro; they are macro. They are micro for the aggressor and macro for the oppressed victims.

In elementary school, my peers often asked me, "What are you? You're too dark to be

white but too light to be black." As I got older, I was able to externalize and speak on what I had spent years internalizing and have come to realize how wonderful it is to be an Asian American, how lucky I am to be Asian American and to descend from the ancestors that I have. Today, I am proudly an Asian American. Today, I am proudly the daughter of a Vietnamese refugee, and I am from the USA. "The flower that blooms in adversity is the most rare and beautiful of all." – the Emperor in Mulan. Today, me and my Asian American brothers and sisters are that flower that is blooming through this unjust adversity our Asian American community is facing.

Quoting the movie Mulan again, "A single grain of rice can tip the scale. One man may be the difference between victory and defeat." As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." I stand with the black community, and I stand in the Asian community. Stand and fight with me as we work together in dismantling systemic racism and white supremacy to create a country of belonging, a sense of belonging.

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# WHERE DO I BELONG?

EILEEN PETZOLD-BRADLEY

Where do I belong? I have struggled with this question for most of my adult life, searching for that “place” where I belong. My eyes fill up with tears when attempting to construct a simple answer. Why does the notion of belongingness trigger deep-seated feelings and emotions of sadness and melancholy? When asking others the same question, it becomes personal and evokes different reactions. It is a loaded question with multiple explanations and stories - many of which define our core human identity.

Explaining my belonging story requires rewinding the clock to where this struggle originates. I grew up in a beautiful tropical paradise, the Panama Canal Zone. My family roots and rich history go back several generations to the building of the Panama Canal and the United Fruit Company's banana operations in Panama. I grew up in the Canal Zone, an area of 533 square miles that ran along the canal's course. I can best describe life in the “Zone” as America's experiment of a socialist utopia.

In 1977, the United States and the Panamanian Government signed the Panama Canal Treaty relinquishing

American control over the canal. This meant US exclusive control and managing of the Panama Canal was to be turned over, and the Canal Zone would cease to exist in 1999. As a result, many Canal Zone families left Panama, the older generations retired to the USA, and my childhood friends and siblings sought a new life in the USA. At home and in school, we heard the constant narrative that there was no real future after the official end of the American era. This lost paradise became the place in history that profoundly shaped me, and still, today, I share unique bonds and friendships with my Zonian tribe.

After living in Panama for 18 years, I worked and studied international relations in the USA for seven years. In 1997, I moved to Berlin, which became my new domicile place. However, it was not the “home” away from “home.” In Berlin, I always felt like an outsider, a foreigner, and no matter how hard I tried to go “native” or embrace and accept my destiny, that creeping and empty feeling of not genuinely belonging always came bubbling to the surface. This caused a lot of personal tension, anxiety, depression, and a considerable strain on my family and marriage. I was constantly frustrated and

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confused. It took me a long time to finally understand that I was nostalgic, homesick, and longing for a place where I could not return, my beloved past in the Panama Canal Zone. I suffered from what the Germans call "Sehnsucht," which means homesickness, loss of a homeland or place and people in time, and even deep pain and grief (BBC Travel, 2023).

Today we live in the age of a global economy where cultures cross and intersect. Yet, I often wonder, do we all share a similar belonging story? Here is a short reflective, healing poem dedicated to those who can relate to feeling like they do not belong.

### **I Belong**

I forgive myself for feeling like I do not belong.  
I am now finding inner peace in knowing I belong.

I forgive myself for being so troubled and confused for so long about not belonging.  
At the time, I did not have the wisdom or understanding about belonging.

I forgive myself for being so hard on myself for trying to belong.  
But then, I did not know how to verbalize or express my frustrations about belonging.

I forgive others, especially family or friends, who made me feel like I do not belong.  
Unfortunately, they probably did not have the perspective or capacity to understand my story of belonging.

I forgive those in society who exclude others to make them feel like they do not belong.  
Despite our differences in age, beliefs, ethnicity, or gender, everyone has the right to belong.

I consciously allow myself and others to belong here in the now.  
May we all find inner peace, awareness, and acceptance in knowing we belong.

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# PIECES OF ANOTHER TOMORROW

RANDALL AMSTER

The sun blazed against the aquamarine sky, stretching shadows over sparse cottonwoods past where the valley faded into the horizon. I stood in awe and asked the padre if anything could ever be more beautiful or more terrifying. He gazed at me through the pale muslin visor shielding his tired eyes from the desert's relentless glare. As he spoke, a bold fury rose in him, not from anger but with passion and pride. I'd rarely seen him like that, and it made me wonder what he might have been like if not for the Great Storm.

"Even now, something special emanates here," the padre said, grimacing while searching for better words, "something hopeful and possible. Just as Sol's rays boldly blanket the mesa, we too endure," he waxed, "from the Originals who walked along these very foothills and the Conquistas who tried to supplant them, to the Moderns who built the fragile cities and the Holdouts who fled them for the relative safety of the highlands."

He saw my furrowed expression as he braced against the midday fireball. "I know

what you're thinking," he anticipated. "How can I go on about the greatness of this half-starved empire of ruins after everything that has happened?" As if to punctuate this, he held out his hand to reveal a feather, small and wiry with reddish flecks on black matting. "You need to know this above all else..." he waxed. I held fast to his impending words.

"There was a time when people with cardboard faces and shoe-leather hands worked the verdant valleys right where you are standing, when people of every age and race kept pace with ever-changing technologies, when hungry fearful masses raised their voices against tyranny and shortsightedness. Before the Storm, this was a place where one was free to disobey and disavow. People bought in or checked out as conscience guided them. There was a unified tolerance for a diversity of opinions. No matter who you were, there was something for you here, somewhere. At least, that's how I like to remember it."

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Somehow this didn't seem right to me, and yet I knew he was telling the truth, his truth. Before our Voyage he once told me that he was the worst sort of troublemaker you could find: A True Believer. I didn't know what he meant then, but I think I do now. He hated so many things about the life he was born to and the country that made him one of its own; he despised its limitations as he saw the direction it had taken, the men who usurped its principles and emptied its coffers, the decaying fabric of its ideologies and infrastructures, and ultimately its deliverance to a long-prophesied end that needn't have been so. He never thought it would actually happen, yet he was prepared anyway.

He was mad in every sense of the word. But he was madly in love as well. This place, this terrible, beautiful place, embraced him. He railed against it, and it protected him. He kicked its left shin, and it offered the right. He disparaged its profane icons, and they rewarded him anyway. He refused its blessings, and they were doubly bestowed. He spoke up when it clamped down and buckled down when it flared up. Try as he might, with all his might, at the end of the day, he was in it, and it was in him. A True Believer.

"This place," he told me on that typical white-hot morning, "is like this feather. It can soar on the Eastern breeze and glisten in the Western

sun. Its sharp edge can poke you, and its ticklish quills can bring laughter. It can distract you from seeing the whole bird even as it draws your gaze toward it. It has a subtle beauty and a raggedness to it as well. It is of ancient design yet eternally young, pliant, and unbreakable. It is a warrior's marker and a symbol of peace. It is simple and complex, a whole unto itself and a piece of a larger whole. It represents freedom and soaring spirits, but ultimately comes crashing back to the ground..." He lifted his veil as his thoughts trailed again and seemed to be misting.

"The days are long, but time is short," he whispered. I watched as he carefully placed the feather in his black pouch. I thought I saw him say "I love you" under his breath, and I wondered if he meant me, or the feather, or the land. I didn't realize that I had spoken this aloud—or did I? He always seemed to know what I was thinking or asking before I did.

"All three," he smiled knowingly, "for they are one and the same: the ideals and the artifacts and the people. It has always been so. Multitudes have been drawn here for tens of thousands of years, braving arctic conditions and barren deserts on the journey. They have come by air, sea, and land. Despite everything that's gone wrong and all the sins of the past, people still want to come here. Nowhere else on this blessed earth can make that claim. This will forever be the Young World, filled with Old Souls. Like yours, my son."



I replayed this moment in my mind's eye today, remembering him as he was. I was far less than a score years then; he was already an old man before his time, as the scourge had begun slowly ravaging him from the inside out. So much has been lost for us all, but a strength has been gained – in me, at least, and in the resilient desert refuge I call home. A country died so that a people might live again, and thus we learn from the elders that it is our thirst for the past that makes the future possible. To the wind eventually will go our tattered bodies, as our spirits stand firm and yet supple in the eternal pursuit of change.

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# THE CALL

RANDALL AMSTER

Calling all souls  
Who dare to care  
And dream impossible  
Scenarios filled with  
Love and light and living  
As if we set it right  
For the future beings  
Recalling our trials  
Saying all is forgiven  
With smiles beaming  
Hope across years  
To pay forward  
The blessings of  
What you and I  
Have begun

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# CONFLICTING IDENTITIES? FINDING BELONGING AS A CHRISTIAN ECOFEMINIST VEGAN

HEIDI HUSE

As an ecofeminist who is also vegan and identifies as Christian, I have found connecting points where my journey as a Christian intersects well with my ecofeminist, nonviolence and social justice, and vegan ethical standpoints. Peace and social justice advocates throughout history have likewise established an ethical foundation based on biblical text; U.S. civil rights advocacy, advocacy and programs for economic justice and equality, and even early establishment of vegetarian education and advocacy organizations have all proclaimed support in Christian theology and the Bible. As one example, The Vegetarian Society explains on their Web site that the first recorded corporate effort (that is, by white Euro-American society) to abstain from meat eating was the Reverend William Cowherd's Bible Christian Church in Salford, England, in the early 19th century, in a spirit of abstinence from the evils of alcohol, tobacco, and "flesh-eating." Cowherd's belief that

eating animal flesh was to be avoided as a potential source of social aggression was affirmed in his own life by his abstention from "flesh" and by his care for the needy humans in his community for whom he provided food and access to medical care ("Early History").

Despite such bullet points of shared ideology, history, and identity, there often seems to be a dearth of essential, fundamental connections in published theoretical or critical literature or in praxis between these standpoints, which are critical to my ethos. There is, in fact, a dominant historical and current strain in Christian theology that renders both a feminist and a vegan standpoint antithetical to Christian belief and practice, if not altogether "unchristian." That is, a shared relationship with and commitment to Jesus is not a broad enough base to build a real sense of belonging while holding to seemingly incompatible identities and ethics. This article reflects on how finding and

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growing kinship and a sense of belonging in a world that categorizes, if not divides, humans from animals and humans from each other can seem daunting, if not impossible. Fortunately, growing evidence shows that it is increasingly possible and worth working toward—for animals and humans.

One hopeful site of such evidence is the rise in critical vegan scholarship. In late 2022, I became aware of an emerging academic field of vegan studies, a field replete with English Studies scholarship, including my own background in rhetoric and discourse analysis. Further, finding direct connections between the feminist vegetarian work of Carol J. Adams and the rhetorical feminism of Cheryl Glenn has offered a site for expanding rhetorical feminism to include animals in discursive and narrative texts incorporating the Other. And British animal welfare theologian Andrew Linzey, along again with Adams, has created a 21st-century foundation for examining vegan ecofeminism through a Christian lens.

Rhetorical feminism may provide a scenic overlook from which those trying to live what often feel like disconnected identities can make critical observations and give voice to their standpoints, leading to personal and social intersection rather than disconnection or conflict. As a student of classic and feminist rhetorics and peace and social

justice studies, I have found my scholarly endeavors have often felt separate from myself. This is particularly true as my evolution over the past 20 years into a vegan standpoint and life practice has progressed significantly, alongside my education in race and sexual identity as an older white heterosexual woman. While correlations between composition and rhetoric studies, race and/or gender identities, and peace and justice studies have seemed more evident to me—though until recently, my own white and heterosexual privilege had not been so self-evident—veganism has felt out-of-bounds due to my position as a tenured faculty member at a rural, state university with a highly successful animal agriculture program of study. Despite my sense of fragmentation and disconnect, these elements of my personal ethos have become increasingly intertwined as I dig deeper into a scholarly and personal exploration of Christian-ecofeminist-vegan discourse, drawing from rhetorical feminism's goal of expanding the field of what counts as meaningful rhetorical text.

One open door of invitation to belong comes from Cheryl Glenn's 2018 work, *Rhetorical Feminism and This Thing Called Hope*. The goals for historical and ongoing rhetorical feminism that Glenn details make room for the inclusion of animals as Other, which Carol J. Adams argues is a feminist act in her 1990 call to reflection and action, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*.

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Glenn reminds readers that our words shape us, particularly the words by which we identify ourselves within a social context. "After all," she points out, "who we actually understand ourselves to be and not to be, with whom we self-identify and do not, has consequences for how we experience and understand the world [...] And given that our identity can be constructed or realized only in the presence of Others...our identity automatically equals a comparison and contrast about our own social, physical, economic, intellectual, cultural—that is rhetorical—position vis-à-vis that of Others. In short, we can—and should—recognize our own positions in systems of power" (47).

Adams argues that feminists should recognize their position vis-à-vis animals in systems of power by including non-human living beings in that "Other" category, particularly since, in the rhetorical constructions of oppression, suppression, dehumanization of and violence against women, the metaphorical bodies of animals (and human acts against those animals) are often central. For example, she refers to the metaphor of treating women like pieces of meat in describing sexual harassment or violent rape, explaining that "feminists have used violence against animals as metaphor, literalizing and feminizing the metaphor. When one is matter without spirit, one is the raw material for exploitation and for metaphoric borrowing." However, she critiques the use of such metaphor when the

actual lives of animals are not considered by feminists either rhetorically or literally: "Despite this dependence on this imagery of butchering, radical feminist discourse has failed to integrate the literal oppression of animals into our analysis of patriarchal culture [...] Whereas women feel like pieces of meat [...] animals are actually made into pieces of meat [...] the literal fate of the animal is elided" (72-73). Where women might identify with the plight of animals metaphorically or rhetorically, there is no actual kinship w/ their fellow exploited living beings except perhaps idiosyncratically but not as a tenet of feminism.

In her first vegan studies collection, *Through a Vegan Lens: Textual Ethics and Lived Activism*, English scholar Laura Wright introduces the text invoking characteristics of rhetorical feminism inherent in vegan studies scholarship. She describes how a vegan studies approach to scholarship involving animals as well as Othered humans, "is theoretical, but it engages a lived politics of listening, care, emotion, and the empathetic imagination." According to Wright, "For vegan studies scholars [...] the work that is done in its name necessarily has to be in the service of animals." Specifically, in the service of an Other consistently rendered invisible rhetorically and concretely. As Glenn points out that rhetorical feminism is engaged in the work of expanding what counts as rhetoric, Wright likewise calls on an interrogation of

what counts as theory in discourse echoing Glenn:

"[...] we must be willing to listen to perspectives that may challenge our conceptions of 'theory,' in favor of work that is more activist, potentially experimental, and less bounded by the strictures of academic writing. That is not to say that vegan studies should be anti-theory but that it should be driven by [...] theory, theoretical inquiry, but also fully engaged in activist praxis, dedicated to establishing a conversation that crosses boundaries and expands both knowledge and social engagement" (viii).

For Wright such scholarship is not confined to discussion about animals alone but includes human individuals and groups that are, like animals, often oppressed if not rendered silent or absent. The example of such othered humans that she presents is the global treatment of refugees. So how she describes vegan studies theory bears kinship with the feminist rhetorical endeavor that pushes beyond recovery and recognition of women's writing that has been overlooked or historically excluded from the established rhetorical canon because it did not fit neatly into traditional—patriarchal—rhetorical standards.

Beyond serving as an overlook, a site for holistic observation, rhetorical feminism offers a 4-way stop between the intersections of feminism and veganism, requiring a full pause to attentively consider the other standpoint more fully before proceeding. But

there is also a noteworthy roadway intersecting Christian theology and practice with vegan and ecofeminist standpoints. In recent years, print and Web publications, organization websites, and the social media presence of Christian vegetarians and vegans have arisen and grown. Those who profess Christian belief and identity, who are also simultaneously committed to feminist ideology and a vegan lifestyle, are finding kindred spirits with whom to educate both their fellow Christians and non-Christians as well as advocate for including animals in the circle of compassion and stewardship of creation. Andrew Linzey offers one of the most well-known and scholarly modern-day defenses of animal inclusion in a life of Christian grace toward creation. His Christian standpoint and biblical scholarship invite active and engaged belonging in the faith community to vegetarians and vegans who too often have felt the need to leave the church to remain true to their vegan commitment and their relationship with Christ.

Linzey aligns "animal theology" with some cultural identities marking my life in two ways. First, he affirms the need for the Christian church universally to incorporate animal theology with "feminist theology, black theology, gay theology, and liberation theology" as essential elements of Christian theology and practice. And second, he challenges the criticisms made by a

dominant body of Christian scholars and pastoral leadership who dismiss and deride such an expansion of “theology” as a “dissipation of theology...a flight from ‘real’ theology into the arms of secular moral fashion” (Theology viii)—that is, such isms are not Christian concerns and detract from what counts as theology. But Linzey counters this common critique, arguing instead that a Christian commitment to justice for animals is long over-due, that Christian commitment to the well-being of non-human animal creation resides in who Jesus presents Himself to be both in his earthly ministry and in the biblical narrative: “I hold that human dominion over animals needs to take as its model the Christ-given paradigm of lordship manifest in service” (Theology ix).

Linzey introduces his book, *Animal Gospel*, as a “struggle [...] against the blindness and indifference of Christians and the Churches to the sufferings of animals.” He acknowledges that “many people [...] are encouraged in their despair about the world by the church itself” in its disregard for the welfare of animals, enough that they “find their own sense of loyalty to the Church severely strained.” Linzey also recognizes that the Church’s failure to extend Christian compassion to animals has been a cause for despair for Christians who identify as animal advocates and vegan. He explains that his willingness to speak and write on behalf of animals and against the failures of the

Church has resulted in many concerned letters to him from Christians who share their disappointment and despair with him. He confesses that these are voices “seldom heard in the meetings and synods and corridors of the churches—let alone in their official pronouncements” despite the growing “groundswell of opinion” that these voices represent a groundswell of voices that the Church has yet to fully appreciate, consider, or respond to (Gospel 3). As we have heard from Glenn and Wright about those speaking outside standard rhetorical or theoretical boundaries, Linzey affirms that these voices “deserve to be heard, and not, as so often happens, marginalized, silenced, or ridiculed” (Gospel 4) solely because they speak outside the standard parameters of accepted theology.

Adams is an additional source for finding intersection if not belonging as a Christian Feminist Vegan. In the 2012 anthology *A Faith Embracing All Creatures: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions about Christian Care for Animals*, she interrogates the common explication of biblical “dominion” as domination over creation and challenges violent exploitation and consumption of non-human created beings. She especially refutes dominion-as-domination being essential to God’s own identity or as an essential element of Christian life and practice—as essential to the traditional, standard theology that Linzey critiques: “Dominion is not our identity; our

end, our essence, or our way of life" (12); rather, "if we see Jesus as the ultimate 'image' of God, then how Jesus operates in his earthly ministry, through a kind of 'non-power' and attentive care of others, has bearing on how we interpret what it means for us as images of Christ to exercise dominion... Understood christologically... dominion cannot be attached to a will-to-power, but is intimately bound up with God's love and God's creation... Jesus's ministry was not based on earthly dominion, as many Christians have understood that word. What matters is the quality of our relationships with each other (10-11)." In Adams's argument, those others include both human and non-human beings. And like Linzey, she presents a relational animal theology based on the identity of Christ.

Additionally, in his introduction to the anthology in which Adams writes, Andy Alexis-Baker laments that questions about what counts as "Christian" when it comes to animals have not only not been answered theologically or in consistent Christian faith practice, as Linzey notes, too often the questions are unwelcome. Relating his progression as a pacifist who came to include animals in his circle of care, study, and advocacy, Alexis-Baker reflects on how identifying as vegetarian and then vegan prompted questions from fellow Christians that often felt more like an accusatory interrogation than genuine, open curiosity. Such questioning compelled him to search for credible, theologically-sound answers. He discovered that the resources providing those

answers were few: "I found a variety of authors who answered one or more of the kinds of questions I was encountering. But I could not find a single source to which to point people who wanted to know more about a biblically and theologically rich Christian vegetarianism" (xvi).

The result was his effort to engage others to join him in producing the 2012 anthology, with the hope that while "[t]his book is neither the beginning nor the end of the discussion...it will be a significant resource along the way" (xviii). The co-editors Tripp York and Alexis-Baker envisioned a broad audience: Christians for whom their vegetarian or vegan standpoint and practice is essential to their faith identity and journey, and yet they feel inadequately informed to offer a solid theological defense of that standpoint; Christians who consume animal products but who are willing to consider possible challenges to their practices and preconceived beliefs on what the Bible says about animals as fellow creatures; and animal advocates for whom Christian belief and practice is wholly identified with violent domination, who might be surprised to learn about ways the Bible itself can be a resource for their advocacy. Hopefully, this current article contributes to the global library of resources available to these and other audiences who are seeking answers and truths and to live intersecting identities in a community with kindred spirits.



I am one of those seekers of sound, inclusive rhetoric, theory, and theology while trying to live an intersecting praxis of my identities as an ecofeminist, social justice and nonviolence advocate, vegan, and Christian—in my own life and community with others. It is easy to become overwhelmed by the questions as I ponder the answers and truths I find along the way. One of my additional identities is college writing educator. And my identities, scholarship, and life praxis, of course, intersect with my teaching. My ongoing study must include pedagogy, where questions can overwhelm answers. But Glenn consistently points rhetorical feminist practice toward hope. I find that locating the sites of intersection and belonging with others offers cause for hope and motivation to continue moving forward.

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# MLK DAY REFLECTION: FEELING LIKE A STRANGER

ALENA AGUAYO

It is in our human nature to crave connection. We tend to gravitate toward like-minded people for companionship due to our natural desire for security. However, we long for more than physical company as we seek authentic emotional and intellectual bonds. Due to this natural tendency, we are more attracted to people we can relate to. We pursue friendships with those who have similar interests, values, and hobbies because we want to feel comfortable sharing every part of ourselves, not just selective sections. While civil discourse is necessary to challenge us in healthy ways, what good would it be to have company you can not find command ground with?

When a person ventures into unfamiliar territory, the sense of security deeply rooted within our human instinct can be stripped away. Whether it is because we moved into a new neighborhood or started a new job, most of us can recall a time of transition when we thought of ourselves as strangers in a new environment. This change often invokes a strong emotional response and

induces hypothetical questions such as: "How will I fit in?"

Like most college students, I began feeling uneasy a few weeks after moving into my freshman-year dorm at Ashland University. Given my outgoing personality and adventurous nature, I had no problem making friends from all sectors of campus life, including athletics, Greek life, and various student organizations. I never had to eat lunch alone or spend the weekend without a fun activity, so you can imagine my surprise when I began to feel like a stranger to those around me.

Despite the stereotypical depictions of what an outsider looks like, being a stranger is often an internal battle, particularly as strangers may not always appear different. Beyond language and ethnic barriers, a stranger may simply be someone close to you who struggles to fully express themselves. I began to realize this as I pondered why I felt disconnected despite having so many close friends I enjoyed spending time with. This frustration continued until I concluded that I

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felt poorly because I lacked the outlet needed to express a crucial part of my identity, which is my proud Puerto Rican heritage.

I was so busy enjoying the excitement of my freshman year that it was not until a few weeks had passed that I was struck with a deep sense of yearning for the cultural aspects of home. Home-cooked meals of arroz con gandules were substituted for the mass-produced meals served at the dining halls, and the Spanglish slang of my family was replaced by the formal speech used by professors and politicians during class and colloquiums. I had noticed their absence but had yet to understand their impact on my daily life. I still loved my surrounding environment but felt like I was betraying a part of myself.

I use this personal example to show that the concept of the stranger is much more complex than we assume. Only when I actively sought ways to express my culture did I find opportunities for fulfillment. I was fortunate to build a small community with three students of similar backgrounds who wanted to put their passion for their heritage toward a more significant cause. Together, we found a special piece of home through UNIDAD, our student-led organization dedicated to sharing the beauty of Spanish-speaking cultures with those interested in learning. We continue to embrace our

differences, and through this, we provide a service to both ourselves and the surrounding community as we expose others to educational opportunities.

My experience of feeling like a stranger represents the idea that ostracization and discomfort are not always grandeur. Rather, they can be small-scale situations occurring naturally. I was always open to sharing my culture but never felt I was with the right audience. However, when I opened up about my identity, I was empowered by my peers who supported my passion. I felt relieved once I understood that I was no longer a stranger because my fear no longer restricted me from connecting with others.

Conveying a gentle and genuine willingness to learn about others is the first step in crafting a more accepting environment. We can accommodate newcomers with similar worries by making them feel comfortable to express the entire contents of their character, and we can become better neighbors if we put forth the effort to be compassionate, curious, and, most importantly, courteous.

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# BENAMING

HÉLÈNE R. FISHER

Longing to be safe

Longing to be welcome

Belonging is mattering

Mattering is in your name

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# WHAT I THINK ABOUT BELONGING

SOPHIA B. KRZEMIEN, 9 YEARS OLD

I think belonging means to feel loved and like you are accepted. Belonging would be like being respected and treated fairly. It also means that you feel like you well...BELONG! It is important to feel as if you belong, but it is also important to treat others to whom you are addressing FAIRLY. And so, this is what I think belonging means to me.

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Section III:

Belonging  
and Wellness

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# EXPRESSION OF DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, EQUITY, AND TOGETHERNESS (DIET) THROUGH FOODWAYS

SUZANNE RISKIN, IDARABASKI AKPAN,  
AND MELINDA LUIS

All of the traditional activities, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are associated with food in your daily life. Foodways include customs of food production, preservation, preparation, presentation, gathering, marketing (both buying and selling), and uses of food products other than for eating and food folklore.

We prepare food to express DIET (Diversity, Inclusion, Equity, and Togetherness). Diversity because options are endless and vary between family members' and friends' preferences. We can reach for the same foods and prepare them in diverse fashions. Inclusion invites everyone to the table to sit down and eat. Many gather in the kitchen as food is prepared. Equity because humanity reaches out to help others to ensure food security when possible. Togetherness brings recipes to each other to share to expand a

continuous exchange of ideas to eat fresh food with new foodways. Together, in our kitchens, we show how we have found a place where we belong. – Suzanne Riskin

Nigerian breakfast:

Friends, family, and food– my fundamentals. When I arrived in Miami from southern Nigeria 8 years ago, I was shocked at how few Nigerians I met. There wasn't a Nigerian store or restaurant anywhere nearby, and it was tough getting used to the different cuisines I encountered in Miami. Cooking was comfort, but it was also my way of remembering where I came from and an excuse to have my new friends over.

I chose this potatoes and eggs recipe because the ingredients are accessible. It is easy to make; so easy that the whole family can be involved. This recipe is also a good

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example of most Nigerian meals. Most meals include tubers\* and protein, and the king of all tubers is yam. We love our yams. In fact, we even often include yams as part of things requested in a dowry. Most excitingly, in the southeastern region of Nigeria, the Igbo tribe celebrates an annual New Yam Festival. The New Yam Festival celebrates the beginning of the yam harvest. During the festival, there is dancing, masquerades, sacrifices of thanks to the gods, and gifts to the local kingship. It is a big deal and highlights yam's importance to our diet and economy. Nigeria is the number one producer of yams globally, and we can make pretty much anything out of yams. Boil, fry, roast, make into flour or as a vessel to transfer soup into our mouths (called "swallow" in that context).

Like in most cultures, Nigerians usually pair starches with protein. Every meal growing up had some meat in it. We are big seafood people in my part of Nigeria. I live in Rivers State. When we are not having seafood, we eat mostly beef and chicken. We also enjoy goat and game. If it bleeds, we eat it. We season it well, and then we enjoy it. For breakfast, however, we chose either eggs, corned beef, or canned sardines in vegetable oil. I chose my two favorites for this recipe, but it really is up to the preference of whoever is cooking. Hope you enjoy my rendition of a classic Nigerian breakfast. I know that I do. Idarabasi Akpan, third-year D.O. student

\*tubers (noun): any starchy underground vegetable. Examples: African yam, potato, cocoyam, water yam, sweet potato, etc.

### **Potatoes and scrambled eggs**

**Time:** max 30 min: prep time 15 minutes, cooking time 10 minutes

**Servings:** 4-6 (closer to 6)

### **Ingredients:**

Water

Yam of choice (I'm using 3 purple Hawaiian sweet potatoes)

1 semi-ripe plantain

3 large eggs (room temperature)

Half of a red bell pepper

Half of a green bell pepper

2 scotch bonnet peppers

1 small red onion

1 tin (can) of sardines in a neutral oil

1/2 teaspoon of salt

4 tablespoons of vegetable oil

### **Instructions:**

#### **Cook the Yams:**

- Boil your tubers and plantain together: Peel and cut the tuber of your choice into whatever shape you like (rings, wedges, large dice). Just make sure that they are all roughly of a similar shape.
- Place them into a deep pan and cover with water. The water should be 3-4 inches above the level of the tubers and plantain.



- When the water starts boiling, set a timer for ten minutes— to check on the softness of your tubers. If they are done, you should be able to stick a fork into one of the larger pieces and have it fall off the fork with little effort.
- Move on to preparing the vegetables but watch out not to overcook the yam.
- Cook the vegetables until the red peppers are to your preferred level of softness. Stirring them every now and again. Add 3 tablespoons of water at a time if the pan goes dry. The water will cook off eventually.
- As you are waiting on the bell peppers to cook, check the tubers again. They should be cooked by now. Strain them off and place on the serving plate once they are drained.

Prepare the vegetables and sardines:

- As the tubers are boiling, preheat the frying pan on medium to high heat.
- Medium dice the onions, bell peppers, and scotch bonnet peppers.
- Smash the sardines in a bowl
- Add the eggs into the bowl and mix with the sardines

### **Cook the vegetables:**

- Place the four tablespoons of vegetable oil into the preheated frying pan
- Immediately add in the onions and move around in the pan with spatula or spoon to prevent burning.
- Once the onions have turned translucent, add in the bell peppers and scotch bonnet peppers. Add in the salt.
- (This would be a good time to check on the softness of your tubers if you haven't already.)
- The red bell peppers should release much liquid, which would prevent the vegetables from burning but will also make them soft.

### **Cook the eggs:**

- Reduce the heat to medium-low and add in the egg and sardine mixture
- Take the pan off the heat and stir the eggs.
- Place it back on and off the heat as needed to control the temperature. I like the eggs more on the softer side so the process of cooking the eggs takes about 1-2 minutes for me.
- Place the cooked eggs on the dish next to the tubers.

### **Stare at your creation.**

Eat it with a fork, knife, spoon, hands, feet. Whatever way you choose to eat it— enjoy!!!

Recipe source: Idarabasi Akpan, Original recipe

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**German Farmers Breakfast:**

Cultural identity through cooking is my superpower. As a fourth-generation German on my mom's side (and a mix of other ethnicities compliments of my dad), I have grown to appreciate the culinary skills and traditions my mother passed down. My mother passed away when I was 24. At that time, I experienced anger and resentment for her leaving me at such a young age which over the years shifted to love and appreciation for the many gifts she left me, especially cooking. I realized my sense of belonging stemmed from my mother's family origins. I grew up eating Braunschweiger, Liverwurst, and Bratwurst my mother purchased from the local German butcher. The German food and nutrition mindset is fresh and whole foods which takes a commitment to finding the best, freshest food. My mom spent a lot of time and energy going downtown once a week to the butcher and then the "cheese man" (as I called him), which was my favorite trip because I always got samples. She organized and managed a vegetable and fruit co-op to build boxes of fresh produce for like-minded moms wanting to provide the best nutrition for their families. She baked her own bread and made her own yogurt.

Many of my mom's food philosophies came from her hardworking farming aunts and uncles. She would spend her school

vacations on the farm drinking daisy wine and adamantly avoiding Schwartenmagen (Head Cheese) that were staples on the table. During these family visits, she learned how to prepare a Farmer's Breakfast, a hearty meal consisting of eggs, potatoes, and often bacon or sausage. The ingredients represent the freshness of the foods gathered from the farm. My mother often recounted how she enjoyed feeding the chickens and helping her cousins gather the eggs. A staple of any German household is potatoes. The farmer's breakfast pairs the woody flavor of rosemary with the freshness of dill to create a culinary burst of flavor. Onions enhance the savory characteristics of the potatoes. One of my fondest memories is helping Mom make her warm German dill potato salad we brought to all family gatherings.

There are other benefits of these ingredients that underlie culinary enjoyment. German health traditions include fresh foods but combine herbs and food preparation methods to promote health. It's not uncommon for a physician to prescribe a tea or herbal mixture for a health concern. The complete German commission E monographs: a Therapeutic Guide to Herbal Medicines\*, contains a plethora of herbal and tea remedies. As a child, my mom always had tea ready to pour when we had a cold. So it's unsurprising that herbs are part of the German culinary cabinet. What is not

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common in German cooking is spice. So many cultures use abundant spice, including hot peppers and sauces. Black pepper and peppercorns are the jazziest spices to grace German dishes.

Join me in preparing the Farmers Breakfast (without the meat), which pairs nicely with the best part of both of my worlds. My other superpower is I'm a registered dietitian. I have these superpowers because of my mom and her determination to create a sense of belonging for me and my brothers by connecting us to our ethnic roots through food – Melinda Luis

### Farmer's Breakfast

**Time:** max 30 min: prep time 5 minutes, cooking time 25 minutes

**Servings:** 4-6 (closer to 6)

#### Ingredients:

8 medium red bliss potatoes, diced

2 and ½ Tablespoons olive oil

2 large onions, diced

8 whole eggs

1 cup fresh rosemary or 4 Tablespoons dried

1 cup fresh basil

Salt and pepper to taste

1 cup low fat mozzarella (Munster works nicely too)

4 teaspoons of vinegar

#### Instructions:

- Cook the sliced potatoes in a wide frying pan in olive oil on a medium heat for 20 minutes. Halfway in add the diced onion. Use a lid as this cook them a bit quicker. Don't stir too often or it won't crisp up.
- Crack the eggs into a cup and give a quick whisk with a fork.
- Throw in the eggs, mozzarella, herbs, salt and pepper
- Cook for another 2 mins or until the egg is done.
- Add a splash of vinegar.
- Done!

#### Recipe

source:

<https://hurrythefoodup.com/farmers-brunch/>

# BELONGING IN TRAINING: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE GERODIVERSITY DIALOGUES

ASHLEY STRIPLING, BRITTANY HYLANDER,  
AND JILLIAN CROCKER

Feeling seen, connected, and supported is important for any group to thrive and grow, but of unique importance to clinical psychology doctoral trainees. Teaching future psychologists to create a sense of belonging in the room with their clients has always been a foundational aspect of effective therapy. In 2020, when the world paused, and we collectively had time to think about what matters to us, fostering belonging and connection went from foundational to essential. The importance of being seen for who we are and having our identities acknowledged and respected has always been an instrumental part of clinical training, often happening in an organic, individual way as students grow. However, as we moved to virtual meeting rooms, cultivating connection and support became more complicated, as did the deeper self-exploration essential to trainees' growth. Met with these challenges and in response to

student needs, the director of Nova Southeastern University's Counseling Center for Older Adults (NCCOA) clinical psychology training program (AS) sought to foster a sense of virtual belongingness by integrating individual diversity and inclusion discussions into formal routine events.

Named the Gerodiversity Dialogues, these monthly virtual dialogues include self-guided reading or the viewing of first-person narratives (i.e., memoir, documentary, talks), followed by a brief presentation and guided group discussion about how age intersects with other identities (i.e., race, gender, socioeconomic status, class, citizenship, sexual orientation, ability status, colorism, neurodiversity, veteran status). These dialogues increase awareness of how multiple identities may impact clinical presentation, diagnosis, and treatment.

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To illustrate the impact of these dialogues, this article details how the dialogues were created, the modifications made since their introduction, trainee perspectives of the experience, and a summary report of the trainings to date. We hope this will aid readers in formally integrating diversity conversations into their settings, promoting growth and belonging, and helping guide other training organizations looking to make informal growth more structured and formal.

**AS:** As director of the clinic, helping clinical trainees feel seen, accepted, connected, and supported not only by myself but by each other is an essential part of personal and professional growth. During the social isolation of COVID-19 and the move to virtual settings, I grappled with how to retain not only the unique training environment I had been able to create in my office but how to model connection and support in group settings. Understanding the importance of being seen for who we are—not only for our clients but ourselves across the lifespan—I sought to formalize my informal practices to provide structure, grounding, a safe space for growth, and provide my students agency and control. Having recently received critical feedback from the larger student body regarding the support of students who identify as Black, indigenous, and people of color, I felt compelled to start by providing students a space to better understand

cumulative race-related trauma and systemic inequality. I also wanted to highlight Black resistance to these issues as experienced by Black older adults and learn how to talk about race therapeutically.

Thus, in leading the first Gerodiversity Dialogue, I chose a topic outside my lived experience, which was, by all accounts, a mistake. In the inaugural Gerodiversity Dialogue, titled *Black Elders Matter: The Impact of Aging While Black and How to Engage in Race Talk in Therapy*, I watched as the carefully curated content I had spent weeks preparing created not cohesion but disconnection. Immediately following, I sought feedback from a trusted trainee (BH), who you will hear from below, to better understand what went array and realized that I had moved away from feelings into content and removed the spaces needed for discussion. Equipped with this new insight, I returned to the group, acknowledged my mistake, and worked to create a group space for growth and understanding. This unintended modeling of humility set the stage for the seven other presentations that year and an additional twelve in the two years since.

**BH:** I entered NCCOA during the beginning of the pandemic when civil unrest began to ensue following the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. At

that time, society was forced to slow down, reflect upon matters they had failed to recognize or purposely ignored, and decide whether to move towards change or remain stagnant. Being one of the three clinicians of color within the clinic that year, I was excited my supervisor, Dr. AS, developed the idea to incorporate Gerodiversity Dialogues into our training curriculum. We needed a safe clinical space for these conversations, and this was the opportunity to do so during a tumultuous time.

As mentioned above, the first dialogue led by Dr. AS fell short of what she had cultivated during our supervision meetings. While very informative, it could have been more impactful. The presentation became just that, a presentation. It left minimal room for dialogue and connection among trainees. Following this, we used space during our individual supervision sessions to discuss what went wrong and how we could make this series better. Dr. AS was open to feedback and collaborating on new guidelines for future talks. Together, we decided to discourage lengthy presentations. Instead of hiding behind PowerPoint presentations, we wanted to create a space allowing for open and honest conversation. Within these dialogues, we also wanted to elicit any strong reactions group members experienced regarding the dialogue topic. These reactions, stemming from personal

identities and experiences, could be reflected upon, discussed, and processed as a collective on how they impact our clinical work with diverse, aging populations. With these changes, future dialogues became impactful and informative, becoming more of what Dr. AS originally envisioned.

Following my time within NCCOA, Dr. AS gave me the opportunity to oversee the Gerodiversity Dialogues. While very excited to take on a new role and co-facilitate these experiences, I learned very quickly how challenging it was. Asking individuals to be open and vulnerable with one another on such important topics was difficult. With time I recognized that the role required me to serve as a model. In being open and vulnerable about my own experiences, a safe space was created for others to follow suit.

**JC:** As someone who lived in Minnesota when George Floyd was murdered, I realized that people pay attention when biases in our society are acknowledged and, more importantly, noticeable actions are taken to address them. I also observed that older adults often use their chronological age in a negative context to explain why they walk slowly or overlook specific details. I wondered where these thoughts came from and found that "ageism" applied.

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Robert Butler defined ageism in 1969 as a combination of prejudicial attitudes towards older people, discriminatory practices against them, and institutional policies and practices perpetuating aging stereotypes. Empirical research has demonstrated that age bias in the media can contribute to ageism and negatively impact older adults' quality of life and health-seeking behaviors. The overemphasis on chronological age during the pandemic particularly caught my attention as I heard justifications for rationing healthcare. It was also striking to notice the salience and prevalence of age bias in older adult cohorts. It seemed logical that telling people they are not as significant would eventually lead to them believing it themselves. For the Gerodiversity Dialogues, it was crucial to ensure clinical trainees could recognize their views on aging. Therefore, I selected Ashton Applewhite's book *This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto Against Ageism* as my source material. Most clinical trainees reflected on the concept and acknowledged that now they have seen it, they cannot unsee it. I find it essential to bring awareness to this aspect of diversity because clinicians may treat individuals at a chronological age they never experienced for themselves. Through the Gerodiversity Dialogues, I have been able to process my feelings, reactions, and emotions about various identities directly affecting the population I work with.

Altogether, since the introduction of Gerodiversity Dialogues, nearly twenty talks have helped move three cohorts of 18 trainees through a deeper understanding of how their identities, and that of their clients, shape their worlds. The current revised structure continues to be collaborative, with the director modeling the first dialogue every year and students self-selecting different identity topics to explore in a group format. While far from perfect, this collaborative framework helps build belonging through a safe space where trainees feel seen, connected, and supported as they take the risk of better understanding themselves and others. As we look forward to optimizing our practice and create deeper environments for growth and belonging, we hope our journey will enlighten others.

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# LEVERAGING CULTURAL IDENTITY IN LEADERSHIP TO FOSTER BELONGING: PERSPECTIVES FROM MEDICAL EDUCATORS

ARKENE LEVY, JOCELYN MITCHELL-  
WILLIAMS, VIJAY RAJPUT

## **Cultural Identity and Medical Education**

Cultural identity is the representation of one's identity as a part of a collective with common lived experiences and shared characteristics such as geographical origin, race, and ethnicity(1). Liebkind defines ethnic identity as a feeling of belonging based on an individual's cultural heritage, values, and traditions (2).

Empowering learners to uphold their cultural and professional identities in the learning environment is a priority for culturally responsive education. Educators play a pivotal role in creating and maintaining an inclusive and psychologically safe atmosphere to facilitate this. As medical educators, our cultural identities significantly impact how we engage with learners and, therefore, will ultimately impact their behaviors and influence the practice of medicine.

Cultural experiences, ethnic identities, and cultural awareness are the factors that often motivate an individual to marshal the courage to challenge learners to be holistic in their approach to medicine. These components also encourage them to look beyond the clinic walls to critically appraise the social, cultural, and structural challenges that might impact the patient's clinical care and overall health. Similarly, cultural experiences impact how we envision and develop healthcare solutions.

In medical education, this understanding empowers future physicians to improve health inequities associated with cultural factors and stereotypes. Faculty must empower students to be confident in their cultural and professional identities by promoting equity and inclusivity in the classroom. This involves valuing students' lived experiences, honoring their cultural

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backgrounds, and engaging in open dialogue. Importantly, faculty must also facilitate the socialization of learners as the primary process through which they acquire and refine the attitudes, values, norms, and behaviors to effectively engage with diverse communities(3).

Professional culture in academic medicine encompasses the norms of interpersonal interaction between all members of the learning community, including peers, supervisors, and patients(4-5). Therefore, the practice of professional socialization is critical for the development of the professional identities of medical trainees. The analytical definition of professional socialization is “a nonlinear, continuous, interactive, transformative, personal, psychosocial and self-reinforcing process that is formed through internalization of the specific culture of a professional community and can be affected by individual, organizational and interactional factors”(6).

The psychological growth of medical trainees occurs primarily at the individual level of professional identity formation. Professional identity formation principles, which involve developmental and adaptive processes at the individual and collective levels, emphasize the importance of professional socialization and cultural awareness in molding medical trainees into well-rounded physicians(7). At

the collective level, appropriate socialization that facilitates community engagement is the key component of professional and cultural identity formation<sup>7</sup>. Community participation involves significant social interactions and appreciation of community stakeholders' and underserved populations' values, beliefs, and identities(8). This interplay between professional identity and cultural awareness underscores the importance of valuing differing cultural identities as a core component of understanding diverse healthcare needs and delivering culturally receptive care.

### **Leadership, Cultural Identity, and Fostering Belonging**

Effective servant leadership is one of the most essential components in creating and maintaining an inclusive culture in healthcare systems' learning environments. In medical schools and hospitals, health professionals and learners are exposed to diverse languages, cultures, and customs. The cultural competence of trainees and employees is significantly impacted by leadership structures, practices, and often by the hidden curriculum(9).

One study evaluated leaders' positive influence on healthcare professionals' cultural competence. The data analysis showed that leadership effects varied with the degree of cultural competence of leaders(10). The

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Medical Leadership Competency Framework underscores the significance of these findings because it highlights the role of the leader to enhance the identity of everyone in the organization(11).

Similarly, outcomes from interventions like the Indiana University School of Medicine's Courage to Lead Program, which was aimed at transforming the professional culture of the medical school, demonstrated that medical school leadership is derived from the identity and integrity of individuals<sup>12</sup>. The Courage to Lead Program consisted of four retreats over a year, allowing medical education leaders to reflect on their inner lives and relationship-centered values and practices<sup>12</sup>. This program was effective, but it was evident that individuals with leadership responsibilities face unique identity-related challenges at the personal and institutional levels(12).

One area of opportunity related to leadership and cultural identity in medical education is how leaders can leverage their cultural identities to create an inclusive culture. Cultural identities can play a vital role in how an individual leads if they embrace and share their cultural backgrounds. This can be a valuable tool when developing diversity and inclusion initiatives in medical schools to promote belongingness.

In 2013, the American Psychological Association hosted a leadership summit to evaluate the leadership challenges related to diversity in a wide range of organizations(13). Leaders with diverse cultural identities across race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation discussed views on leadership, how individual execution of leadership is impacted by the multiple dimensions of identity and lived experiences, and the kind of leadership needed for the future, given the growing diversity in society(13). Three important actions highlighted concerning identity included recognizing intersectionality, projecting confidence in the face of identity backlash, and building trust and integrity across diverse groups(13). In the context of medical education leadership, these three factors are vital to promoting inclusion and belongingness.

Culture and cultural identity also impact how leadership develops recruitment strategies for employees and students. Recruiting diverse faculty and students enriches the academic and clinical environment by ensuring that students and practitioners acquire diverse experiences, perspectives, attitudes, and skill sets. However, the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC) reported that 63% of medical school faculty are white and highlighted the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minority groups in medical schools and leadership positions. <sup>14</sup> Lee et al.

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propose that “Leaders of many medical schools and health systems who are seeking to improve diversity must acknowledge a plain fact: their ecosystem is mostly white and predominantly male”(14). They offer recommendations for leadership in medicine, including the need for healthcare leaders and their boards to “[...] recognize that diversity is necessary but will not, alone, create a just and inclusive culture.” They further state that boards should “appreciate that concepts of leadership and stereotypical traits of leaders among existing leaders may limit efforts for cultural inclusiveness and operational success”(14). This highlights the need for leaders to work closely with organizational human resource offices to foster diversity enhancement.

Finally, leaders must address the nuanced implications of intersectional identities within their organizations. Kimberle’ Crenshaw, a legal theorist, first defined intersectionality as the theory of identity in which race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics “intersect, especially for black women who are disadvantaged by these multiple identities”(16). Leaders should aim to value the intersectionality of multiple cultural identities among learners and employees to mitigate the exclusion of those who have been traditionally marginalized because of ethnic identities.

### **Fostering Belonging**

To successfully establish and sustain a culture of belonging in medical education, leaders must value cultural identity and appreciate the concept of belongingness. Belonging in medical education can be defined as “the experience of being accepted, included, and valued by others”(17). To promote belonging, leaders must mitigate against factors in their organizational culture and environment that can be barriers to belongingness. These factors include discrimination, bias, and microaggressions(17). Proactive education to prevent these behaviors is prudent, but having a safe space for individuals to report violations and obtain emotional support after experiencing inappropriate conduct should be in place.

In a recent study, Underrepresented in Medicine (URiM) faculty reported that racial and ethnic microaggressions are still common, leading to increased frustration because of the lack of allyship from their colleagues and leadership(18). Providing consistent training in diversity, equity, inclusion, and antiracism at the institutional level may provide a sense of deep commitment to URiM physicians for their well-being and psychological safety. It may also encourage meaningful discussions that lead to a better understanding of how historical racial injustices continue to contribute to today's health disparities.

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Mentorship is a crucial aspect of a successful academic career. URiM students and faculty report difficulties finding mentors or receiving adequate mentorship during their professional development(19-20). Despite reaching out to faculty members for support, URiM students and faculty have less success than their white counterparts in obtaining mentorship, which can create an environment of isolation. Leaders must find ways to invest in supporting URiM faculty as they begin their careers. Providing research packages that include space, funding, and administrative support can improve the sense of belonging.

Studies have shown that URiMs report having their ideas repeatedly dismissed in the academic medicine environment. To have a sense of belonging, their voices need to be heard and their opinions valued(21). Academic leaders must ensure that their proclaimed missions to create diverse and inclusive communities are more than just words and supported by evidence. Haggins further suggests that academic leaders demonstrate intentional strategies within institutions through marketing and imagery and promoting welcoming spaces to acknowledge the contributions of URiMs and women from the past and present(21).

Taylor Kennedy describes four general measures that can indicate belongingness in the work environment: “[...] seen for our unique contributions, connected to our coworkers, supported in our daily work and career development, proud of our organization’s values and purpose”(22). Therefore, leadership must be able to cue in on indicators that will give a sense of whether students and employees feel psychologically and culturally safe in the organization’s culture and environment(23). We propose that for leaders in medical education, principled sincerity and curiosity, combined with a responsive understanding of the nuanced nature of cultural identity as a multifaceted and dynamic construct, is vital for fostering this sense of belonging.

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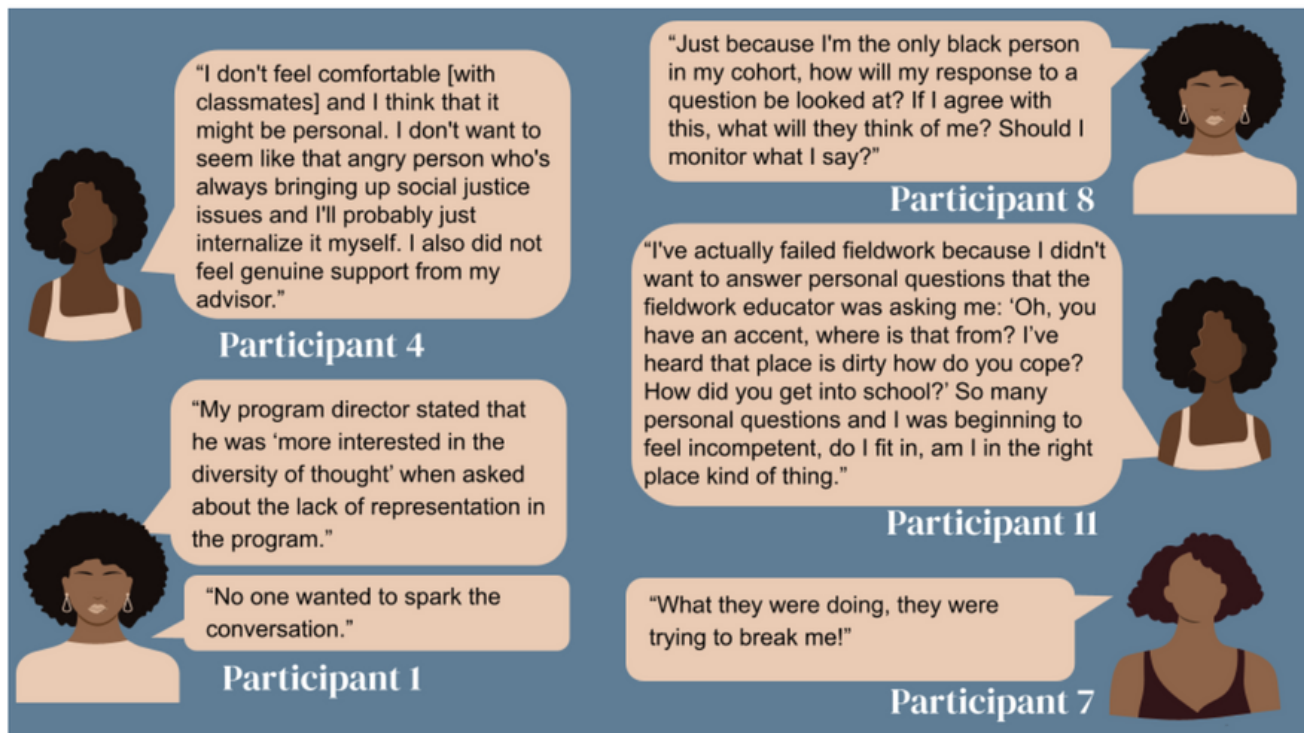
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# A REFLECTION ON BLACK OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY STUDENTS' SENSE OF BELONGING

NARDIA ALDRIDGE, SIERRA GREEN,  
AND CHLOE HILL



**Image 1. Participant quotes referred to throughout our reflections.**

Occupational Therapy (OT) is a white female-dominated (88.6%) profession (Data USA, 2020) aiming to assist clients with gaining or regaining function and independence through the power of meaningful occupations (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], n.d.).

Occupations are “everyday personalized activities that people do to occupy time and bring meaning and purpose to life” (OTPF4, 2020, p.79). Occupational therapists serve people from all racial and ethnic backgrounds, but only 5% of practitioners are Black (Data USA, 2020).

In her *Occupational Perspective of Health Framework*, Ann Wilcock defines **Belonging** as having acceptance and interpersonal connection. Aspects of **Belonging** may include the physical and cultural environment, social interactions or interpersonal challenges, experiences, personal views on feelings of belonging, environmental barriers and/or supports, and fulfillment of roles (Hitch et al., 2014).

In this reflection, **Belonging** addressed how the participants view how supported they are in occupational roles and their sense of connectedness and shared identity in the classroom or clinic. The lack of inclusivity and diversity in the profession led to Black occupational therapy (OT) students, practitioners, and educators lacking a sense of Belonging. This also contributes to them being unable to handle problems about systemic racism and difficulty connecting to others.

### **Dr. Nardia Aldridge's Reflection**

My name is Nardia Aldridge, and I am a Black Jamaican American female in her forties. I am an Associate Professor of Occupational Therapy in a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). This reflection is based on research I recently completed with some of my students (now OTR/Ls) on the impact of systemic racism on Black occupational therapy students' sense of belonging.

On the evening of Monday, May 25, 2020, white Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin brutally and unjustly murdered George Floyd, a Black man, by kneeling on his neck for almost 10 minutes. Millions saw this inhumane killing, which was in your face all day, impacting everyone who witnessed it. For Black Americans, the murder of a Black man was nothing new to us. However, seeing and hearing about it daily was traumatic and likened to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. I remember coming home from work and crying non-stop. I thought about myself, my Black daughter, my Black son, My Black husband. George Floyd represented us, and we represented him. I remember my husband reflecting and saying, "I have been serving this country for over 30 years in the US Army, and when I walk out the door, all they see is the color of my skin."

This traumatic experience impacted our Black students and faculty significantly. The very next day, we were all expected to get online for class (we are a face-to-face program, but since we were still following COVID guidelines, we were virtual). This proved to be very difficult as it required that your video stay on for class. No consideration was given to the fact that these individuals just experienced trauma. What made it worse was the complete silence about what had occurred. It was deafening. The days, weeks, and months that followed led to me meeting



with students in my program and throughout the University as a sounding board for what they were experiencing. Students from other programs came to me because they had no faculty in their programs that looked like them. The occupational therapy students wanted to know if what they were experiencing was unique to them or if other occupational therapy students felt the same way. I believe in being the change I want to see, so I decided to use this experience and make it a positive one by researching the lived experiences of Black Occupational Therapy students and giving them a voice. Six students of various ethnic backgrounds signed up as co-researchers.

Our research participants comprised 15 Black OT students and 5 Black OT practitioners within their first three years of practice. Unfortunately, many of the participant's experiences reflected a lack of representation, lack of initiative, and a blatant disregard for the well-being of Black students by their programs. The lack of diversity and representation impacted one hundred percent of the participant's sense of Belonging.

Some participants have this to say regarding their sense of belonging during this time... Participant 1 "My program director stated that he was 'more interested in the diversity

of thought' when asked about the lack of representation in the program." Participant 4: "I don't feel comfortable [with classmates], and I think that it might be personal. I don't want to seem like that angry person who's always bringing up social justice issues, and I'll probably just internalize it myself. I also did not feel genuine support from my advisor."

Not only did the participants not feel supported by their faculty, but they also had a lack of support from their White cohort members. One of the research members stated, "It was sad to hear that they never attended the participant's events and that even the SOTA president was reluctant to deem "Black Lives Matter." This "tense" dynamic puts into perspective how lucky I am to be attending school in South Florida. Although I am only one of just eight Black students in my cohort, I can look around HPD [Health Professions Division] and see Black nurses, Black doctors, Black PTs, and so forth." As you can see from the participant's experiences, representation is crucial to one's sense of belonging. It puts into perspective how alienated Black students can feel when there is such little representation in OT programs.

**Sierra Green's Reflection**

My name is Sierra Green, and I am an Occupational Therapist. I was one of Doctor Nardia Aldridge's students and co-researcher during this research study. Entering my first semester of my OT Masters Program, I would have never thought it would be virtual as I signed up for a face-to-face program. Due to virtual classes, I had no face-to-face encounters with my peers in my cohort, which limited our interactions.

Many of us used social media as an outlet due to quarantine from the rise of COVID-19. However, I can vividly remember the BLM movement and how the death of George Floyd impacted my mental health. Although I was doing school virtually, I could not avoid the constant tension on the news and social media. I realized it was emotionally draining for me not to be able to speak up because I didn't know how my peers or faculty instructors would view me. My White cohort members did not want to discuss it because they thought it would "cause more tension." I understand it is a sensitive subject, but I do not believe it was right to disregard it. In my opinion, ignoring racism and police brutality is the number one reason many people feel it's time to stand up for their beliefs.

As a researcher on this project, I empathize with the participants. It made me feel like we

had an unspoken bond because of our similarities. The research sheds light on the lack of diversity in the profession and the limited access to safe spaces to discuss uncomfortable issues. My fellow researchers and I bonded over this topic. We will have a lifelong tie and safe space to discuss these topics with fellow OTs.

Here are some reflections on the participants' experiences in our study, specifically about their sense of belonging. Participant 1 had a powerful and insightful interview. She was the token Black person and the one to "rock the boat." Participant 2 was the only Black student in her cohort. I can only imagine what it was like to be the one Black person in my OT program. It appears to be a lot of emotional weight to carry. Participant 8 says, "Just because I'm the only black person in my cohort, how will my response to a question be looked at? If I agree with this, what will they think of me? Should I monitor what I say?" I know this would have increased my daily anxiety because of the lack of representation. Before reading this participant interview, I did not consider the everyday anxieties I would face from the lack of diversity. This really opened my eyes to see that I rely on the comfort of representation. I understood the comfort of representation for my clients in the medical profession, but I never considered what representation means for me as a practitioner in the workplace and school.

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Participant 4 “felt isolated and alone.” Processing those feelings can be emotionally draining in addition to managing academic stress. Overall that is an overwhelming amount of pressure, and Participant 5 mentioned being a “part of the minority benchmark.” During our reflection time, When Dr. Aldridge questioned whether the existence of a minority benchmark bothered me, I realized that it did. The revolting reality is that I feel like I actively contributed to my undergraduate institution meeting the minority benchmark. This resonated with me because my undergrad was a PWI, and my job as a rehab tech made me feel isolated. I remember my Black patients always looking towards me to treat them, but I did not have the credentials. I would also have patients ask me how they get the Black PT to be their therapist. This reminded me of the value of being represented. There are times that I know I am paving the way for other Black OT students to come along, and I am helping my future Black clients feel comfortable, valued, and seen.

It was refreshing to hear Participant 7 say she is “spoiled” after overcoming an experience of being held back by a racist supervisor during fieldwork. She now works in a place of great diversity due to the clinic being owned by a Black Occupational Therapy Assistant. However, during fieldwork, her White supervisors made her create 3-4

different treatment plans for each client, about 30 treatment plans. She was not allowed to repeat treatments, and by the end of fieldwork, she was instructed to compile those treatment plans into an organized folder for successive students to use freely. She exclaimed, “What were they doing? They were trying to break me!” She mentioned that she strongly relied on her faith and talking to her mentors, which is one way I also used to cope. It brought attention to the fact that White practitioners may be intimidated by the knowledge and confidence of their Black students. Other Black participants report being failed by their supervisors for unjust reasons. Participant 11 commented, “I’ve actually failed fieldwork because I didn’t want to answer personal questions that the fieldwork educator was asking me: ‘Oh, you have an accent, where is that from? I’ve heard that place is dirty how do you cope? How did you get into school?’ So many personal questions, and I was beginning to feel incompetent. Do I fit in? Am I in the right place? That kind of thing.”

Participant 8 was fairly new to her program but was “only 2 out of 91”. That was shocking to see a number that low for diversity but appalling to see a number that high for a cohort. She truly felt supported by the Coalition of Occupational Therapy Advocates for Diversity (COTAD), which was good to hear.

In the future, I hope that Black OT students do not have to endure some of the challenges that the participants or myself have encountered due to their skin tone. A lack of diversity in our profession, the need for safe spaces, and the anxiety that Black OT students experience are all reflected in the research. Raising awareness of the challenges faced by Black OT practitioners and students is only the beginning of how much difference can transpire. Additionally, this is a step in the right direction to increase their sense of belonging.

### **Chloe Hill's Reflection**

My name is Chloe Hill, and I am a newly certified occupational therapist. At the time of our research, I was a second-year student at a PWI. I am a part of the majority as a white female with a dual heritage. My father was born and raised in Georgia, the deep south, and my mother immigrated with her family to the United States from Jamaica when she was 13 years old. As I do not know my paternal family well, I identify strongly with my Jamaican cultural upbringing. However, I recognize what opportunity my white privilege affords me and the generational inculcation of systemic racism within myself. This research was instrumental to my personal growth in cultural humility. In listening and reflecting on the experiences of Black individuals within my community, I strive to hold myself accountable for the safe spaces I must create and adapt to the needs of others, be they patients, colleagues, classmates, or friends. I deeply appreciate the journey past ignorance toward acceptance and understanding as an ally better prepared to be an Ally.

From the onset, I was reminded of all the times I should have spoken up or let others know that I am comfortable discussing issues of racism, further validating its importance in contributing to a sense of belonging. Regarding the unjust murder of George Floyd, Participant 1 lamented, "No one wanted to

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spark the conversation,” and countless participants echoed this sentiment. Initiating the conversation after a traumatic event is a great burden, but as most participants experienced a lack of support, speaking up became a burden they were willing to bear. This raises concern. Why is it the responsibility of the oppressed to open dialogue about their oppression? Why weren't the channels of communication open from the get-go? Ignorance is not an excuse. Educating oneself is no one's responsibility but their own. Ignorance in a position of power further isolates the oppressed, creating what could seem to be an insurmountable barrier without support. I see other people. I see their struggles. I have the power to speak. So, I have resolved to act upon my knowledge no matter my position of power or lack thereof; otherwise, my silence will speak volumes for me. Racism and injustice are difficult conversations, but they are omnipresent, and speaking up is a way to provide support. If I see something, I will say something. In doing so, hopefully, people will look to me as an approachable source of comfort. If not, the least I can do is alleviate some burden of responsibility to spark change.

I cannot believe how much explicit racism festers in the world today. Many participants identified the source of their education on systemic racism as their parents, never by formal education. It reminds me how, too,

sadly, racist individuals learn from their parents. Tradition is not easily forgotten, and intergenerational racism is a significant societal problem. When you are raised in an environment where microaggressions, perhaps explicit counts, are commonplace, you may believe what you know about others is true. Then, as you develop independence from the people like you and converse with those who are unlike you, you realize that what you thought you knew about race is wrong, leading you to cognitive dissonance. Your options from this confrontation distill to (1) rationalize your biases or (2) change your belief system. Here lies the corresponding turning point where individuals can either perpetuate the generational cycle of racism, marching on in ignorance or bridge the divide between people by making changes within themselves.

I would like to share some personal downfalls and triumphs along my life journey regarding systemic racism. A growth mindset does not require you to define yourself by your mistakes but rather by your success in overcoming them. I have seen racism in the classroom and have been left in shock, not knowing what to say. For example, a guest teacher described a patient's color and weight in a story, insinuating that because the patient was Black and fat, they were lazy and unlikely to stick to the recommended exercise regimen. Everyone in the classroom

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was uncomfortable. It was palpable. But no one spoke up, and neither did I. Sure, we discussed the incident as classmates, acknowledging it was wrong. But no action was taken to address the sheer inappropriateness of his statement with the teacher himself or any supervisor. As aforementioned, ignorance in a position of power is a tricky beast. I now understand the severity of the impact his attack must have had on Black students' sense of safety and belonging, and so I should have raised my hand and been the one to challenge the aggressor at the same moment he had the audacity to spew it. Today, I am prepared to speak against racism. My personal discomfort is inconsequential and pales in comparison.

Moving beyond my state of cognitive dissonance, I have since learned to reach out to members of my cohort and professors alike when I see racial violence on the news. This validates their emotions; their experience. I have and will continue to apologize for my microinvalidations as I struggle to rewire familiar, insensitive expressions. I understand that seeing color is integral to understanding the generational struggles of those who wear their skin proudly. Pretending to be colorblind is a microinvalidation itself. Being an ally, though, is not a perfect science because, like me, most come from a place of ignorance and misunderstanding. But educating myself has

proven to be one of the best decisions I made in the course of my career as I strive to be a culturally competent occupational therapist creating safe spaces and establishing relationships that turn into channels for Black counterparts to thrive in a system that tries to barricade the doors for opportunity.

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# EMPOWERING CHANGE: UNITING DECOLONIZED EDUCATION, HOLISTIC WELL- BEING, AND PEACEFUL COMMUNICATION

ERIC S. THOMPSON, JUNE HYUNG,  
PATRICE LEOPOLD, AND ASHLEI PETION

## Introduction

Belonging is an essential aspect of human life (Adler, 1927), and it is particularly significant in the realm of education. As educational institutions increasingly recognize the value of inclusive and diverse environments, a growing movement aims to decolonize curricula, provide mental health counseling, and participate in non-violent communication and radical wellness to take back permission to achieve well-being and increase belonging. This approach seeks to foster a sense of belonging and promote peace in educational settings. In this article, we will explore the historical context of colonization in an educational setting, discuss decolonizing the curriculum, and suggest strategies and approaches to achieve this goal, as well as the role of educators, counselors, and administrators in supporting this critical work (Battiste, 2013; Patel, 2016; Smith, 2012).

## Colonization in Educational Settings: A Historical Context

The history of education is intertwined with the legacy of colonialism. During the colonial era, European powers imposed their values, languages, and educational systems on the colonized territories. This process aimed to assimilate indigenous populations and suppress their cultures, marginalizing indigenous knowledge and perspectives in educational institutions (Mignolo, 2009; Smith, 2012).

As a result of colonial legacy, most educational curricula are heavily influenced by Eurocentric perspectives. This approach has led to the prioritization of Western knowledge and the marginalization of non-Western perspectives, particularly those of indigenous and colonized peoples. According to Patel, Eurocentric curriculum has contributed to the erasure and

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devaluation of diverse knowledge systems, perpetuating inequalities and undermining the sense of belonging for students from diverse backgrounds (Patel, 2016; Quijano, 2000). Furthermore, the educational system perpetuates oppressive structures and practices established during colonization and, in turn, marginalizes Black students, Indigenous Peoples of Color (BIPOC). For example, African-American students are more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than their white peers (Skiba et al., 2011). Scholars argue that maintaining the status quo is a way to reinforce colonization in the educational systems and urges us to challenge and dismantle power and privilege. (Giroux, 2014)

### **A Call for Decolonization: Multicultural Counseling and the Social Justice Movement in Counseling**

Calls for decolonization and inclusivity in education have grown stronger as scholars, educators, and mental health professionals recognize the need to address historical injustices and marginalization perpetuated by colonialism and Eurocentric curricula. This movement aims to challenge and dismantle the power structures perpetuating inequality in educational settings, promote recognizing and integrating diverse perspectives, and foster a sense of belonging for all students (Battiste, 2013; Dei, 2000; Smith, 2012).

Counseling scholars have emphasized incorporating culturally responsive and inclusive practices in mental health counseling to support this movement (Sue & Sue, 2012; Ratts et al., 2016). These scholars argue that mental health professionals are responsible for recognizing the impact of historical and cultural factors on the mental health and well-being of various students and using this understanding to inform their counseling practices (Sue & Sue, 2012; Ratts et al., 2016).

For example, the multicultural counseling competencies (MCCs) framework, proposed by Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992), provides guidelines for mental health professionals to develop culturally responsive counseling practices. The MCC framework emphasizes the importance of developing counselors' awareness of their own cultural values and biases, understanding the worldview of culturally diverse clients, and developing culturally appropriate intervention strategies (Sue et al., 1992).

### **Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies**

The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies framework by Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, and McCullough (2016) outlines a comprehensive framework for mental health professionals to integrate culturally responsive and inclusive



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practices into their work. The authors present a model known as the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC), which provides a roadmap for counselors to better understand and address the unique needs of diverse clients, including students. The MSJCC model emphasizes four key components: counselor self-awareness, client worldview, counseling relationship, and counseling and advocacy interventions. By focusing on these areas, mental health professionals can develop a more in-depth understanding of the historical and cultural factors that impact the mental health and well-being of various students and use this knowledge to inform their counseling practices.

Counselor self-awareness involves recognizing one's own cultural background, biases, and values and understanding how these factors can influence the counseling process. Through participation in self-reflection and ongoing professional development, counselors can develop the cultural competence needed to effectively support diverse clients. The client worldview refers to understanding the unique cultural, social, and historical contexts that shape clients' experiences, including students from diverse backgrounds. This involves acknowledging the impact of systemic barriers, such as racism, sexism, and ableism, on mental health and well-being and using

this knowledge to inform culturally responsive counseling interventions. The component of the counseling relationship emphasizes the importance of establishing a strong therapeutic alliance with clients that is built on trust, respect, and empathy. To achieve this, counselors must demonstrate cultural humility and a genuine commitment to understanding and valuing clients' diverse perspectives and experiences.

Finally, it is noted that counseling and advocacy interventions involve developing and implementing culturally responsive strategies that address unique needs while also advocating for social justice and systemic change. This may include collaborating with other stakeholders in the educational community, such as teachers, administrators, and families, to promote decolonization and inclusion within the broader school context.

The call for decolonization and inclusivity in education is echoed in the literature on social justice counseling (Ratts et al., 2016). Social justice counseling emphasizes addressing systemic barriers and power imbalances that contribute to mental health disparities between diverse populations (Ratts et al., 2016). By adopting a social justice lens, mental health counselors can better understand the impact of historical injustices and marginalization on their client's mental health and well-being. They can also work

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collaboratively with clients and communities to promote social change and foster a sense of belonging for all students.

In the context of the Peace Chronicle's issue on belonging, incorporating culturally responsive and inclusive practices in mental health counseling, as described by the MSJCC model (Ratts et al., 2016), directly promotes a sense of belonging among diverse students in educational settings. A sense of belonging is essential to promote peace, as it encourages empathy, understanding, and connection among people of different backgrounds and cultures.

Using the MSJCC model, mental health professionals can address diverse students' unique needs and experiences, acknowledging and validating their cultural, social, and historical backgrounds. This validation and recognition of diverse perspectives empowers students and enhances their sense of belonging within the school community.

Counselor self-awareness and understanding of client worldviews enable mental health professionals to be more effective in their work with diverse students, as they are better equipped to appreciate and respect the students' unique backgrounds and experiences. This respect and appreciation create an inclusive environment that fosters a

sense of belonging and promotes peaceful student interactions.

Establishing a strong counseling relationship built on trust, respect, and empathy is crucial to creating a sense of belonging among diverse students. When students feel heard, understood, and valued, they are more likely to develop a sense of connection and belonging within their educational community, promoting peaceful relationships and interactions.

Counseling and advocacy interventions that address systemic barriers and promote social justice can also contribute to a sense of belonging and peace in educational settings. By advocating for decolonization and inclusivity in education and collaborating with other stakeholders to create more equitable environments, mental health professionals can help foster a sense of belonging and support for all students, regardless of their background.

In conclusion, the growing call for decolonization and inclusivity in education has significant implications for mental health counseling. Drawing on counseling frameworks such as the MSJCC and social justice counseling, mental health professionals can develop culturally responsive and inclusive practices that support the decolonization movement and foster a sense of belonging for all students.

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## **Key Strategies of Decolonizing the Curriculum**

Decolonizing the curriculum can begin by encouraging critical thinking and reflexivity among students and educators. This process entails questioning dominant narratives and power structures, examining one's own biases and assumptions, and actively seeking to learn from diverse perspectives. By fostering a culture of critical inquiry, schools can empower students to challenge injustices and contribute to a more equitable and peaceful society (Freire, 1970; Gay, 2010).

Educators and administrators play a crucial role in promoting decolonization in educational settings. They must actively participate in decolonizing their perspectives and practices, develop culturally responsive pedagogies, and advocate for including diverse voices in the curriculum. Furthermore, they should collaborate with indigenous communities, scholars, and activists to ensure that the process of decolonization is authentic and respectful of diverse knowledge systems (Battiste, 2013; Paris, 2012).

One of the key strategies for decolonizing the curriculum involves centering indigenous knowledge and perspectives. This approach recognizes the value of indigenous wisdom and the importance of incorporating it into the educational process. By integrating

indigenous knowledge, schools can promote a more inclusive and diverse learning environment, encouraging students to appreciate and respect different cultures and ways of knowing (Battiste, 2013; Simpson, 2014).

In addition to focusing on indigenous perspectives, it is essential to integrate diverse voices and experiences into the curriculum. This can be achieved by including literature, art, and historical narratives from diverse cultures and backgrounds, providing students with a more comprehensive understanding of the world and fostering empathy and respect for different perspectives (Patel, 2016; Sleeter, 2017).

## **Mental health counseling: The Need for Support**

Mental health issues are increasingly prevalent among students, with anxiety, depression, and stress-related disorders affecting a significant proportion of young people. Pressures of academic performance, social expectations, and navigating complex identities can contribute to these challenges, making mental health support a crucial aspect of educational settings (Regehr, Glancy, & Pitts, 2013).

Mental health issues can significantly impact student academic achievement and general well-being. Students who struggle with

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mental health challenges may experience difficulties with concentration, motivation, and memory, affecting their academic success. Moreover, poor mental health can negatively impact students' social and emotional development, leading to isolation and a diminished sense of belonging (Hysenbegasi, Hass, & Rowland, 2005).

### **Barriers to accessing mental health support in educational settings**

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of mental health support, many students face barriers to accessing these services in educational settings. The stigma surrounding mental health, inadequate funding for mental health programs, and a lack of culturally responsive counseling services are just a few of the factors that can hinder students from seeking the help they need (Cauce et al., 2002; Eisenberg, Hunt, & Speer, 2012). Culturally responsive counseling is a critical aspect of mental health support in educational settings. This approach recognizes the importance of understanding and addressing the unique cultural, social, and historical contexts that shape students' mental health experiences. Culturally responsive counselors participate in ongoing cultural competency training, collaborate with diverse communities, and employ culturally sensitive assessment and intervention strategies to better serve their students (Sue & Sue, 2012).

### **Peer support and mentorship programs**

Peer support and mentorship programs can play an important role in promoting mental health and well-being among students. These initiatives foster connections between students, allowing them to share their experiences, offer guidance, and provide emotional support. By creating a sense of community and belonging, peer support and mentorship programs can improve mental health and academic success (Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & DuBois, 2008).

### **Integrating mental health education into the curriculum**

Integrating mental health education into the curriculum is another essential component of promoting well-being in educational settings. By incorporating mental health topics such as stress management, self-care, and emotional regulation into the curriculum, schools can help students develop the skills and knowledge they need to navigate life's challenges and maintain their mental health (Watts, 2016).

### **The Role of School Counselors and Mental Health Professionals**

School counselors and mental health professionals play a vital role in providing mental health support to students. They offer individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, and prevention services and collaborate with teachers, administrators, and

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families to create supportive educational environments. These professionals are instrumental in identifying and addressing students' mental health concerns and ensuring they receive the appropriate support and resources (American School Counselor Association, 2012).

### **The Intersection of Decolonizing**

#### **Curriculum and Mental Health Counseling**

The decolonization of the curriculum and mental health counseling are deeply interconnected, as both aim to create inclusive educational environments that promote a sense of belonging and well-being. Recognizing the impact of historical injustices, cultural erasure, and marginalization on student mental health is essential to addressing their needs and fostering a supportive and inclusive educational setting (Patel, 2016; Smith, 2012). Decolonizing the curriculum can positively impact students' mental health and well-being by promoting a sense of belonging, validating diverse perspectives, and empowering students to challenge injustices. By integrating diverse voices, histories, and experiences into the curriculum, schools can create environments that respect and celebrate students' identities, leading to improved mental health and academic success (Paris, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Mental health counseling plays a critical role in creating inclusive educational environments. By providing culturally responsive counseling and addressing the unique mental needs of students of diverse backgrounds, mental health professionals can help foster a sense of belonging and support within the school community (Sue & Sue, 2012). Additionally, mental health counseling can equip students with the tools and strategies to navigate the emotional and psychological challenges associated with identity formation, cultural differences, and historical trauma (Cauce et al., 2002).

#### **Belonging and non-violent communication**

Belonging is a crucial aspect of human existence, as it influences our emotional well-being, sense of identity, and interpersonal relationships. In recent years, the concept of belonging has gained significant attention in mental health counseling and education. One approach that has shown promise in promoting belonging and fostering positive connections is nonviolent communication (NVC), a method developed by Marshall Rosenberg in the 1960s.

#### **Non-violent Communication Overview**

NVC is a communication framework that facilitates conflict resolution and connection by focusing on meeting needs through effective communication strategies. It

explores the relationship between needs and conflict, recognizing that unmet needs can harm connections. Conflicts often arise from the strategies people use to meet their needs. These strategies can become intertwined with one's identity and may require intentional effort to change.

### **Making Requests Grounded in Needs**

One key aspect of NVC is making requests grounded in needs. This exercise aims to train people to focus on their current needs before focusing on strategies for problem-solving. By practicing holding and cherishing one's needs, requests or strategies can emerge naturally from this process. This approach fosters empathy, self-awareness, and understanding of the relationship between needs, feelings, and requests.

Non-violent communication encourages us to prioritize identifying and understanding our present needs before seeking solutions or strategies to address them. This approach lets us cherish our needs, allowing requests or strategies to emerge organically from this understanding. By focusing on the emotional and physical sensations that arise from our needs, we can better understand ourselves and others, cultivating a greater sense of belonging.

For example, in mindful breathing, we might ask ourselves if we are willing to breathe

more slowly, focus more mindfully on our breath, or breathe from deeper within our lungs. This self-reflection can also extend to other aspects of our lives, such as identifying anger, frustration, or unhappiness and examining the unmet needs underlying those emotions. For example, if someone feels frustrated at work, they may identify their unmet need for recognition or support from their colleagues. People can foster a greater sense of belonging by understanding and addressing these needs.

### **Four-Step Reflective Listening Process**

The four-step reflective listening process is crucial to nonviolent communication. The process includes the following steps:

1. Observation free of blame or criticism: Clearly describe the situation without evaluation or judgment. For example, "I noticed you did not respond to my email yesterday."
2. Expressing and reflecting true feelings: Share feelings without blaming others and listen empathetically to others' feelings. For example, "I felt concerned and disappointed when I did not hear back from you."
3. Validating the underlying needs/values: Identify and acknowledge the needs or values underlying the feelings. For example, "I need reassurance and timely communication to feel confident in our collaboration."

4. Making/receiving a concrete request that enriches life: Use positive, concrete language to make a specific request. For example, "Would you be willing to respond to my emails within 24 hours?"

This process promotes a balance between personal needs and the needs of others in a relationship, fostering a sense of belonging. For a relationship to thrive, both honesty and empathy must be present. By employing this process, we can soothe the discomfort arising from unmet needs, develop empathy for others' needs, and encourage making honest requests instead of demands. Recognizing that not all needs can be met by all people is important, and offering self-empathy and focusing on where needs can be met is essential.

### **Non-violent communication in mental health counseling**

NVC plays an essential role in mental health counseling by building trust and rapport and enhancing client-centered communication. NVC's four-step reflective listening process involves observation free of blame or criticizing, expressing and reflecting true feelings, validating the underlying needs or values, and making or receiving concrete requests that enrich life.

Balancing personal needs and the needs of others in a relationship is crucial to successful

counseling outcomes and improving a sense of belonging. Honesty and empathy must both be present for a relationship to flourish. NVC helps soothe activation from unmet needs, develops empathy for the needs of others, and encourages making honest requests instead of demands. It also helps individuals recognize that not all needs can be met by all people, offering self-empathy and focusing on where needs can be met.

### **NVC in Course Design**

Educators can integrate NVC principles into their course design to create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. Recommended steps include:

1. Highlight dispositional expectations and incorporate NVC models to support balanced classroom discussions.
2. Provide open-source NVC handouts to students before the course begins.
3. Encourage students to use empathy to guess and be open to correction regarding the unmet needs underlying emotional pain during class discussions and clinical role-plays.
4. Instruct students not to correct or mock classmates or clients who report faux feelings but to examine and reflect the authentic feelings underneath.
5. Addressing microaggressions by pausing, exhaling slowly, and identifying the statement or behavior that does not meet the need for respect.

By integrating these approaches and drawing on various resources, schools can demonstrate their commitment to equity, social justice, and the well-being of all students. Through a concerted effort to decolonize the curriculum and provide culturally responsive mental health support, educational institutions can cultivate inclusive environments that empower students and contribute to a more just and peaceful world.

As the movement to decolonize education and provide mental health counseling continues to gain traction, it is vital that educators, administrators, and mental health professionals actively participate in these efforts. Collaboration among stakeholders will be key to addressing historical injustices and marginalization experienced by diverse populations and fostering a sense of belonging for all students. By doing so, schools can pave the way for a more compassionate and inclusive future where all students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Belonging is a fundamental aspect of the human experience, providing us with a sense of connection, acceptance, and identity. In this article, we will dig deeper into the role of nonviolent communication in fostering belonging, focusing on making requests grounded in needs, the four-step reflective

listening process, and the importance of cultural considerations. By incorporating these elements into our communication, we can create stronger relationships and a greater sense of belonging for ourselves and others.

### **Privileged and Subjugated Tasks Model**

Dr. Ken Hardy's Privileged and Subjugated Tasks Model aims to transform health and human service systems by addressing racial polarization and conflict escalation. The model requires participants to reflect on their experiences with racialization, power, and privilege and be aware of their relative privilege and power during conflicts. For example, a white therapist working with a person of color must acknowledge their racial privilege and be sensitive to potential power dynamics in the therapeutic relationship.

Belonging is essential for students' academic and personal success, and educators play a vital role in fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment that promotes a sense of belonging. One approach that can assist in this effort is the use of Nonviolent Communication (NVC), a communication model that emphasizes empathic listening, identifying needs, and expressing oneself nonjudgmentally and respectfully. Counselor educators can incorporate NVC into their course design to support balanced classroom discussions and encourage authentic expression.

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To integrate NVC into course design, counselor educators can take several steps. First, they can provide open-source NVC handouts to students before the quarter starts, including inventories on universal needs, authentic vs. faux feelings, observations, and requests vs. demands. In-class exercises can encourage students to reference their handouts and use empathy to guess at the unmet needs underlying emotional pain. Students can also enact Hardy's Privileged and Subjugated Tasks (PAST) model, which involves reflecting on their racialization, power, and privilege experiences. The Privileged and Subjugated Tasks (PAST) model, developed by Dr. Ken Hardy, can support and enhance a sense of belonging by encouraging participants to reflect on their experiences of privilege and subjugation. This reflection helps individuals understand how their experiences shape their perspectives and responses to conflict and their relationships with others. By acknowledging and owning their role in perpetuating systems of privilege and oppression, participants can take responsibility for their contributions to conflicts and work towards creating positive change and promoting equity.

This model requires participants to reflect on their experiences of privilege and subjugation. Specifically, the model involves four tasks:

1. "Personalizing" the issue - identifying how one's experiences of privilege and subjugation shape their perspective and responses to conflict.
2. "Acknowledging and owning" the issue - this task requires individuals to take responsibility for their contributions to the conflict and acknowledge their role in perpetuating systems of privilege and oppression.
3. "Situating" the issue - involves recognizing the broader societal and historical context in which the conflict occurs.
4. "Transforming" the issue - this final task involves identifying and implementing strategies for creating positive change and promoting equity.

Using Hardy's PAST model, students can reflect on their relative privilege and power during conflicts. Participants must be aware of their privileges and power and avoid ranking pain in other domains of social privilege. Whites often expect their intentions to be centered when they cause harm. The focus should remain on the consequences experienced by more subjugated members. This model encourages us to avoid ranking pain in other domains of social privilege, instead focusing on the consequences experienced by more subjugated members. For example, during a discussion about racial injustice, a participant should not focus on their experiences of gender discrimination, as this can detract from the issue at hand.

By engaging in these tasks, participants can increase their awareness of their own privilege and power, as well as the experiences of those who are subjugated. This understanding promotes empathy, reduces conflict, and creates a greater sense of belonging among participants. Additionally, the PAST model can facilitate discussions about race, power, and privilege, which can help create more inclusive and welcoming environments that promote a sense of belonging for all individuals.

In conclusion, curriculum decolonization and mental health counseling are essential to foster a sense of belonging and promote peace in educational settings. By addressing historical injustices and marginalization experienced by diverse populations and providing culturally responsive mental health support, educational institutions can create inclusive environments that empower all students and contribute to a more just and peaceful world (Battiste, 2013; Patel, 2016; Smith, 2012). By integrating these approaches, schools can demonstrate their commitment to equity, social justice, and the well-being of all students, ultimately paving the way for a more compassionate and inclusive future.

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# DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION: A CALL TO INCREASE BELONGING

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When the word “diversity” is brought into a conversation, thoughts of race, sex, and gender often flood in; however, rarely does ability or disability get listed as a factor. Pam Hayes (2016) utilizes an acronym to include various areas of diversity, including Age, Developmental or other Disability, Religion, Ethnic and racial identity, Socioeconomic status, Sexual orientation, Indigenous heritage, National origin, and Gender (ADDRESSING). The ADDRESSING model aids clinicians in recognizing their own factors of diversity and how they interact with their client’s diversity factors. This model can help clinicians better understand underrepresented groups and oppressive forces that unintentionally and mindlessly increase People with Disabilities (PWD) being excluded from society.

Disability is a broad term generally understood through physical and invisible

disabilities. One of the broader categories of disability, physical disabilities, comprises individuals living with physiological, functional, or mobility impairments. Physical disabilities can either be congenital, hereditary, or acquired. A person has had the disability since birth, developed a disability due to genetic factors, or became disabled later in life (Tiedemann, 2012). Disability is the only minority group that anyone can become a part of at any time in their life. Given the vast presentations of disability, it is difficult to address the inequalities among disabled people. However, two different theoretical models attempt to define and combat disability discrimination: the medical and social models (Bunbury, 2019).

The medical model of disability suggests people are disabled by their impairments or differences, and these impairments or differences should be “fixed” or changed

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through medicine or other treatments, despite the impact the impairment or difference has on a person's overall life or functioning. This model paints disability negatively, as it looks at what is "wrong" with the person versus how to meet the person's needs. Thus, low expectations are set for people with disabilities, which can lead to individuals believing they lack autonomy and authority over their own lives. However, the barriers present are not solely physical. Prejudicial or stereotypical attitudes toward people with disabilities (also known as ableism) also prohibit people from having equal opportunities to be an integral part of society. This social model of disability suggests that disability is caused by how society is structured rather than by an individual's impairment or difference. This model aims to remove barriers restricting autonomy, authority, and overall functioning for disabled people. When these barriers are removed, disabled people can then become self-actualized within society (Bunbury, 2019). For example, if a student has a physical disability and they are a wheelchair user, it would be a barrier for them to get into a building with a step at the entrance. However, under the social model perspective, a ramp would be constructed for the wheelchair user to access the building. Using the medical model, there are only a very few solutions to help wheelchair users to ascend stairs, which excludes them from engaging in

numerous day-to-day necessary and leisure activities.

Students with visible physical disabilities face unique barriers that can inhibit their ability to obtain and complete their education. Some of these barriers include 1) insufficient availability of academic support and reasonable accommodations provided by institutions; 2) absence of infrastructural accessibility on school grounds; and 3) financial difficulties related to paying for both higher education and disability-related expenses (Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2011). In relation to higher education institutions and academic support and accommodations, there is a spectrum of responses from colleges and universities across the nation regarding the types of academic support and accommodations they are willing to provide a student. Accommodations are determined on a case-by-case basis and vary from one institution to another (i.e., accommodations provided at a public versus private institution). These accommodations often include additional time on testing, classroom aides, modified courses, access to a student disability resource center, and on-campus housing accommodations.

Moreover, a lack of infrastructural accessibility on school grounds is an additional barrier faced by students with physical disabilities. However, numerous academic institutions

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have begun implementing the principles of universal design, which includes increasing infrastructural accessibility, to create an educational experience that meets the needs of all students. Finances are another noted barrier, as many disability-related expenses are not covered by health insurance or federal funding (Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2011). For instance, if a student with a disability impacting their motor functioning or hand mobility requires a specialized mouse for the computer, the onus would most likely be on the student to purchase that adaptive device.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020), in the United States, 61 million adults (26%) are known to have a disability, and of that 26%, approximately 587,900 (3.7%) have disabilities requiring assistance with self-care needs. These self-care needs are known as activities of daily living (ADLs). Activities of daily living intervention can include paid and unpaid assistance needed by individuals with physical disabilities for tasks such as bathing, dressing, feeding, and grooming (Texas State Council for Developmental Disabilities, 2005-2012). Attendant care is a significant component in necessary support and life-sustaining service to help a person with a physical disability live independently, especially for students to pursue/achieve an education.

Throughout primary education, the foundation of successful student development for students with disabilities is built on appropriate accommodations and self-advocacy (Burwell et al., 2015). For many students with physical disabilities, the need for attendant care adds to the challenges faced when transitioning to higher education. No current legislation requires colleges and universities to provide attendant care programs for students with disabilities. There is a spectrum of responses from colleges and universities across the nation. These range from not assisting with obtaining attendant care services, providing help to students with hiring an attendant, or providing attendant care services.

Only three postsecondary institutions offer an attendant care program as part of their disability services. Previously, five postsecondary institutions offered these services, but the only active programs as of this writing are located within the University of Houston, the University of Illinois—Urbana-Champaign, and Wright State University (Tiedemann, 2012). Students with physical disabilities should have equal opportunity and access to higher education, just as their non-disabled counterparts. Therefore, greater access to attendant care programs would enable current and future physically disabled college students to pursue their goals while simultaneously growing interpersonally and

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academically. Overall, disabled and non-disabled individuals alike should aim to educate themselves about disability and become involved in various efforts to encourage and support the integration and inclusion of individuals with visible physical disabilities as well as those with invisible disabilities.

Invisible disabilities include the absence of ability leading to life limitations that are not readily discernible to others (Davis, 2005). Mental health disorders, fibromyalgia, chronic pain, and dyslexia are only a few examples of what an invisible disability could be. Yet, do not allow the term “invisible” to lull you into believing there is less severity than physical disabilities. As Davis (2005) mentions, “There is no reason to believe that the invisibility of a disability itself necessarily lessens its impact or makes the disability less serious.” Thus, against some popular belief, an invisible disability is not a shield against stigma and has the opposite effect. In reality, those with an invisible disability are not visibly seen as disabled; therefore, they are forced to prove they are disabled enough to require assistance. People with an invisible disability are presented with a difficult decision to make in response: forgo assistance and navigate their challenges alone or endure the discomfort of potential rejection, humiliation, and social disapproval from a stranger’s interrogation (Davis, 2005).

Due to the general lack of understanding about disabilities, people can find it challenging to understand a concept as abstract as an invisible disability. In instances with concrete physical limitations, such as limb loss, others may find it easier to logically follow than a less observable disability, like a mental health disorder (Mullins & Preyde, 2013). However, when a person with an invisible disability hears others question the validity of their disability or provide negative comments that belittle the severity of the disability, internalized stigma can occur. As a result, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and the likelihood of future disclosure are significantly impacted.

However, the likelihood of future disclosure is not only impacted by interaction with peers but also through interactions with institutions. When a student with an invisible disability attempts to utilize accommodations, there can be substantial backlash. Even research conducted with graduate psychology students with various physical and invisible disabilities found that less than half reported their disability to the Office of Disability (Lund et al., 2014). Of those who reported to the office, individuals reported receiving nearly no guidance. Regardless of formal reporting, most participants Lund and colleagues (2014) interviewed noted experiencing disability-related discrimination during their graduate school training.

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Additionally, students with disabilities often want to be treated like “normal” students and to appear normal; thus, the likelihood of disclosing their disability is low (Tinkling & Hall, 1999). The need for accommodations involves a process that may lead students with disabilities to become “extra-visible” negatively. In turn, there is less desire from the students to request services. However, not requesting accommodations when they are legitimately warranted, or feeling guilty about requesting them due to the perceptions of others, has profound implications for learning (Rocco, 2000).

If individuals can bear the weight of attempting to obtain and successfully acquire accommodations, subsequent obstacles remain. Mullins and Preyde (2013) explored attitudes toward educational institutions; they showed that compared to students with physical disabilities, students with an invisible disability (dyslexia) were less likely to report positive attitudes toward their institution. Similarly, their research observed the same less positive attitude was reciprocated from the institution to the students. As a result, it is often left up to the professor to provide individual accommodations for the student. This opens the door for additional difficulties, as some professors can resist or stigmatize the student through comments such as, “Oh, aren’t you lucky,” paralleling misconceptions that the

student has an unfair advantage. Similarly, adult educators may develop stereotypes and stigma surrounding adults they perceive as poorly prepared to succeed in higher education (Rocco, 2000). There is a significant gap in knowledge with these misconceptions as accommodations, in reality, are solely leveling the educational field and allowing more access for students with barriers.

Adults with disabilities seek educational opportunities at higher frequencies, yet there is a lack of research on higher-functioning adults with disabilities (Rocco, 2000). However, there are historical trends of placing non-majority students in special education. Paired with the noticeable absence of disability during diversity discussions, the lack of awareness that accommodations increase equality rather than making things “unfair” in the classroom can have devastating consequences.

### **Solutions**

Mullins and Preyde (2013) provide some recommendations for change to increase access to higher education for individuals with disabilities. The pair proposes increased consideration for limitations related to disabilities that need to be recognized. Additionally, increased information about disability, access to learning about coping skills, and additional finances devoted to computers with adaptive technology would

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assist in breaking the barriers experienced. When institutions facilitate better understanding through increased education and awareness of different invisible disabilities for all staff, stigma cannot stand as strong (Mullins & Preyde, 2013). Institutions need to treat students with disabilities fairly by taking all accommodations into account to improve the academic experience. By providing opportunities to achieve the same outcomes and benefits as students without disabilities, institutions can create more robust access to learning opportunities while improving their satisfaction within their program.

Students with disabilities may be more susceptible to cultural insensitivity and stigma from professors, peers, and colleagues regarding their disability (Verdinelli & Kutner, 2016). These students often need to dismantle these stigmas independently to improve their relationships and professional standing. Completing and turning in work for students without disabilities is an expectation, while for those with disabilities, it may be viewed as a stunning accomplishment. Others may believe that those with disabilities may not produce the same caliber or quality of work as those without disabilities. If there is knowledge of an invisible disability such as a mental health condition, some may believe these individuals can “control” their experience to

not impair their performance. Notably, those with disabilities are often viewed as impaired students rather than a member of the diverse community among the student body, which can lead to social distancing.

There is a growing movement to recognize those with disabilities as an integral piece of the critical diversity within a higher education setting (Kim & Aquino, 2017). Ideally, students with disabilities should be valued among graduate programs for offering their experiences as a part of a diverse community rather than viewing them as a “standard” student who is debilitated. The influence of faculty education at this level is imperative to improving the experience for these students. Instructors who continually evaluate their competence in understanding disability as diversity can leave a lasting impact on colleagues and the students they advise. A cultural shift is needed to steer away from a pathology-focused lens of disability and to lean towards an efficacious perspective. This idea is supported by the diversity model, which views disability as a unique and diverse cultural identity (Altman, 2001; Andrews, 2020). A pressing message from this model is the belief that ableism is the reason for disability-associated disparities in society (Mackelprang & Salsgiver, 2016). A seemingly subtle but impactful movement is the person-first perspective. Graduate faculty and students should strive to avoid terms such as

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“disabled person” and put the person first instead: “a person with disabilities.” This semantic change carries the message that disabilities are not a person's sole identity but rather a piece of their experience. This can be applied to both physical and invisible disabilities (i.e., “a person with schizophrenia” as opposed to “a schizophrenic”).

When it comes to students pursuing higher education, there is often a lack of resources and accommodations provided. As discussed, the student may be expected to seek resources and accommodations for themselves. This can cause financial strain as many accommodations can be costly and elicit anxiety and stress in the student. The American Psychological Association (2019) summarized this idea: “The burden often falls on the individual with the disability to advocate or arrange for accommodations. Impairments in functioning become more disabling when activity is limited by structural or environmental features.” Due to this idea, principles related to equitable use, flexibility, simple and intuitive features, information communicated effectively, minimization of hazards with error, low physical effort, and appropriate size and space for approach and use have been created as a guideline. These principles are great in theory, but how well are they being implemented? How can we ensure that all universities or higher education programs carry out these or similar

principles? All should have a set of guidelines and/or mission to provide accommodations, support services, and necessary aids to qualified students with disabilities. It is essential to consider the variances across these programs and examine their ability and willingness to provide resources for students with disabilities. Despite progress, there continue to be barriers individuals (including such students) with disabilities face. We can and should be more educated on what we can do to address these unnecessary barriers to create better learning experiences and provide opportunities for students with disabilities to achieve the same outcomes as those without disabilities.

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# CREATING CONNECTION AND BELONGING IN A HYBRID PROGRAM SETTING

SARAH REPASKY

When I started Physical Therapy school four years ago, it was very different from my previous educational experiences. I worked full-time, and it had been almost a decade since I had set foot in a formal classroom. I was at a regional campus and would be attending classes, at least for the first semester, in a converted office building. It was a hybrid program, so most classwork was done online, and I only saw my classmates once a month for four stressful days filled with hands-on skills reviews, practicals, and exams. In addition, many of my classmates had children or other family members to care for. Add onto this a year of COVID restrictions, and how do you build community in this setting? When you don't have a lot of face-to-face time, and most people already have so many other responsibilities pulling them in different directions, what kind of community can be built?

Honestly, I didn't give those questions much thought for the first year or so. I was at school to do the work, get the degree, and keep moving. It wasn't until the end of my second year when a couple of our professors put out a call to create a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Taskforce, that I started to think more about the connections I had or didn't have with my classmates. I realized that I had a much deeper connection with my colleagues in many of my previous jobs and studies. In undergrad, I was a Peer Leader through our Diversity Services Office, helping underclassmen to make the transition from high school to college successfully. During my time with AmeriCorps, I was a Team Leader, and part of my job was ensuring my team could work well together. I realized there wasn't much sense of connection between my PT classmates, my cohort was together by happenstance, and most of us didn't know much about each other beyond the basics. This made me wonder how we'd be with our future coworkers and patients.

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Throughout our curriculum, there's a lot of emphasis on patient-centered care. Two of the first courses we take are Professional Issues, where we learn all about being an ethical practitioner, and Communication and Cultural Competence, where we delve into the psychosocial aspects of patient care. These courses were great, but as I thought back, I realized we didn't have a chance to practice what we'd learned in those courses the way we did with all the other skills we were studying. So, when the DEI Taskforce met and started brainstorming what we wanted to do together, my idea was to create a course that would carry throughout the program and provide opportunities for us to practice those interpersonal skills and get to know one another in the process.

The first step to doing this was to put together a needs assessment to survey the students and find out if they felt similarly to myself and the other members of the Taskforce. What was their understanding of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion? Did they think the program aligned well with their understanding of DEI? Did they think DEI initiatives were important? What topics did they want to know more about? How did they want to learn about those topics? And who did they want to learn with? Most people who responded felt that the program aligned well with their definitions of DEI, but some felt there was room for improvement.

Many agreed that DEI initiatives were important and should be explored further.

With that information, the next step was to create the course. We wanted to provide a variety of ways for students to interact with each other through the course but keep it similar to what they were already used to. During the summer term, we put together 20- to 30-minute interactive activities during one of our on-campus weekends that students complete with their own cohort. They include an icebreaker activity during Orientation, some self-reflection on working within a group, practice providing clear directions to patients, and talking through scenarios involving microaggressions. During the fall term, everyone is randomly placed in an online discussion group with members of their own and the other cohorts. They are provided a topic with a short article to read or video to watch and reflect on. This past fall, the topics were education and healthcare, neurodiversity and patient care, and gender identity and patient care. During the winter term, different trainings are available to students by cohort. For the first-year students, we provide a short video and quiz on working with medical interpreters; for second-year students, it is mental health first aid; for third-year students, it is ways to promote healthcare improvement.

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This course is only a starting point. It's just the first year it has been in place, and I know that it will continue to grow and change after I graduate. But hopefully, its purpose will remain the same. To serve as a structure and a common place for students to engage with one another on a more personal level. A place for us to continue to reflect and grow as patient-centered practitioners. As physical therapists, we spend much time with our patients, more than most healthcare providers. Only by being comfortable as our whole selves and creating a workplace and community that we feel connected to can we create genuine connections with our patients and provide them with the care we all deserve.

### **Acknowledgements**

The author would like to thank Keiba Shaw, PT, DPT, MA, EdD; Shari Rone-Adams, PT, MHSA, DBA; Robin Galley, PT, DPT, OCS, CLWT, and her fellow DEI Taskforce members for their support and guidance. The purpose of the NSU-Tampa DEI Taskforce is "to investigate Nova Southeastern University (NSU) Professional DPT Tampa program's student life, curriculum, policies, mission and vision statements from a DEI perspective" with the hope of "creating an open environment that is welcoming, inclusive, and comfortable for students, staff, and faculty involved at NSU and especially within the Tampa DPT program."

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# CONTRIBUTORS



Dr. Ismael Muvingi is a Professor of Conflict Resolution and African Studies and was the Director of the Ph.D program in DCRS from 2015 to 2020. Prior to that he was the IRB Center Representative and IRB board member for the college. Professor Muvingi holds two law degrees from the University of Zimbabwe, an MA in Political Science and an MA in Peace Studies from The University of Notre Dame, Indiana. His PhD is in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from George Mason University, Virginia.

Dr. Muvingi started his engagement with conflict resolution during Zimbabwe's war for liberation from colonial rule when he worked for the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace going into the war zones to investigate and publicize the victimization, violence and other atrocities committed against unarmed civilians by armed combatants. Thereafter, he practiced law both in the private and the public sectors for close to twenty years and lectured in law on a part time basis at the University of Zimbabwe. In the USA, Dr. Muvingi worked for four years in Baltimore and Washington DC for a US NGO as a legislative advocacy campaign manager on conflict resolution and HIV/ AIDS issues in Africa. He then moved to Canada and taught conflict resolution at Menno Simons College in Winnipeg, for seven years before joining Nova Southeastern University. His research interests include transitional justice and decolonization of knowledge with an area focus on Sub-Saharan Africa.



Dr. Kimberly J. Hamilton-Wright is a Social Scientist with the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, Dr. Richard Oliver Hope Human Relations Research Center. Dr. Hamilton-Wright holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Journalism and Mass Communications from Kansas State University, a Master of Public Administration degree from Webster University, and a doctorate in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from Nova Southeastern University. She holds a Grant Proposal Writing certificate from Fort Hays State University, a U.S. Air Force Master Resilience Training Course certificate, and is a certified Myers & Briggs (MBTI®) Practitioner.

Dr. Hamilton-Wright's research interests include womenwarography, military community issues, and indigenous conflict resolution practices. She developed the courses, Conflict and Peace Connections: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Women in U.S. Military Communities, and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: U.S. Domestic and Global Perspectives. While working as a full-time journalist, she was an editor with Upscale magazine, writer/editor at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and has freelance written for Essence and Black Enterprise magazines. Early in her career, she launched and coordinated a multicultural alumni program and was a writer at the Kansas State University Alumni Association. She was also a broadcast journalism instructor for high school students with the Kansas State University Upward Bound program. While earning her degree at Nova Southeastern University, she was a peer mentor for conflict analysis and resolution colleagues. Dr. Hamilton-Wright was born in Junction City, Kansas and grew up in the military. At Patrick Space Force Base, Florida, she served on the 2023 Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month Planning Committee and is a member of the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Working Group.

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Dr. Suzzette Harriott is an accomplished conflictologist and life strategist. With a distinguished academic background from Nova Southeastern University that includes a Ph.D. in Conflict Analysis and Resolution, she brings an impressive combination of educational and real-world insights to her practice.

With over two decades of professional experience, Suzzette has delved into the complexities of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB), Emotional Intelligence, and Transformational Leadership. Her acumen is not only theoretical; she has applied her knowledge in influential roles within international organizations, demonstrating a unique ability to merge theory with practice.

Her research centers on exploring the intriguing connection between Impostor Syndrome and Self Compassion. This insightful work pushes boundaries, providing a deeper understanding of the human psyche.

As a steadfast advocate for diversity, kindness, and transformative education, Dr. Suzzette Harriott remains a force for positive change in her field, empowering individuals, teams, and organizations to embrace their full potential.



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Laura Finley, PhD, is Professor of Sociology & Criminology at Barry University in Miami Shores, Florida. She is the author, co-author or editor of 33 books and has two to be released in 2023. Finley is also the author of 44 peer-reviewed journal articles and numerous book chapters. In addition, she is a syndicated columnist with PeaceVoice. Dr. Finley is also actively involved in a number of peace, justice and human rights movements and was the 2022 recipient of PJSJA's Peace Scholar Award. She served as Board Co-Chair for many years and is currently Board Vice-President of the Board of Directors for The Humanity Project and a Board member with Floridians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty.



Dr. Nahum Jean-Louis graduated from Nova Southeastern University (NSU) with a doctorate in education. Prior to his study at NSU, he attended Florida International University, School of International and Public Affairs where he graduated with a master's degree in public administration and, two master's certificates in Conflict Resolution and National Security. He also studied International Relations at the same university. He earned his bachelor's degree in social psychology from Florida Atlantic University in Boca-Raton, Florida. His research focuses on Symbolic violence in school curriculum in the U.S., Curriculum relevance & Black students' performance in the U.S., Eurocentrism in curriculum of post-colonial countries, Decolonial Education, and Teachers professional discretion & Black students' success.

For nearly fifteen years, Jean-Louis has worked in the university system, serving as both a faculty member and an administrator. As an instructor, he has taught American

government for more than a decade to a diverse population of students at different colleges in South Florida. As an administrator, he oversaw staff members and developed numerous workshops and trainings for employees of diverse backgrounds.

Currently, Dr. Jean-Louis works at FIU Online as a success coach, helping students achieve their goals by connecting them with university resources. He also works at FIU as an adjunct faculty, teaching basic skills and competencies necessary for first-year college students to succeed. In this capacity, he helps students develop an understanding of twenty-first century life skills and build a lifelong passion for learning. More recently, he was contracted as a research consultant by the Small World Group (SWG), an organization based in Washington, DC that specializes in federal Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) projects. As a member of its research team, he collaborates on conducting research, analyzing data, and designing interview questionnaires.

Administratively and practically, he developed strong leadership and management skills while building and maintaining an effective team that worked to help students achieve their goals. These academic and practical experiences have provided him with unique insights and a firsthand understanding of students' needs and the university system at large. Over the years, he has built strong research skills, designing surveys, conducting interviews, organizing outreach, and collecting and analyzing data on a wide range of local policy issues.

Dr. Jean-Louis is the author of *Nahum Bilingual*, an English/Creole-Creole/English dictionary that contains an extensive alphabetical list of commonly used words, as well as advanced concepts translated with accuracy and detail.



Dr. Clisbee is the Chief Research Officer at the Small World Solutions Group, leading a research department that provides diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) monitoring and assessment services. The Small World Solutions Group is a veteran and minority owned small business serving clients in the federal government, and public and private companies offering a menu of DEIA training, mentoring, coaching and assessment services.

Since 2015, Mary has had the pleasure of working for Partners In Health (PIH), an international healthcare and social justice agency. Dr. Clisbee has served in many roles at PIH, including the Provost for Academic Affairs and Research at the University of Global Health Equity – Haiti, and Division Director for Director of Research and Curriculum at Zanmi Lasante, a Haitian non-profit healthcare system of 16 hospitals and clinics, including the country's largest and most prestigious teaching hospital. She is a founding member of the team who has led the education accreditation efforts at the University Hospital of Mirebalais, Haiti, earning medical education accreditation from the esteemed Accreditation Council of Graduate Medical Education-International, based in the United States. This hospital is the first hospital in a low-resource country and the first in the Caribbean to earn ACGME-I accreditation. Under Dr. Clisbee's leadership, the research department developed the Zanmi Lasante Institutional Review Board (ZL IRB) earning the distinction of being one of only four IRBs in Haiti that are recognized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Sciences.

Previously, Dr. Clisbee served as an Associate Dean and professor at the Abraham S. Fischler School of Education at Nova Southeastern University (NSU) in Fort Lauderdale,

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Florida. She continues to serve as a dissertation chair and adjunct professor. Dr. Clisbee has an extensive background in international education, medical education and DEIA.

Dr. Clisbee holds a doctoral degree in education from the University of Massachusetts, a master's degree of education in counseling from Salem State University and a bachelor of science degree in physical education from Norwich University Military Academy.



Terry Morrow Nelson, Ph.D. is the Associate Dean of Student Affairs in the Nova Southeastern University College of Health Care Sciences. She serves as the Chair of the Multicultural Affairs Committee and member of the university Belonging, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Council.



Emily Ann Morrow Nelson is seven years old and loves to draw the world as she sees it. Her drawing was created when she was six years old. Emily is part of Generation Alpha and emerges into our increasingly diverse nation seeing the beauty in our diversity.



Kira Nurieli is the CEO of the Harmony Strategies Group and is an expert Ombuds, mediator, conflict coach, trainer/facilitator, consultant, and restorative practices facilitator. She has spent upwards of twenty years helping clients handle conflict and improve communication strategies and has presented at numerous conferences and symposia as a subject matter expert, including the Society for Human Resource Management and the Association of Conflict Resolution. She holds a Master's degree in Organizational Psychology from Columbia University and a Bachelor's degree in Comparative Performance from Barnard College, and she is currently pursuing her PhD in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University. She enjoys helping individuals, teams, and lay-leaders become more impactful and empowered in their work and is honored to work alongside her esteemed colleagues with the Harmony Strategies Group. Kira is especially grateful to her five children for challenging her to apply dispute resolution skills in unique and creative ways.



Jasmine Phan has been a leading advocate for conflict analysis and resolution for over 6 years as a global and national speaker, and practitioner. As a PhD candidate in Conflict Analysis and Resolution through Nova Southeastern, Jasmine has researched into the intersectionality of conflict resolution, psychology, and business by studying the link of workplace conflicts and the impact that has on an employee's attitude and productivity. I am a vessel for other community leaders to express their need and actions in resolving and mending relationships among the community through the radio show The Conflict Corner, volunteering for CASA representing the best interest of abused and neglected children in the family court system with the aim of reunifying families, the National Board Chair for Leaders Recognizing Leaders mentoring young adults on how to become leaders and young diplomats, displaying leadership as the Regional Chair in Kentucky and Tennessee for the American Bar Association's Women in Dispute Resolution encouraging Fortune 500 and top law firms to employ diverse neutrals, and

Co-Founder of CALM Dispute Firm working with clients to mediate and facilitate intrapersonal conflicts, policing and community conflicts, and they make assessments based on human behavior to help the parties move towards a mutually exclusive resolution. CALM members study the past and look at the present to help their clients look towards the future.



Eileen Petzold-Bradley works for Nova Southeastern University (NSU) as an Internal Editor in the Public Relations and Marketing Division, writing communications on belonging, equity, diversity, and inclusion themes. She is also a Conflict Management Consultant helping clients navigate conflicts, improve team dynamics, boost productivity and inclusivity, and create a positive work environment through intervention, team reskilling and upskilling, and 1:1 coaching. In addition, she specializes in urgent learning and development themes in dispute resolution, cross-cultural understanding, emotional intelligence, and implicit bias awareness. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate at NSU's Department of Conflict Resolution Studies. Eileen is an avid outdoor fan, environmentalist, adventure traveler, yoga enthusiast, and a mother of three children.



Randall Amster, J.D. Ph.D., is Co-Director and Teaching Professor of Environmental Studies at Georgetown University and is the author of books including *Peace Ecology* (Routledge, 2015). Amster served as Executive Director of PJSA for many years and is still an active member.

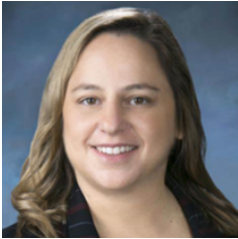


Heidi Huse, Associate Professor in the Department of English and Modern Foreign Languages at The University of Tennessee at Martin, teaches first-year composition, as well as upper-division essay writing and English grammar courses. She is the Composition Coordinator for on-campus and dual enrollment composition instruction. She is a Board Member of the Weakley County Reconciliation Project, a local organization centered on racial truth-telling and reconciliation for the region. She is also a member of the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition and of the Peace and Justice Studies Association. She recently contributed a chapter on using non-fiction graphic novels to teach peace and justice in first-year composition to the anthology *Teaching Peace Through Popular Culture*. She is owned by several rescue cats.



Hélène R. Fisher, SLP.D., CCC is an associate professor in Speech-Language Pathology at Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Her area of specialization is Voice-Resonance Disorders, Craniofacial Anomalies and Gender Affirming Voice Care. Dr. Fisher teaches graduate level classes and supervises graduate clinicians in the evaluation and treatment of clients of all ages.





Dr. Suzanne Riskin enjoys her role as Assistant Professor of Internal Medicine and Foundational Sciences at Nova Southeastern University, Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine, Tampa Bay campus. She focuses on student mentorship for preventative health and community engagement. Dr. Riskin serves as Chair of the committee subgroup Educational Programs Curriculum & Pedagogy (EPC&P) in the Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) KPCOM Unity Program (KUP) and as faculty advisor to medical students. Her servant leadership style promotes an inclusive approach to mentoring and education in an increasingly diverse student body. She believes research and community service promotes equality and allows students to grow. She feels, to serve as a faculty mentor and advisor in these moments is a great honor.



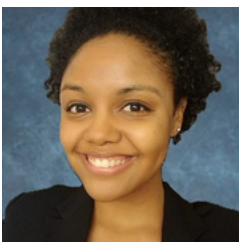
Idarabaski Akpan is a third-year medical student, an aspiring Forensic Pathologist, and a proud Nigerian! She also a huge foodie because sharing food provides: a way of spending time with friends, a medium of exchanging cultures, and an excuse to meet up and gossip. Most importantly it provides a way of ending any argument (It is pretty hard to stay mad at someone who bakes you a cake...) She believes in actively including diversity, equity and togetherness in our thoughts about food and in our discussions of nutrition with our patients.



Melinda Luis, MS, RDN,LDN is a food enthusiast, a mom of two, and a registered dietitian. She is also faculty in the Department of Nutrition at Nova Southeastern University, Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine. She enjoys teaching courses in the community nutrition track, such as Food and Culture, Special Populations, Community Nutrition, and Global Nutrition. Melinda is the co-secretary of the Educational Programs Curriculum & Pedagogy (EPC&P) in the Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) KPCOM Unity Program (KUP) and serves as a mentor to both graduate and undergraduate students of all backgrounds. She enjoys sharing her cultural knowledge and experiences in and out of the classroom.



Ashley Stripling, PhD is a licensed psychologist, associate professor and the Director of Nova Southeastern University's Counseling Center for Older adults. She has over fifteen years of experience conducting aging focused clinical research and providing psychological services. As a result she has obtained several grants, authored or co-authored eighteen peer-reviewed articles, two book chapters, and over a hundred presentations at national conferences. Currently, she provides specialized didactic training as a HRSA grant funded subject matter expert for Nova Southeastern University's Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Program and is collaborating on a series of grants to promote healthy aging and geropsychological training.



Brittany Hylander is pursuing her Psy.D. in Clinical Psychology at Nova Southeastern University. Her clinical interests include helping older adults and their families with the transition and difficulties that can come with aging and guiding organizations on diversifying their workforce and creating a more inclusive environment for employees and those they serve. Brittany is currently the Research and Assessment Coordinator for NSU's Counseling Center for Older Adults (NCCOA). In this position, she instructs the incoming trainees and intern on the current assessment battery, supervises battery administration and scoring skills to ensure accuracy, as well as, co-facilitate monthly diversity process groups.



Jillian Crocker is a second-year PhD student at Nova Southeastern University, having earned a B.S. in psychology and business management from the University of Minnesota. Through her graduate studies, she builds on her past work as a research coordinator for the Center for Magnetic Resonance Research to understand the environment contributions to neurocognitive disorders and relationship distress. To this end she is currently working with the Alzheimer's Association to examine periodontitis and Alzheimer's disease, through grant funded research. Her overarching goal is to become a geropsychologist who combats anti-aging stereotypes and promote resilience by advancing geriatric training and clinical care.



Dr. Arkene Levy is an Associate Professor of Medical Education and Director of DEI at NSU MD. Dr. Levy has mentored students in research related to health disparities, racial equity, and LGBTQI+ cultural competency. She has published her DEI work at the regional and national level including the International Association of Medical Sciences Educators (IAMSE) and Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) National conferences. Her most recent publication is a book focused on DEI integration into health professions curricula. She is currently a member of the AAMC Group on Diversity and a member of the DEI working group for the Florida Council of Medical School Deans.



Dr. Jocelyn Mitchell-Williams is the Senior Associate Dean for Medical Education and an Associate Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Cooper Medical School of Rowan University (CMSRU). Prior to this role, she served as the inaugural Associate Dean for Diversity and Community Affairs at CMSRU, where she led efforts to improve the health outreach for disadvantaged communities, including the creation of a pipeline to medical professions, diversity and anti-racism training, and community service programs. She has a special interest in addressing bias, racism, and health disparities, especially regarding their impact on persons of color, LGBTQI+ communities, and other underserved populations.



Dr. Vijay Rajput is a Professor and Chair of the Department of Medical Education at NSU MD. He was the founding Assistant Dean for the clinical curriculum at Cooper Medical School of Rowan University and Program Director for Internal Medicine at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School from 2004 to 2012. Dr. Rajput has authored over 110 publications and presented more than 200 seminars at regional, national, and international conferences. He has received numerous "Excellence in Teaching" awards from students, residents, and national organizations including the ACGME and SHM. His areas of interest are bedside teaching, professionalism, ethics, humanism in medicine, student well-being, mentoring, and curriculum development.



Nardia Aldridge, PhD., OTR/L, DTM, is an Associate Professor in the Occupational Therapy Department at Nova Southeastern University. She has a Ph.D. in Health Services, MS in Gerontology, and a BS in Occupational Therapy. Dr. Aldridge was born on the beautiful Island of Jamaica and has served nine years in the United States Army, where she met her husband, Roger Aldridge. They have been married for 20 years and have two children, Alyssa and Andrew. Dr. Aldridge has a passion for increasing diversity in occupational therapy. She is the President and Co-founder of the South Florida Black Occupational Therapy Caucus (SFBOTC), whose mission is to increase the Recruitment, Retention, and Registration rates of Black occupational therapy practitioners and students in the profession of occupational therapy.



Sierra graduated from the University of Louisiana Lafayette with a BS in Kinesiology Exercise Science with a Minor in Psychology. She recently graduated from NSU, MS in Occupational Therapy Winter class of 2022. After obtaining her NBCOT certification, she is now practicing at an acute care hospital in her hometown New Orleans. Throughout Sierra's academic journey, she has realized that her classrooms lack diversity and was always looking for a way to make her mark in the classroom and community. She has genuinely enjoyed researching the experience of Black occupational beings with systemic racism because she values representation. She has spoken on the topic at local and international conferences, such as the World Federation of Occupational Therapy (WFOT).



Chloe obtained her BS in Neuroscience & Behavior in 2018 with a Minor in Psychology from FAU, where she was honored as Valedictorian of the University Honors Program. She graduated from NSU in the Winter of 2022 with her MS in Occupational Therapy (Summa Cum Laude) and obtained her NBCOT certification shortly after. She has a lifelong passion for dance, teaching at her home studio for over a decade, and dreams of combining her practices in the near future. Throughout her schooling, Chloe has advocated for diversity, researching the experience of Black occupational beings with systemic racism and compiling that pertinent information to bring to light through discussions and dissemination at local, national, and international conferences such as NBOTC, NYSOTA, ACOT, & WFOT Congress.



Patrice Leopold, PhD, LMHC, NCC is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor and Assistant Professor of Clinical Mental Health Counseling at Nova Southeastern University in the College of Psychology. Dr. Leopold's research interests and clinical focus include couples, families, intersectionality, intergenerational work, supervision, and creative counseling. Dr. Leopold has been actively involved in varying professional counseling organizations including ACA, ACES, IAMFC, ASERVIC, and FCA via leadership and conference presentations.



Jung (June) H. Hyun, Ph.D., LMHC, NCC is an associate professor in the mental health counseling program at Nova Southeastern University. Dr. Hyun teaches core counseling courses: basic counseling skills, counseling theory, multicultural counseling, and systems theories and supervises practicum and internship students. Her scholarly work includes multicultural counseling and social justice issues, counselor supervision, SFC (School, Family, and Community) partnership, and promoting the resiliency of AAPI. At the professional level, she has been actively involved in ACA, AMCD, ACES, and ACAC by serving in various leadership roles and presenting at conferences. She is a licensed mental health counselor in WA. She has provided play therapy for children and adolescents and parenting workshops for Asian American populations.



Dr. Ashlei R. Petion, LPC, NCC is a Licensed Professional Counselor and Assistant Professor of Clinical Mental Health Counseling at Nova Southeastern University in the College of Psychology. Dr. Petion's clinical experiences span suicide prevention and intervention, crisis response, culture-centered and trauma-informed care, as well as LGBTQ+ concerns. Dr. Petion's research interests include generational trauma and healing, culture-centered group work, and participatory action-based research through qualitative and mixed methodologies. In addition to clinical and research work, Dr. Petion is also an active member of several professional counseling organizations including ACA, CSI, AMCD all within which she has served in various leadership roles.

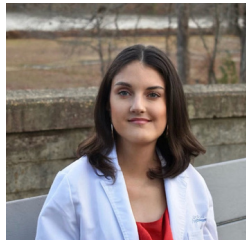


Dr. Eric S. Thompson, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor at Nova Southeastern University in the College of Psychology. He teaches multicultural counseling competencies in the School Counseling and Clinical Mental Health departments and has experience working as a school counselor in middle and high school grade levels. In addition to data driven approaches to best practices in school counseling, Dr. Thompson specializes in contemplative and mindfulness practices and emotion regulation including counseling skills and effective communication. Dr. Thompson facilitates workshops and webinars on mindfulness emotion regulation. Dr. Thompson worked at the Family Data Center at the University of Florida linking maternal data with child outcomes and has interest in the intersection between early life stressors and later life outcomes.



D'anna Sydow, MS, Norah Scholl, MA, Jorgia Wilson, BS, Kelly Griffin, MA, and Barry Nierenberg, PhD, ABPP:

The authors are clinical psychology trainees and members of the Disability, Awareness, and Well-being Group (DAWGs) at Nova Southeastern University. DAWGs is a chapter of the American Psychological Association, Division 22 (Division of Rehabilitation Psychology)'s Student Leadership Network. We aim to increase awareness of the foundational principles of Rehabilitation Psychology and focus on advocacy and research to benefit the welfare of those with disabilities and chronic health conditions.



Sarah recently received her Doctorate of Physical Therapy from Nova Southeastern University. While at NSU, she served as the Student Coordination officer for Shark Motion Clinic, a student-run pro-bono PT clinic, Service Chair of the Student Physical Therapy Association, and was a founding member of NSU-Tampa DPT's DEI Taskforce, where she spearheaded the creation of a Canvas course that strives to create learning content and develop strategies to promote a more inclusive and collaborative environment for all. Sarah is passionate about working with underserved communities and supporting their pursuit of peace and justice, having served multiple terms with AmeriCorps. She plans to continue this work by volunteering her services as a Physical Therapist providing pro-bono services to those in need.



Robin Cooper, PhD, is an Assistant Dean and Professor of Conflict Resolution and Ethnic Studies at Nova Southeastern University. Robin is currently serving PJSAs as Secretary.