# Social Justice Action Plan

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Per the ACA Code of Ethics, as counselors, we have an ethical responsibility to advocate and be leaders for those who are considered minorities in the culture. The purpose of this paper is to provide an action plan that emphasizes my desire to be a strong voice of advocacy and social justice. I will explore the meaning behind what I do as well as my commitment to it, evaluate my personal cultural privilege, my exposure to oppression (if any), becoming well-versed in different cultures, and promote a set of principles that demonstrate and communicate my social justice compass.

## Exploring Life Meaning and Commitment

I am a licensed professional counselor and have been in the field of counseling for over 5 years, so I have learned several reasons as to why I enjoy the work I do. Being in a Christian setting is even more of a blessing because I get to see how the Lord works in the lives of my clients. What gives my work even more meaning is seeing how the passage of 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 is embodied in the counseling process. This passage references how we can learn from and use the comfort which God has given to us in our times of suffering, to then go and extend that same comfort and grace to others in their own suffering. Additionally, this allows me the privilege and calling to carry another person's burdens as they walk through life. Knowing that the Lord is using my in such a crucial way gives my work meaning and significance.

The results of my efforts is that my clients hopefully experience what it looks like for Jesus to love them and give them grace during their difficult times. I get to see how the therapeutic alliance is significant to their own progress. Because of my relationship with the Lord, I am then able to explain and replicate that relationship with my clients. Because I have seen both teaching and counseling as the calling God has on my life, I am often reminded of my

commitment to that life mission. Even if I impact only one person, I know the Lord can use that as a ripple effect in the lives of people whom that person interacts with.

## Personal Privilege

When it comes to understanding my personal cultural privilege, I am often confused and offended by the concept. However, I know where it originated from. It is likely due to not having one clear way to identify myself. Even though I have a Latino/Mexican background heritage, I was born in the U.S. In most cases, I would be considered a minority, and would assumingly not benefit from any cultural privilege. Not only that, but I am also a more light-skinned Mexican which brings on a sense of criticism from those even within my own culture. In the greater context of the American culture, I do not have any privilege, yet within my own culture, they would communicate that I do have privilege because I have more of an education than many Latinos have.

I think when people believe they have or do not have privileges, they behave in ways that reinforce those beliefs about themselves. I know part of this section is to acknowledge my personal privilege, but I do not see how that can be beneficial to my personal growth or that of others.

## Nature of Oppression

I personally have not experienced any element of oppression, but coming from a Latino background, I have family members and friends who have experienced racism and oppression. However, one of the unique aspects of learning about their negative experiences is understanding that those experiences are not unique to them but rather are a common element of the human experience.

Because of how I was raised and because I never saw my father communicate to me about any forms of oppression he experienced, I do not see myself as a victim of oppression nor do I believe it would be conducive to my personal growth if I would see myself in that way. I know that it can bring a form of healing for some, but I do not feel that it would benefit me to see myself that way.

Regarding my contribution to the perpetuation of oppression, I believe others would identify my lack of acceptance of my own oppression as being a contributing factor because it does not provide a voice for their experiences of oppression. In fact, I experienced several conflicts with other Latino people from my church for not viewing the world around me through that lens. I have my father to thank for that. He emphasized to me the importance of working hard, never quitting, and continual learning which has helped me establish myself in my identity as a professional counselor. I do not believe I have used my professional authority in an unjust way, but I may also be blind to the perceived impact of it.

## Becoming Multiculturally Literate

When it comes to becoming multiculturally literate, I think we overcomplicate this process by believing that we need to take several multicultural courses, read all the multiethnic books and autobiographies, and even visit or live in a different cultures for extended periods of time. Though I find that these options can be helpful (and they are), the most simple and effective way to become multiculturally literate is to engage and converse with as many people as possible. The population of people I engage with does not even have to be of a different culture, because even if they are of the same ethnic background as myself, they still have different trials and experiences that I may not have encountered in my own life. When the

emphasis is made on it needing to be someone from a different background or culture, I believe we miss the point of being multiculturally literate.

What we are seeking to find when interacting with any person of any background is common ground. If we can find one point of similarity and connection, we become culturally literate which leads to becoming multiculturally literate. I believe the key to growing in our multicultural understanding is to be curious about all people's stories and then find the areas where we share common ground. I do want to emphasize though, that learning a new language, living in and experiencing a different culture than your own, and working towards religious tolerance can expedite and enhance your understanding of different cultures, but it is not necessary. Curiosity, authenticity, and seeking common ground I believe are the key to becoming multiculturally literate.

## Establishing a Personal Social Justice Compass

To guide my interactions with people, I have a set of personal principles that direct my engagement, communication, and relationships with all people. From a Christian and theological standpoint, I believe it is important first and foremost to see all people as being made in the image of God. Viewing people this way allows me to consider a perspective of them that helps me understand God's uniqueness in writing our individual stories which prompts and elicits an intrigue into understanding why people are the way they are. This is especially true when it comes to learning about another person's ethnic background. I referenced some key elements to becoming multiculturally literate in the above section, but I will elaborate more on these in the following section.

First, I believe that curiosity is of utmost importance. Having honest questions about people's backgrounds and upbringings can provide me with information that speaks to their identity. The key is to *remain* curious. Secondly, authenticity is also a significant factor. Authenticity is the acting and expressing of one's self in ways that reflect one's true values, desires, and emotions (Harter, 1999, 2002). When we are authentic with each other, it is easier to trust and acknowledge people for who they are and not for what they have or do not have. The last elements we should look for is to seek what we have in common with each other rather than looking for our differences. Today, people are hypervigilant for what differences we do not place enough of a focus on what emotions, thoughts, and experiences we share. I believe if we can seek similarities, multicultural literacy will result as a consequence.

## Conclusion

My hope is that anyone who reads this paper can understand how my unique perspective on cultural privilege contributes to my voice for a group of people who feel conflicted about identifying as a victim of oppression. It is for these people that I seek to advocate for. I also discussed how I do not see myself as a victim of any type of oppression because I do not think it would have helped me advance in life. Although I did see some oppression with people I loved and cared for, I do not remember them seeing themselves as victims either, and I think this contributed to my overall view of victimhood. This provided for me a set of principles which I choose to live by. If we can see people as being made in the image of God, we can see the value they have and instinctively seek to know more about them. The hope is that we get to see and know them the way God does.

## References

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