

Tools of oppression and control in counseling: Making the invisible, visible¹

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Abstract

In the last few years the literature in mental health work and ethnic minorities, seems to reflect the need to take in consideration the effects of oppression and in particular the after-effects of colonialism during the counseling process. However, the tools used to gain power and control over others, as well as the stages to reach a colonized state has not been addressed. Therefore, this manuscript intends to name both the tools of oppression as well as the stages of colonization in an attempt to raise consciousness, critical thinking and personal liberation, as an outcome of the counseling process, a process that according with Freire (2000) and Martín Baró (1998) lead to change. Implications for counseling and clinical practice issues are included, as well as future directions for research and practice.

Keywords: colonization; liberations; counseling

Resumen

En los últimos años, la literatura en el campo del trabajo en salud mental y las minorías étnicas, parece reflejar la necesidad de tomar en consideración los efectos de la opresión y, en particular, las etapas del proceso de colonialismo durante el proceso de consejería. Sin embargo, las herramientas utilizadas para ganar poder y control sobre los demás, así como las etapas para llegar a un estado colonizado, no se han abordado. Por lo tanto, este manuscrito tiene la intención de nombrar tanto las herramientas de opresión, así como las etapas de la colonización en un intento de aumentar la conciencia, el pensamiento crítico y la liberación personal, como el resultado del proceso de consejería, un proceso que, de acuerdo con Freire (2000) y Martín Baró (1994) llevan al cambio. Implicaciones del proceso de consejería y práctica clínica se incluyen, además posibles metas futura en la investigación y la práctica clínica.

Palabras clave: colonización; liberación; consejería

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Goodman and Gorski (2015) provided a number of scholarship chapters about colonialism and the effects of colonialism in counseling. According to the authors, Western concepts of research and knowledge have dominated what is known not only about education and counseling, but also about what is known about all people. Smith (1999) and Trimble (2009) further argued that individuals with the power to define and to articulate how knowledge looks like might distort, overlook, exaggerate and extend ignorance in order to preserve their power at the expense of others. These sentiments are echoed by the writings and suggestions of Fanon about power and colonialism (as cited in Bulhan, 1985). While understanding Fanon is not an easy task, his overall message indicated that in order to reach decolonization is important to consider the following factors: language, violence, and, the creation of consciousness in the form of critical thinking. This last factor was used by Freire (2000) in the development of Critical Consciousness Theory and was further developed by Martín-Baró (1998) in his development of the Liberation Psychology Theory.

In more recent history, specifically in Ireland, Moane (2003; 2014), using liberation psychology principles, highlighted the six tools (mechanisms) that colonialism and patriarchal societies use to control people and to maintain power. These tools are also used in the United States (U.S.) to keep minorities under control and in check. These tools are present in schools and universities curriculum, which serve as the indoctrination of minorities into the dominant culture (Goodman et al., 2015). According with Moane the tools are as follows: (1) violence through military and/or police as well as battery and rape (structural violence is also part of this tool); (2) political exclusion via lack of voting rights and restriction of assembly as well as to assess votes and attitudes toward who can vote; (3) economic exploitation via seizing the land, who can own properties, low wages, and high taxes; (4) control of sexuality via enforcement of motherhood, birth control, and marriage; (5) cultural control via determining who have access to education and curriculum and what is included in it, erasing of actual history, stereotypes, and control of media; and (6) fragmentation via control of immigration, tokenism, and competition.

In addition to these mechanisms, the counseling literature has little information about colonization and the stages of colonization (Torres-Rivera, Torres Fernandez & Hendricks, 2013). Defining colonization is challenging given that it is a process that involve economics, politics, and, psychological variables and is not a simple process instead it is a complex one that includes the control of a group by another. This control includes real estate, political, psychological and social worlds, as well as sociocultural worldviews (Comas-Díaz, 2007; Tate, Torres Rivera, & Brown, 2013).

Thus, Moane's (2003), description of the colonizer's tools is an excellent one. However, a simple examination of these tools will only result in an incomplete comprehension and understanding of these complex processes. Therefore, it is suggested that the examination of these tools in conjunction with the stages of colonialism will provide the reader a better understanding of how these tools were utilized at each stage of colonization. Moreover, it is these authors' assertion that an understanding of the stages of colonialism is imperative in order to make these tools visible in everyday interaction. By making the tools of oppression visible, individuals will be able to create their own unique reality which, is in tune with Freire's traditional (2000) approach of change. According to Freire and Montero (2000; 2009) problematization is the action of

questioning one's own reality. Freire pointed out to the process as follows: problematization -> reflection -> critical consciousness -> action and/or change.

Although when describing the stages of colonialism and discussing colonization could give the reader the impression that this process is provided within a historical context; recent events and experiences of minorities in the U.S. are telling a different reality. This reality is that the colonization process has not stopped but rather has taken a different shape, and it has been renamed. For example, in the case of international economic colonization, the term globalization has been coined but it is just another form of colonization. In the context of preparing mental health professionals and developing curriculum, the continuation of an extended colonization is taking place (Torres Rivera, 2013). That is the U.S. have been exporting their educational system to prepare mental health professionals now for a while, thus, by that exporting their view and perspective of mental illness and how to treat it (Greenberg, 2010; Watters, 2010). While, this by itself is a form of colonialism, the most prevalent part of this extension is the curriculum based on the American beliefs systems which have been label as the White Male System by Schaeff (1985).

Therefore, in explaining and describing the different stages of colonization as well as what particular tool(s) are employed by the colonizer to exert control and domination over the colonized can assist the colonized people regain their independence (liberty) and power over their reality. Although in reality all tools are used in every stage of the colonization process it is also true that in the later stages of colonialism, structural violence, fragmentation, and cultural control are more prevalent as they are subtler than the other three tools (political exclusion, economic exploitation, and control of sexuality). In academia while more subtle the development of curriculum seems to exert cultural control by means of historical cleansing and by silencing the voices of those who are not male and in the top of the social pyramid (Moane, 2014).

Furthermore, while, the tools of the colonizer are naturally linked to the process of colonization (Enriquez, 1994; Moane, 2003; 2014); colonization is not a simple process instead it is a complex one that includes the control of a group by another. Laenui (2000), by means of Virgilio Enriquez's (1994), provided one of the best descriptions of the five stages of colonization. These stages included particular characteristics and behavior from both the colonizer and the colonized. The first stage is the stage of *denial and withdrawal*. According to Laenui, this stage is characterized by the colonizer looking at indigenous people as individuals without culture, morality, or having nothing to offer as a culture group. During this stage is not uncommon that indigenous people deny and reject their culture and society. Laenui further posited that in this stage the colonizer use violence through military and/or police as well as battery, rape, structural violence; political exclusion; economic exploitation; and control of sexuality. The tools at this stage are more blatant. The use of these tools continues into the second stage of colonization, which is *destruction and eradication* (Laenui). In this second stage, the colonizer is more aggressive in their conquest by adding control over the culture in addition to violence, political exclusion economic exploitation, and control of sexuality.

The third stage of colonialism is the *denigration, belittlement, and insulting* stage (Laenui, 2000). In this stage, the colonizer uses all tools of oppression, particularly structural violence and conventional violence. Laenui further stated, the control of the culture takes a violent approach by creating new educational, health, and legal systems, religions (churches) and by "evilizing" every

aspect of the indigenous system. According to Laenui, this stage is followed by a period of *composure under the surface, accommodation, and tokenism* stage. It is these authors' assertion that minorities in the U. S. still experiencing this stage through education and social media via fragmentation and cultural control.

Finally, Enriquez (1994) named the last stage *transformation and exploitation*. In this stage, the colonizer has tried everything and the colonized have resisted every attempt to assimilate or to die away. Thus, the dominant culture absorbed the dominated culture via exploitation and incorporation of some traditions and/or folklore. However, this is done by economic exploitation while still imposing control via structural violence, political exclusion, cultural control via curriculum design and by erasing real history, stereotypes, and control of media; and fragmentation via tokenism, and competition.

While referring to psychology and mental health the Jesuit priest, Ignacio Martín-Baró (1998) addressed the colonial nature of all social sciences in general as well as education and socialization in his development of liberation psychology. Martín-Baró suggested that psychology, in particular, should be refocused such that individuals' mental health and social problems are viewed in the context of larger, unjust sociopolitical structures that are created when people are colonized and subjugated. Martín-Baró also suggested that most psychological-social problems have their roots in oppressive social and political structures and that the colonization of the psychological and social worlds is at the core of what many people would call "psychological disorders" and personal disorganization. Lastly, Martín-Baró posited that education and socialization into colonial view would prevent people for liberation, as this reality was not their reality but that of the colonizer.

What Martín-Baró (1998) pointed out seems to resonate with curriculum developed by accrediting organizations and followed by schools and universities in the U. S. since universities and other higher education institutions gave these psychological and educational traditions powerful influence. In other words, it set forth sociopolitical structures in which both education and professional training would be built. Even though, these notions of education and knowledge as well as how knowledge is shared might be considered progressive, it still nested within a colonial Western framework that relies on universal, reductionist, and expert-based scientific principles. As a result, these fields (education and psychology) could be seen in complicity with the overarching maintenance of Western domination of social, psychological, and scientific thought (colonization of the mind).

Therefore, a clear understanding of the colonization process and globalization will allow individuals to understand that we have lost valuable data and meaning. That is, we cannot understand people's knowledge from a different worldview without an understanding of the actual etiology of colonization and oppression and subsequent conditions. This statement is also consistent with Laenui's (2000) assertion that decolonization must begin with rediscovery and recovery of what was lost during the colonization process followed by discovery. The identification of the tools of oppression such as violence, exclusion, exploitation, control, and fragmentation (Moane, 2003; 2014) provide the bases to set forward a decolonization process by igniting reflection and critical thinking.

Furthermore, as previously stated, the bases and mechanism utilized to obtain new knowledge are also built on that universal, expert-based notions of what the Western (Euro-American) worldviews understand and defines as knowledge and education. These frameworks and in this case curriculums, are defined and crafted by groups and individuals in power and not by the average citizen and/or colonized populations. Moreover, despite a number of publications that seemed to be including voices of everyday people (e.g., Constantine, 2002; Constantine, 2007; Kim, Ng, & Ahn, 2009; Owen, Leach, Wampold, & Rodolfa, 2011), a closer examination of research indicates that these studies are also clearly based on universal, expert-based notions of what is knowledge, which denied indigenous ways of knowing.

Additionally, the conventional goal of educational research of collecting and analyzing data within expert-based frameworks and curriculums create and support stagnant theoretical structures that in the name of science and education is applied across contexts and individuals. Moreover, this action needs to be interpreted as the continuation of the colonization process and maintenance of the status quo by not promoting critical thinking and new (re) discovering. At the research level, defining and investigating new knowledge as well as the forgotten (or uncovered) one in the pursuit of critical thinking, must be conceptualized as an on-going process rather than a gradual collection of content pieces that can be used to create static models of such knowledge or “banking on education” (Freire, 2000; Torres-Rivera, Phan, Maddux, Wilbur, & Garrett, 2001).

These static theoretical models of gaining new knowledge and education are consequently used to filter data and applied it in a universal manner across contexts (as stated earlier). In contrast, a decolonization model that promotes people to intentionally and continually reexamine truths gleaned from investigations, utilizing reflection and critical thinking, seems to allow a more inclusive and realistic way of getting new knowledge. This is a recurring process of collaborative discovery and dialogue with the community as a whole. Furthermore, this process creates a more egalitarian and collaborative atmosphere. Once an egalitarian and collaborative context have been created, it will be possible to take full advantage of expert research and wisdom in a non-colonial or non-patriarchal manner. Moreover, Watkins and Shulman (2008) described a conflict between a critical view of the past and a creative view of the future by indicating that there is a movement that look at the past with a deconstructive, dysfunctional, dissociative, and destructive thinking (colonial view) while another movement is looking forward, toward new ability for creating, voicing, connecting, empathizing, and celebrating everyone in community (liberation view).

Therefore, according to the before mentioned view, the purpose of research is an effort to discover new knowledge that will inform effective, socially just practice(s) and living. However, we seem to have suffered from the “globalization syndrome”, in which Western worldviews are assumed to be the only standards to discover new knowledge. As such, we are risking leaving out real knowledge that does not fit into the reductionist and limiting perspective of Western values mentality.

In conclusion, the understanding and recognition of the tools used by the colonizer to gain and maintain power and control over others (i.e., violence; exclusion; exploitation; control; and fragmentation) as well as the stages of colonization (i.e., denial and withdrawn; destruction and eradication; denigration, belittlement, and insult; surface accommodation and tokenism; and transformation and exploitation) although complex, allows individuals to acquire knowledge that is based on multiple experiences, histories, theories, and valuing new and old. This particular

approach of creating critical thinking and consciousness (problematization → reflection → critical consciousness → action and/or change) offers a framework that organizes and facilitates the understanding of the numerous helping, educational, and psychological approaches that humankind has developed. It recognizes that theories, research methodologies, and knowledge of counseling and education developed in the Western world and those helping models indigenous to non-western world cultures are inherently right or wrong, good or bad. The following section will present the counseling implications for counselors of recognizing the utilizing their knowledge of the colonization process, the tools used by the colonizer to oppress and control people and the creation of a counseling environment that lead to problematization → reflection → critical consciousness → action/change.

Counseling Implications

The multicultural counseling literature defined counseling as: as a dual helping process where the counselor utilized interventions and modalities that defined the goals of the counseling outcome parallel with the life experiences and cultural values of their clients. Strives to understand client identities and to include individual, group, and universal dimensions. Additionally, advocates for the use of culture specific strategies and roles in the healing process, and balances the importance of individualism and collectivism in the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of client and client systems (Sue & Torino, 2005).

The process that is describe in this piece is a decolonization process that takes place during the counseling process based on the theoretical foundations that by promoting problematization and fostering critical thinking, clients will be able to see and choose their own reality and well-being. However, the greatest point here is to help clients to understand that the aftermath of colonization still at work thru the tools of oppression and that by recognizing those tools, clients can re-discover their strengths and gifts. Given that it is important for counselor to be clear that in counseling there is no real division between theory and practice and as such is more important to work with clients with what they have and their resiliencies. While this applies mainly to the clinical counseling practice it also pertains to research and scholarship. For clinical counselors we suggest that a counselor should never be separated from the process of developing theories of counseling effectiveness, beyond the status quo. For scholars and researchers, we suggest that they should be founding their research process and questions on the perceptions and expertise of clients and community.

Future Directions

Counseling as a profession has an opportunity to decolonize or deconstruct the understanding and definitions of the counseling process through collaborative engagement with our clients in the research (gaining knowledge) and counseling process. The multicultural counseling as well as the social justice movements in the counseling profession were founded on the assumption that many clients were being treated unjustly within traditional, universal models of counseling practice. Thus, we are proposing that the counseling profession needs to move further in the practice of transformation through completely throwing off the assumptions of expert-based “truth” as the foundation for determining what counseling should look like.

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