



# CSJ Activist

*Newsletter of Counselors for Social Justice,  
a Division of the American Counseling Association*

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## Social Justice Counselors Division Approved in Texas!

Selma d. Yznaga, Founder and Director, TxCSJ

The race is about to start. The runner on the left is physically fit, in large part due to his personal trainer and the amount of dispensable time he has to work out each week. His running shoes are top of the line, and the wrist watch heart monitor will help him pace himself so that he does not become overexerted. His family proudly stands on the sidelines: healthy children dressed warmly on this crisp Saturday morning. Their only concern this morning is that daddy finish this race first.

The runner on the right waits in stark contrast. He is hungry, tired, anxious. He has no shoes on his feet. His clothes are inappropriate for a marathon, and weigh heavily on him. He's had no training, only knows that he has to be in this race to survive. His family waits at the shelter for news of his performance. Can he compete? Can he even stay in the race?

America has always embraced a culture of meritocracy; that is, any individual who works hard enough, is smart enough, and has enough energy can make it to the top. The

prevailing attitude is that we are all born with an equal chance for success. However, as depicted in the analogy above, one can see that while we are all expected to compete, we are not all endowed with equal resources at the start of the race.



Dr. Yznaga

Discrimination, oppression, and marginalization continue to thrive in this country despite the great strides made by the Civil Rights movement and the more recent attention to multicultural issues. Texas, in particular, ranks highly in some disturbing national statistics: death penalty executions (U.S. Department of Justice, n.d.), persons living below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.), crimes of bias (Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.), and war casualties (Office of Speaker Nancy Pelosi, 2007). And yet, Texas counselors did not have an organized voice promoting the very elements that we know contribute to the mental health and overall

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## Social Justice in Counseling Profile: Dr. Anneliese Singh

Adam Zagelbaum, PhD  
Governors State University



Dr. Singh

Dr. Anneliese Singh defines social justice as "being able to take a real hard look at ourselves in order to see how we can stop perpetuating harm towards others." Furthermore, she views this matter as a relational concept which goes beyond recognizing how resources are distributed among societal members, or how 'playing fields' can be leveled within political systems. The relational component of social justice to Dr. Singh is mainly about "taking a close assessment of our own lives" in order to uncover and discover ways in which any form of violence is tolerated, condoned, or enacted onto those around us. By making these discoveries and speaking out and about them to others, individuals avoid a top-down hierarchical approach toward forcing change to occur, and instead become advocates that inspire and enact changes that have enduring effects over the long-term. This close assessment is something that Dr. Singh appears to have applied well, especially to herself and her work as a counselor educator for social justice. Within the upcoming year, she has many actions and visions which will remain true to these roots and plant seeds of future advocacy.

Continued on Page 3

# ANNOUNCEMENT:

## ***Congratulations!***

### **CSJ Election Results:**

**President Elect (2009-2010 Presidential term): Michael D'Andrea**

**Communication Officer (2008-2010 term): Nicole R. Hill**

**Graduate Student Representative (2008-2010 term): Zulema I. Suarez**

**Retiree Representative (2008-2010 term): Judy Lewis**

### **Next Step Social Justice Retreat at The University of Vermont**

Dr. Denise Pickering

Assistant Professor of Counselor Education and Counseling

The University of Vermont (UVM) offers the Next Step Retreat, an annual social justice retreat that is in its sixth year at UVM. During the weekend, students are provided an opportunity to gain knowledge and skills to assist them in becoming change agents and social activists to address all forms of oppression, including racism, classism, ableism, heterosexism, gender bias, religious discrimination and other expressions of differences. Students explore their own cultural backgrounds and assumptions and lesson learned from others in a safe, affirming environment. UVM school counseling student, Siri Banach, reports that "[As a result of participating in the Next Step Retreat] "I take with me a better understanding of what diversity is, how prejudice and oppression go hand and hand, and how I can be an advocate for change and educate others on these very important issues."

Next Step believes that in order to be change agents, participants need to be aware of some of the models of discrimination, privilege and its impact on individuals and society, specific forms of oppression and how their effects, and how stereotypes evolve. Also, one must have experiences and skills in hearing others' stories. Time spent in small groups involves attendees sharing their own stories (at the level they feel comfortable) and hearing the experiences of other participants. These small groups and large group activities are facilitated by Next Step faculty and staff who volunteer their time for this weekend training. Many of the facilitators are previous participants.

Even though the Next Step Retreat has been at UVM since 2003, the concept originally started at Colorado State University (CSU) in 1994 in response to the need for an arena for students to address social justice issues. Two former participants and a facilitator came to UVM from CSU in 2002 and the first Next Step Retreat started the following year.

The 2008 weekend retreat marked the sixth year for Next Step at UVM and was held at the Hulbert Outdoor Center, located in Fairlee, VT which is approximately 90 minutes from the UVM campus (located in Burlington, VT). The facility can accommodate up to 65 students and this year as in previous years was at maximum capacity. Both undergraduate and graduate students can apply, and if their applications are accepted, students are asked to pay \$20 to cover basic costs. However, no one is denied participation due to inability to pay.

The long term goal of Next Step is to equip students with skills to value and give voice to individuals and groups which have historically been marginalized once they return to campus. The small groups and group facilitators continue to meet monthly for a few months after the initial retreat in order to follow-up with what they have learned and experienced, share challenges participants have encountered since completion, and to reconnect with their peers who have had a similar experience. As one Next Step Retreat graduate shared, "This program should be required for every student at UVM before they graduate."

Further information on the NextStep Retreat can be found at: <http://www.uvm.edu/~nextstep/>. If you have additional questions, contact Justin Gerboc, UVM Assistant Director for Leadership & Involvement, at: [Justin.Gerboc@uvm.edu](mailto:Justin.Gerboc@uvm.edu)

## Dr. Singh (continued from page 1)

Dr. Singh, who teaches in the School Counseling program at the University of Georgia, attributes much of her roots regarding her social justice work to her family and religious background. As a South Asian woman, she has noticed the importance of diversity and the way in which society needs to have greater exposure to individuals of all cultural backgrounds. Her upbringing by her father, who practiced Sikhism, inspired her to stand up for truth and principles which have centered on creating a balanced system of relationships and a focus on social justice. Being raised within New Orleans, Louisiana exposed her to significant amounts of diversity, relationship issues, and various conditions that inspired her to become active in reaching out toward individuals who may not always have the visible presence within a political, interpersonal, or family system to receive such actions. Primarily focused on issues related to child sexual abuse, Dr. Singh set out to make a difference within various systems that would advocate for victims. However, by also focusing on systemic perspectives related to child sexual abuse, Dr. Singh has been able to highlight issues that appear to contribute to conditions and circumstances that perpetuate acts of sexual abuse towards children. It is this work that has evolved into her *Breaking the Silence* project which serves to provide awareness as to how individuals can effectively work together in order to combat this treacherous matter.

Another dear cause that Dr. Singh has helped create and inspire is an organization known as Action Community Transformation (ACT). This national group of South Asian women which works to stop child sexual abuse has been instrumental in setting up an infrastructure to make change on this matter without complete reliance on governmental agencies. ACT's mission is "to honor the rights of all to safety, dignity and bodily integrity...to raise consciousness to interrupt root causes of CSA, develop innovative tools and strategies to transform how to hold individuals, communities, and institutions accountable, and mobilize everyone directly and indirectly affected by CSA to act as agents of change." Though change is a slow process, especially regarding legislative action, Dr. Singh is able to find this work to be "gut-wrenching but inspirational" which appears to accurately summarize the risks and rewards of working in a social justice framework.

Some of the work accomplished by ACT can be found on their website ([www.act2transform.org](http://www.act2transform.org)) and in various media. A modification of the Power-Control Wheel which works to address issues of sexual abuse and intimate partner violence is another major contribution which counseling professionals can expect to soon see as a result of ACT's work. Dr. Singh is also actively addressing national organizations to aid men's greater involvement with preventing conditions that lead to child sexual abuse, which is work that has also stemmed from prior therapeutic endeavors regarding South Asian intimate partner violence.

While conducting groups for South Asian immigrants who were struggling with intimate partner violence issues, Dr. Singh was able to recognize issues regarding political and legal pressure which did not allow for many of these incidents to be

reported. Especially for immigrant clients, issues with deportation and a restricted view of the United States' legal system have inspired Dr. Singh to advocate for the rights of these individuals to be protected as legal protocol is followed. The complexity of this work would also lead her to construct a social justice course for doctoral students at her university to better understand how to perform advocacy work, and also how to coordinate efforts among advocates, community members, and other stakeholders who get involved with this process. Dr. Singh has certainly led by example as a counselor, counselor educator, and academician, and it is certainly no surprise that she is an organizational leader herself.



Dr. Singh's leadership of the Association in LGBT Issues in Counseling (ALGBTIC) has also been a defining part of her social justice work. She is part of the Transgender Task Force in ALGBTIC, which advocates for transgender concerns to be addressed within the division. The Transgender Task Force will be working on transgender competencies to help counselors work better with clients who transgress the gender binary within various systems. Dr. Singh has presented and published extensively on concerns of marginalized individuals, such as queer persons of color, transgender individuals, and immigrant populations. ALGBTIC is fortunate to have a leader who is able to speak candidly and passionately about these topics. Those who are attending the American Counseling Association (ACA) Conference in Honolulu, HI should be aware of the ALGBTIC Annual Luncheon which will further articulate these issues and provide individuals with a chance to interact with a dedicated group of professionals who are committed to addressing these specific matters.

It should also be noted that Dr. Singh is also an excellent resource for the *Safe Zone* program, which provides training for professionals who wish to create a climate of accessibility for addressing LGBT issues within school environments. Students who struggle with issues related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identity exist within all school levels, and Dr. Singh helps to provide Safe Zone training and resources to schools and universities that recognize the need to make these issues available for discussion. It is clear from discussions with Dr. Singh that her recognition and action related to social justice has been well articulated with the experiences she has had, and the settings within which she has worked. Her actions only further demonstrate that a commitment to social justice can happen in all facets of one's life and work if you follow what appears to be her direct approach: "use your own information to see how your background contributes to the future work you wish to do." This simple message is certainly no easy task for all, and accurately reflects the gut-wrenching but rewarding work that Dr. Singh exemplifies as a counselor for social justice with specific objectives for her upcoming year.

**Those who are attending the American Counseling Association (ACA) Conference in Honolulu, HI should be aware of the ALGBTIC Annual Luncheon**

## TxCSSJ (continued from page 1)

wellness of our *paisanos*: access, equity, and fair allocation of resources. Until now.

With tremendous support from the American Counseling Association's Counselors for Social Justice Division (ACA CSJ) President Hugh Crethar, a proposal for a Texas division was created last year. On November 5, 2007, the Texas Counseling Association (TCA) Board of Directors voted unanimously to approve the proposal. The next day, the TCA Senate followed suit and the new division, Texas Counselors for Social Justice (TxCSSJ) was established. The following individuals agreed to serve as founding officers of TxCSSJ: Dana Comstock, President; Selma Yznaga, Director; and June Davis, Senator.

While the celebration of conception is fresh, there is immense work to be done. As a branch of the national division, TxCSSJ supports the mission of the ACA CSJ: "to promote social justice in our society through confronting oppressive systems of power and privilege that affect professional counselors and our clients and to assist in the positive change in our society through the professional development of counselors" (ACA Counselors for Social Justice, n.d., home page). In addition, TxCSSJ endorses the 2005 ACA Social Justice Resolutions (D'Andrea & Daniels, 2007): to eradicate religious discrimination, racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, ageism, poverty, and war. Moreover, TxCSSJ will examine issues that are demographically pertinent to Texas (including anti-immigration initiatives and the newly revived discrimination against Mexican and Mexican-descent residents) following an environmental scan and input from members.

The goal of TxCSSJ is at once simple and colossal: to advance access, equity, and fair allocation of resources for all Texans. The Texas Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (TexAMCD) has been successful for years in its enlightenment and training of Texas counselors vis-à-vis respect for diversity. The multicultural counseling goal of self- and interpersonal awareness is critical in the counseling relationship, and TexAMCD's work continues to be indispensable. TxCSSJ intends to collaborate with our TexAMCD allies by addressing bias and oppression from the opposite, societal pole.

The specific strategies TxCSSJ will employ toward this end include an environmental scan for issues of social injustice confronting Texans, awareness and informational sessions at professional conferences, training in advocacy competencies, and the creation of white papers identifying TCA's position on such issues. The division will also serve as the contact for TCA's public response to current events that destroy, demoralize, or otherwise diminish wellness and dignity for Texans.

The motto of TxCSSJ, "Be The Change," is borrowed from Gandhi: "be the change you wish to see in the world." The logo includes a flame which represents the passion with

which we will work, the heart symbolizes the care and respect we have for all individuals, and the wings signify that we will soar above oppression and injustice, empowering our clients to the dignity and wellbeing they deserve. Together, we can provide Texans with the resources they need to stay in the race.

*Membership in TxCSSJ is open to all TCA members. To join TCA, go to <http://www.txcca.org/tca/JOIN-RENEW.asp?SnID=974436393>. If you are already a TCA member, contact Jennifer Cullen ([jennifer@txcca.org](mailto:jennifer@txcca.org)). For more information regarding TxCSSJ, contact Selma d. Yznaga ([selma.yznaga@utb.edu](mailto:selma.yznaga@utb.edu)). This article has been submitted simultaneously for release in TCA's Guidelines and CSJ's Activist.*

### CSJ Membership & Voting

-Hugh C. Crethar, CSJ President-

As I reviewed the results of this year's elections, I found myself puzzling over a few statistics. Although CSJ currently has around 500 members nation-wide, only 120 of us took time to vote in the ACA/CSJ elections. As I hope all of our membership knows, our elections are run through the ACA election process. This year, that meant that all ACA members were mailed ballots. I believe mine came in the mail in early December of 2007. The ballots arrived pre-addressed and postage-paid. Members were asked to fill them out, put them in the envelopes and mail them back to ACA headquarters.

What I am having trouble understanding is how so many counselors with passion for social justice did not take the time to vote. I realize that voting percentages nation-wide are generally low, but honestly, I don't understand why they would be amongst our own. I hope that we, as a group, would consider taking the time to vote every chance we get. Of course, this is particularly crucial in the current national election season, with so much at stake. I hope that we, as advocates for social justice, take time to consider the importance of participation in democratic processes and act accordingly. I know that more than 24% of us can get out the vote in November. We should also be actively involved in our own election process within our division.

Please take the time to read the statements of nominees in the future and vote.

**¡Si se puede!**

# Children's Mental Health, School Counselors, and Social Justice: A Call to Disrupt the Status Quo

Rhonda Bryant, Albany State University

Meeting the complex mental health needs of children continues to dominate the agendas of the American Counseling Association, federal and local governments, and our communities. That children have mental health needs is not news, per se. We do not have to look far to see the impact of disaster, trauma, community and family violence, and bullying on the emotional development and behavior of children enrolled in grades K-12.

Accessing quality mental health services is a matter of social justice. In this era of managed care, reduced funding for community mental health services, and a dearth of community programs that focus on primary prevention, school counselors are uniquely poised to facilitate students' referral and entry to available mental health services. School counselors' training in promoting optimal psychosocial, maturity, and academic development also provides unique opportunities to help students who may have unmet mental health needs.

Yet, evidence seems to indicate that school staff track poor children and non-white children who have problematic behaviors into the criminal justice system and refer middle class white children with similar behaviors to mental health providers (US Surgeon General, 2000). Moreover, a plethora of research indicates that school administration practices, classroom rituals and management, teacher attitudes, beliefs, and expectations influence students' behavior (US Surgeon General, 2000). As student to school counselor ratios increase, school counselors have even less access to students who need appropriate intervention and referral to community mental health support. Similarly, teachers striving to meet No Child Left Behind's (NCLB) mandate for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) may refer students perceived as troublesome or difficult to the principal's office for discipline rather than to the school counselor due to frustration and stress related to meeting curriculum guidelines and testing goals of NCLB. Finally, because of reduced staffing, school counselors may find themselves performing inappropriate duties (e.g., master scheduling, covering academic classes) that prevent them from building a comprehensive developmental program anchored upon advocacy, equity, and relationships with students, school staff, and the local community.

As of this writing, the school counseling profession continues to debate whether school counselor are educators first (and hence, counselors second) or vice versa. While we engage one another in this debate, educators estimate that anywhere from 7 to ten percent of the children in American schools meet the criteria for special education for emotional and behavioral disorders; this translates into at least 480,000 students (Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2007). Evaluations for emotional and behavioral disorders identify African American males for special education 5.5 times more

often than any other group in the school (Coutinho, Oswald, Best, & Forness, 2002). Some literature suggests that low income correlates strongly with emotional or behavioral disorders (e.g., Qi & Kiser, 2003) and explain this phenomenon as a function of systemic challenges such as restricted or no access to quality housing, medical/dental care, and community violence.

This call to disrupt the status quo draws upon the principles of social justice that ACA and CSJ have advocated for several years. Applauded as the 'great equalizer', American society has long touted the benefits of education as the primary way to attain social status, economic stability, and upward mobility. For students with unmet mental health needs, the daily school experience might be fraught with misunderstanding, confusion, and even despair. Heider (1957) presented the concept of fundamental attribution error, which maintained that humans tend to explain others' problematic behaviors as a function of personality defects or internal flaws while explaining their personal behavior as situational or atypical. For example, an African American male student who presents as angry and sullen may get a referral to the School Resource Officer or principal that results in suspension or expulsion. That student could benefit from meeting with the school counselor who can assess for possible symptoms of depression or anxiety and make appropriate contact with family and/or community support to help the young man get his mental health needs met while continuing his education.

The establishment of a comprehensive developmental counseling program promotes social justice. As advocates of social justice, school counselors must avoid Heider's fundamental attribution error even as teachers, administrators, and parents strive to determine the motivation, abilities, and intent of students under scrutiny. Careful self-examination, regular clinical supervision, and operating from a strengths based perspective support students with mental health needs and challenge the status quo that can lead children away from mental health services that can help them become productive and involved community members.

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# COPARC

**(Council of Presidents and Regional Chairs)  
New Orleans, Louisiana**



COPARC is a meeting held twice a year and includes the division presidents, president-elects and regional chairs and chair-elects. The second COPARC meeting for the 2007-2008 year was January 24-26 in New Orleans. COPARC functions in an advisory role to the ACA Governing Council and works together on strategic planning and inter-division/region collaboration.



## Interested in writing an article for CSJ?

You are invited to contribute an article for the **CSJ Activist**. Any person interested in writing an article is asked to contribute their completed pieces to the editors. Articles should be between 200-700 words. Articles should also be related to social justice and/or counseling issues. The articles should relate to work you are doing, or opinions you would like to share that relate to CSJ. We also ask that you submit a picture along with your article.

If you have any questions, please contact the editors.

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**Sabino Canyon in Tucson, Arizona**



## **Community Violence: Where to Begin- the Beginning of a Conversation**

Laurie Vargas, San Francisco Unified School District

Working in San Francisco can be quite glorious: beautiful parks, beautiful museums and a beautiful culture behind it all. Look a little closer and see what our children are living with on a daily basis. Some live in fairly safe neighborhoods with at least one working parent in the home. Some children have parents who are active in their education. Others are residing in subsidized housing with and without parental involvement and support. Many of these children face violence and drugs on a daily basis.

I am currently working at a school in one of the rougher neighborhoods of SF- one that I would consider an inner city school. Almost daily the students are affected by some form of community violence and very often cope with shootings and killings in their community. I am an outsider. I have lived in SF almost all of my life- and am a prodigy of the public school system. I have not, however, had to survive the severity of violence our students today are dealing with. The children I work with come to school- some without clean clothes, some without having breakfast (at school or at home), and a few who are too tired to stay awake in class. When asked what they would like to change about their lives, more often than not, they reply that they want to feel safe, to have everyone respect each other, and to not have shootings and killings anymore. These same children are the ones who cannot sleep at night or study in a peaceful home. Concentration is difficult when there is so much violence outside of your door. Many of the families have been victimized in one way or another. Yet to move for safety is almost impossible. Moving requires having the financial means, support of family, and unfortunately moving to another neighborhood that may be just as unsafe. Another neighborhood means another gang. Whether they are “in” or not, it’s not safe for most. There is an assumption that even if you are not “in” or “running” (with a gang) there is still an affiliation.

So here I am. Knowing that recently an anti-gang activist was killed not too far from our school and fearing for a retaliation shooting. My on-going question: Where do I begin? I make a point to speak with staff and faculty about what our community sends to school each day with the children. I give the children the space they need to talk about and grieve the loss of their loved ones and safety. Teachers have discussions in their classrooms. And still- it is not enough. We can show videos to staff about a community living in violence. We can have community based organizations come and talk to staff and families about the violence and how to fight it. We begin to dialogue. We can open our school doors to be a safe haven. We reach out to the families in need. We are the safe outlet for many of the children. Knowing the violence is not going

to end tomorrow (and preparing for the inevitable- yet another killing in our community), we persevere.

As we live in a multi-tiered society- so do our children. Often times I hear from my colleagues that community violence is a community problem and thus too immense to address in a school system. I beg to differ. If we do not begin that discussion with our staff and faculty how can we even begin to understand the magnitude of what our children are living in. Recently I was at a conference where the current Superintendent for SFUSD, Carlos Garcia, made a comment that he is suffering from PTSD. The audience laughed. As Mr. Garcia continued speaking he spoke of the shootings and various forms of violence he lived through when growing up in Los Angeles. His mention of PTSD was not a joke. As I am aware that community violence affects our students I also am making the decision to “do things differently.” Clearly the approach has to change. So my question to all: “How do you see community violence affecting your clients and schools? And secondly, how do you begin to address them?”

As an agent of change I am always wondering what others are doing. If you are willing, please e-mail your response to the CSJ Listserv or directly to me at: [lvargas@earthlink.net](mailto:lvargas@earthlink.net) for possible inclusion in the next newsletter. Thank you.

### **CSJ Call for Nominations**

*We invite nominations for the following positions:*

- ◆ **President Elect (3 year term)**
- ◆ **Governing Council Representative (3 year term)**
- ◆ **Treasurer (2 year term)**
- ◆ **Community Representative (2 year term)**
- ◆ **Counselor Representative (2 year term)**

*Please contact Hugh Crethar at  
[crethar@u.arizona.edu](mailto:crethar@u.arizona.edu) for nomination  
information. Nominations are due to ACA by the end  
of March 2008.*

# Social Justice and Mainstream Theories of Counseling

Thomas W. Blume

Associate Professor, Oakland University



Dr. Blume

The growing social justice focus in counseling faces its skeptics. Some of our peers doubt the relevance of social justice concerns, saying “there will always be inequities in society” and “I had a hard time, too—they should just get over it.” Others in our profession believe in justice concerns but also believe that traditional approaches are working—they say that the counseling field has always been a force for social change. Both groups express frustration about an “obsessive” focus on access, power, privilege, and marginalization. After teaching counseling theories for many years, I have come to believe that this confusion could be a result of mainstream theories and their ways of representing oppression and its effects.

I would start with the thought that mental health professionals have generally taken a passive role regarding the lives of those around them. This traditional role involves sitting in an office and waiting for people to come seeking help. Professionals are then presented with clients who are malfunctioning, who represent the non-conforming exception, and the theories that have been most popular for the past 100 years are ones that explained why this individual, as opposed to another individual, has come looking for assistance. It’s not the situation, say the white male theorists, because other people are managing the situation.

How is the particular individual or family seen as the source of the problem? Rogers, for example, called on the client to reject *conditions of worth* that are interfering with a clear view of reality. The malfunctioning client is helped, through contact with the counselor, to get in touch with an internal *valuing process* that rejects external control. In this new, internally directed and therefore *authentic* way of living, the client is expected to find that the world is fair and just. Beck’s version of client-blaming asks the client to monitor *automatic thoughts* and learn a new kind of *self-talk* that will eliminate overgeneralization and depressive thinking. Minuchin’s version tells the client family to *reestablish the hierarchy*.

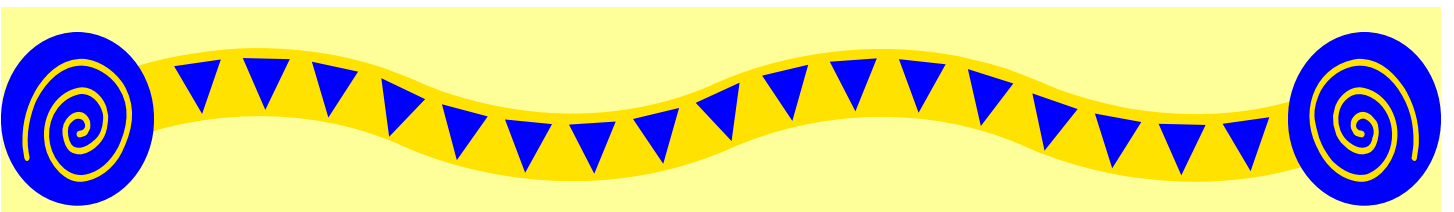
These theorists seem to say that clients have created their own problems. Talking with a qualified professional, according to these experts, will make it obvious that there are no limits to what sincere, hard-working people can do. The only limits lie on the inside. We continue to tell our students and our communities that these disempowering, colonialist theories are essential tools for counselors.

But when our graduates go out into the real world, they lose confidence in these theories. It seems disrespectful to tell a disabled, unemployed mother of 3 preschool children that we don’t know how she can change her life but she will feel better if she talks about it.

It should not surprise us when many counselors report that they have abandoned the idea of having a theoretical basis for their work and have become theoretical pragmatists. Yes, they say, life is not fair, and our clients are victims of injustice, and being a counselor gives one no special tools to help in these situations. When the core counseling function seems to have lost its power, social action offers a real way of making a difference in clients’ lives. Advocacy and direct service offer real opportunities for change.

But abandoning theory is not the only solution. I propose that the time is right for changing the theoretical base of our profession. We can become more sensitive to the assumptions built into our traditional language and work toward eliminating messages of disconfirmation. But we can also develop a new generation of theories that better represent individual and social change. If we view our clients not as carriers of internal, self-limiting automatic thoughts, for example, but instead see them as victims of negative race and gender discourses, the message may be different. Furthermore, it is possible that we can not only name the oppression in clients’ lives but also help them use new skills and strategies to reposition themselves in an unfair social environment. We need theories that tell us what this process might look like, that point us toward those skills and strategies.

With new theoretical tools, counselors in a future world may be equipped to help communities, families, and individuals to challenge the limits—internal and external—that preserve inequality and protect privilege.



# The Changing Tide in Counseling

## Hugh C. Crethar, CSJ President (2007-2008)

### University of Arizona



The past few years have been exciting in the development of social justice in the field of counseling. We have increasingly moved the direction of focusing on the convergence of contextual, systemic and cultural variables in our counseling approaches and theory. Increasing numbers of counselors are arriving at the realization that a great many of the challenges that our clientele face are ultimately due to systemic and systematic variables that are designed to serve some people better than others.

For instance, in the field of school counseling, student advocacy and systemic change are two of the four themes of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005). In the model, Reese House argues that school counselors should ultimately “fix the system, and not the student.” This model of counseling takes a clear stance that counselors who work in school settings have a primary responsibility to serve every student. Implicit in this stance is the understanding that the great majority of our school systems are not serving our students appropriately. It is both archaic and inaccurate to assume that the challenges that our students experience are all results of individual choices. School counselors are increasingly encouraged to act as leaders who develop counseling programs focused on collaborative, systemic change that serves every student in every school. Therefore, responsible counselors oppose policies that maintain inequitable funding of public schools based on property taxes, support policies that treat students of all sexual/affectional orientations with equity, support educational practices that encourage increasing numbers of women to work in science and math-related fields, and support educational practices that close the achievement gap.

Counselors who work in mental health, community, rehabilitation, military, college, career, occupational and couples and family settings also serve clientele who face systematic marginalization and oppression on a regular basis. It is our duty as ethical counselors to empower our clientele while simultaneously advocating for systemic change that increases equity, access and participation in society. Such changes will bring greater wellness for all and ultimately a more

harmonious world.

César Chávez once explained that “once social change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot un-educate the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. You cannot oppress the person who is not afraid anymore. We have looked into the future and the future is ours.” It is my hope that social justice continues to flourish as the “fifth force” in counseling. We will know that Counselors for Social Justice has done its job within counseling as soon as we have made our existence obsolete. This will come when social justice counseling is infused in all theory and practice in counseling. The tide is changing in the field of counseling.



Having grown up on a beach in the Pacific Ocean, I learned at an early age that the tide is not something that can be stopped.

## *A Note from the Editors*

**Hello Fellow Activists!**

**We would like to thank everybody who has contributed to the newsletter thus far, and invite all interested writers to contact us. The deadline to submit for the next newsletter is May 1st. As always, we welcome feedback and comments from our members and friends.**

**Please feel free to contact either of us.**



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*Newsletter of Counselors for Social Justice,  
a Division of the American Counseling Association*

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