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September 2023

## **Culturally Responsive Practices in Graduate Training: Challenges, Strategies, and Recommendations**

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### **Recommended Citation**

Ali, K., Dhani, J., & Luna, O. (2023). Culturally Responsive Practices in Graduate Training: Challenges, Strategies, and Recommendations. *The Journal of Advancing Education Practice*, 4(2).

<https://openriver.winona.edu/jaep/vol4/iss2/3>

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**Culturally Responsive Practices in Graduate Training:  
Challenges, Strategies, and Recommendations**

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states there is no conflict of interest.

### **Abstract**

Three women of color provide their perspectives on the relevance of incorporating culture and race into graduate course discussions, activities, and assignments. The authors provide a description of their upbringing to highlight how their personal experiences shaped their perspective on culture and race in educational settings. They discuss challenges of delivering instruction to encompass culture. In addition, instructors outline strategies they have implemented to incorporate a culturally responsive practice. Last, authors present recommendations to urge faculty and students to advocate for culturally responsive practices.

*Keywords:* applied behavior analysis, biases, racism, culturally responsive pedagogy, rehabilitation and addiction counseling

### **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Graduate Training: Challenges, Strategies, and Recommendations**

Women of color (WoC) represent a small proportion of US faculty (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022), likely due to a myriad of factors including the psychological, behavioral, and structural institutional climate (Hurtado et al., 1999; McClain & Perry, 2017; Milem et al., 2005). Because WoC have historically been excluded and marginalized in academic environments (Gause, 2021), their contributions to academic and research endeavors are likely to be devalued (Turner, 2002). Due to their qualitatively different history and experiences than their White colleagues, WoC bring valuable perspectives and worldviews as educators (Hernandez et al., 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1996). For example, WoC can provide opportunities for students to develop critical consciousness (Freire, 1970 as cited in Borrero et al., 2016). Critical consciousness is a skill in which students can identify social inequalities experienced by historically marginalized and excluded groups and use that information to act to make changes (El Amin et al., 2017).

One-way administrators, department chairs, and program directors can support WoC (Borrero et al., 2016) is by prioritizing, funding, and valuing culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). According to Ladson-Billings (1996), “CPR is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 17-18). The act of being culturally responsive in one’s instruction is to highlight the importance of cultures of marginalized groups. WoC can draw upon their past experiences during their instruction to interrupt patterns of oppression (Akom, 2003).

Furthermore, higher education administrators, to be competitive and responsive to the changing student population, must acknowledge and encourage the integration of the cultural identities people of color bring to the university setting (Biglan & Embry, 2013; Gay, 2004). These academicians and graduate students face barriers and marginalization in higher education, which makes teaching and learning challenging, especially when attempting to change the status quo (Bavishi et al., 2010; Brown, 2020; Gingles, 2021; Hernandez et al., 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1996). Likewise, WoC often face the loss of their cultural identities in academia (Essed, 2000). According to Sinanan (2016), WoC might feel obligated to *mask*, that is, portray two identities.

At our regional, comprehensive university, we (first and third authors) are tenure-track faculty, part of a departmental cohort of WoC, who teach students in rehabilitation and addictions counseling and applied behavior analysis. It is clear we are part of the minority. Specifically, of the 1.5 million US faculty, only 9.8% of faculty are Hispanic/Latinx and 7.2% Black or African American (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). At the time of hiring, we were appreciative

to have the opportunity to be in an academic environment. In our short time, we have found these academic spaces have been unsupportive. For instance, when we encourage students to be creative in their coursework, urging them to examine old assumptions, this has been unsupported by colleagues (Melaku & Beeman, 2020). In addition, we have seen and experienced times where our colleagues fail to acknowledge our input, academic success, or research endeavors.

Despite our initial optimism (which quickly faded, a phenomenon outlined in Brown III, 2020), we have experienced the emotional, laborious toll of holding historically excluded identities in academia (Bavishi et al., 2010; Hernandez et al., 2014). When faced with challenges we have leaned on each other as we struggled to learn the institution's administrative, bureaucratic, and political policies regarding instruction (Hernandez et al., 2014). In addition, we encountered an institutional atmosphere in which culturally responsive pedagogy is valued (as communicated by White folks), but simultaneously unsupported. As a result, we sought advice and community among ourselves, during a time of extreme isolation and distress. This reaction (racial battle fatigue; Arnold et al., 2016; Smith, 2006) is common and well documented in which psychological distress including guilt and stress that arises because of racism. Through our conversations, research endeavors, and professional development opportunities, we found a shared passion to ensure our students become culturally humble. As stated by Hernandez and colleagues, “we found it necessary to pool our limited resources to engage in collaborative research in an institution where research is hardly recognized and barely rewarded” (2014, p. 545).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this reflective paper is to provide three WoC perspectives at our midsize, Midwestern university master's programs (rehabilitation and addiction counseling and applied behavior analysis; [ABA]). We (first and third author; hereafter referred to as KA and OL) prepare graduate students to work with vulnerable populations in community settings. We share the relevance of incorporating culture and race discussions into our graduate level courses and our attempts to integrate culturally responsible pedagogy. First, we begin with our historical background and journey to our current position. Next, we highlight our challenges in delivering and receiving culturally responsive instruction from instructor and student perspective (hereafter referred to as JD). Then, we discuss our respective teaching strategies that we have implemented to combat these challenges. Finally, we provide specific recommendations to a) faculty teaching graduate students and b) students who are enrolled in graduate training. Through this discussion, we aim to push the conversation forward on how to expand the development and research of training programs to prepare culturally responsive professionals. Finally, we hope this paper serves as a product in the scientific record to document our academic experiences and sets the occasion for higher

education graduate programs to investigate, research, and create a more inclusive context for WoC.

### **Authors' Background**

I, (KA), was born in East Africa and arrived in Toronto, Canada at 17. I have lived in three different countries and speak four languages. As soon as I was granted a work permit, I worked at a dry cleaner as a cashier and saved around \$800.00 before I enrolled in high school. Since I had no idea what career I wanted to pursue, I majored in economics because I excelled in it. After taking an elective, psychology class for a week, I switched my major. I graduated with two undergraduate degrees: BA with Honors in Psychology and a BA in Family Relations. In my final year, I approached my thesis professor and asked him for guidance in pursuing graduate school in psychology. To my surprise, the professor informed me it was impossible to be accepted into graduate school with my grade point average (a B+ average). The professor informed me to pursue my interest in psychology, I should apply to educational programs, hinting that these were *easier* programs which might grant me admission. He also referred me to a doctoral student of color. He said she was someone “I could relate to.” I was disappointed with his feedback and his lack of mentoring, a common experience for students of color (Brunsmas et al., 2017). However, I was glad he referred me to a Black student who was pursuing an advanced degree in psychology. Often students of color prefer to be mentored by those who share similar identities and backgrounds (Brunsmas et al., 2017; Santos & Reigadas, 2002). The best indicator of student’s success is receiving quality mentoring (Brunsmas et al., 2017). She coached me on how to apply for graduate programs. Without this Black woman’s help, I would have never reached the point in my career in pursuing tenure in the rehabilitation and addiction field. My story highlights the need for students of color to be properly mentored, which has been previously shown in past research (Brunsmas et al., 2017; Dixon-Reeves, 2003; LaVant et al., 1997). In addition, this pivotal event with my advisor set the stage for uncertainty and discomfort when asking questions, soliciting advice, or recruiting feedback from White folks. Now that I am in an influential position, I still experience discomfort in sharing skills and knowledge I have attained based on my unique but important cultural perspective.

I (JD) am a student enrolled in a MS graduate program in behavior analysis. I was born in Canada, and my parents were born in India. I consider myself a part of the South Asian community; my religion is Sikhism. My parents raised me with a mixture of Western and Indian cultures. I grew up in a city with many Indian immigrant families. Most of my classmates shared the same ethnocultural background as me. Often, I was comforted by growing up with individuals whose history related to my family’s journey of coming to Canada and establishing themselves as immigrants. On the other hand, I have witnessed

members of my ethnocultural background face racist remarks such as “go back to your country” and ridiculing their accents. I spoke Punjabi fluently as a child, but as I got older my immediate family shifted to primarily speaking English. I can still understand Punjabi, but I speak with a lower level of accuracy. My parents and culture valued attaining a high level of academic achievement; therefore, I put a lot of pressure on myself to attain successful outcomes in academic settings. I obtained a bachelor’s degree in sciences with a major in biology with the goal of going to medical school. After working in a behavioral context, I had a passion for the field.

Although there was pressure to succeed academically, I found learning (e.g., reading about science, watching documentaries on how the brain works, and recalling information through studying) reinforcing. I continue to want to know more about the world whether that be history, the human body or behavior-related content. Despite my MS program being challenging, I have persisted due to rewarding nature of gaining knowledge. Therefore, when I receive high marks, it is highly reinforcing to continue with academic endeavours. Additionally, as a BIPOC graduate student, I have advocated for culturally responsive education. I want individuals in my community to have accessible resources and be confident their service provider will respect and honor their values.

Despite the positive effects of high familial value on education and the reinforcing process of learning, I have noticed problematic behavioral patterns emerged. This includes experiencing anxiety and impatience while waiting for my marks. No matter my past educational success, I am convinced I will not be successful the next time. Therefore, I need reassurance, clarity, and precise instructions from professors. Additionally, I have questioned if I have the right to advocate on my communities’ behalf. I second-guess my voice but then I remember I personally value aspects of my culture.

I (OL) am the daughter of a man who fled El Salvador in the 1970s to escape an oppressive regime in which it was a common occurrence for college students to go missing. I imagine he thought his life in the U.S. would be full of hope, promise, and peace. However, his immigrant story was full of obstacles: failing to finish his academic journey, struggling with alcohol abuse, divorcing my mother, and passing away tragically. I am also the daughter of woman who experienced a life riddled with substance and parental abuse and mental health concerns. As a toddler, I did speak Spanish; however, by growing up in suburban and rural Midwest communities, this skill set quickly left my repertoire. I was one of handful of children of color in my school and my friend groups. Growing up, children and adults ask, “Where I was *really* from,” and I learned America was never a sufficient answer (a phenomenon known as perpetual foreigner stereotype, Huynh et al., 2011). While with Latinos, I was teased for my broken Spanish. My mom, a student parent, completed her associate degree at a

community college and bachelor's degree at a private university. As a child, I always knew we used social services, and I remember the fear and embarrassment of using paper food stamps.

Education was highly valued in my household. Due to grades and financial needs, I earned scholarships to attend a prestigious university. After two years, I withdrew due to missing home and not fitting in. I moved home and attended a small, private college. I finished my undergraduate degree, while volunteering in an operant research lab, maintaining a full-time job as a barista and part-time job working with an autistic child. I trekked to the U.S. South to obtain my master's and doctoral degrees. In my graduate program, I was one of two students of color in our cohort, one of the most diverse cohorts in the program's history at the time.

Given my history, academic environments are reinforcing. As a young child, I waited for my mother at her community college cafeteria, sat in on her classes, or read in the campus library. To me, the educational setting was (and *is*) transformative. I found equity in the learning process, meaning with hard work one could master a subject area. During my mom's classes I witnessed adults across gender identities, race, ethnicities, and religious practices studying, teaching, and conversing about psychology and social work, my mother's passions. I see now, these experiences are ones I continue to seek out. Despite academic environments being associated with a history of reinforcement, I have minimized my cultural experiences when conversing with colleagues. This avoidance is an attempt to prevent discomfort, fear, and further recognition of how my background, identities, and experiences are qualitatively different. Professional assimilation (Bechard & Gragg, 2020) is common in academia, and it serves to distance faculty of color from their experiences. As noted by Monzó and SooHoo (2014), "too often the voices of women of color are benevolently rewritten or transposed by the voices of the dominant group who tell or explain our stories" (p. 156).

By sharing our backgrounds, we show how our life experiences impact our academic interactions. As WoC, we know the academic environment was not built for our voices, stories, nor presence. Despite institutional and systemic structures historically excluding people who look like us, we have important contributions to add to the scholarly record regarding academic instruction.

### **Teaching Challenges Encountered**

Many challenges arise for WoC in academia. These challenges are not solely limited to creating culturally responsive instruction (e.g., Borrero et al., 2016; Gay, 2004; Li, 2020). Instructors of color are likely to experience emotional labor (Berheide et al., 2022; Miller et al., 2019; Steele, 2018) and encounter microaggressions (Arnold et al., 2016). It is important to outline these teaching challenges to spark a discussion on how institutions can improve instruction.



### **Navigating Classroom Dynamics**

In our campus graduate courses, most students are White. As instructors who hold historically excluded identities, we experience stress and anxiety when discussing our intersectionality, experiences, and culturally related topics to White students, a common experience for WoC in academia (Arnold et al., 2016; Bavishi et al., 2010; Gingles, 2021). Furthermore, discussing our intersectionality makes us feel as though we are selling a product to a silent, disengaged audience. Ladson-Billings (1996) found student silence to be a common behavior when teaching White students about race. According to Ladson-Billings (1996), silence in the classroom may be a result of feeling oppressed by the White students whether real or perceived. White students may also use silence as a weapon to derail or stop discussion in the classroom. Likewise, instilling an informed perspective in our students when examining clinical issues is a struggle.

That said, the “classroom” behaves differently in online courses. For example, OL teaches courses to both international and domestic students in a distance format. This experience is a stark contrast to what OL and KA describe in their campus classes. As a distance student (JD), I have found classmates engaging in challenging discussions surrounding racial bias and cultural responsiveness. Even though I am a part of a historically excluded community, I was comfortable sharing my experiences in how we could become more culturally responsive practitioners. Notably, I have the luxury of writing out my answers to challenging questions surrounding culture and race (e.g., “what biases do you have when providing service”), worrying less about commenting in an offensive manner or engaging in problematic silence. The live campus experience might present difficulties when discussing cultural topics or racial bias due to its finite time to respond, which also is exacerbated by the demographic makeup of the class.

### **Selecting Course Materials**

As instructors, we also struggled to create culturally responsive syllabi that will help students assess and treat the varying needs of the communities we serve. We want to ensure our textbooks, readings, videos, and other educational sources not only represent the diverse nature of our clients, but also represent various racial and ethnic profiles of professionals in our respective fields. Though a priority in our respective classrooms and teaching philosophies, we receive little institutional support, guidance, and feedback to prioritize such endeavors, a common experience by faculty members of color (Hernandez et al., 2014). As a result, this creates a draining practice in which course material selection is a taxing endeavor. Even when we are successful in potentially identifying relevant course materials, striving to identify if the materials meet our profession’s criteria for evidence-based practices is an arduous task. As instructors, we are in a continuous cycle between ensuring our students are versed in what our field

deems important while also ensuring our course materials represent folks about and by diverse communities.

Similarly, we recognize research in our disciplines is flawed. In psychology and related fields, research outcomes are based on participants from White-educated, industrialized, rich democracy (WEIRD) societies (Cheon et al., 2020). Cheon et al. (2020) found in their review of 5000 articles in leading psychology journals that the U.S. and other western countries (i.e., Canada and Australia) barely mention sample demographics in article titles. However, if the researchers recruited historically excluded communities, the sample's demographics were stated in some fashion in the periodical titles. According to these authors, conclusions about WEIRD samples are more likely to be generalized to *all* humans when compared to findings from non-WEIRD populations. Similarly, there is a lack of description in behavior-analytic research about the culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds of participants (Deochand & Costello, 2022; Jones et al., 2020).

From a student's perspective (JD), I appreciate the efforts *some* instructors work toward curating course materials that represent a range of voices. I recognize instructors might have difficulties in presenting culturally responsive course materials because even our flagship peer-reviewed outlets fail to report or require specific demographic information (Jones et al., 2020). However, I crave more course materials that discuss, evaluate, and contain examples of cultural aspects. I want to be best prepared to work with a range of families. For example, as a behavior analyst, I might need to teach communication to an autistic client in their familial language to best communicate with their immediate family members. I want my course materials to reflect best-practices when working with immigrant and first-generation folks. I also see a need for course materials to outline challenges and present potential solutions when encountering language barriers in clinical practice (Deochand & Costello, 2022; Lim et al., 2018). Enhancing our instruction with greater incorporation of culture and race will also educate us on how to serve families in the future that are seeking treatment but lack awareness or knowledge on treatment avenues.

### **Designing Courses and Activities**

We have received solicited and unsolicited advice in how to arrange our courses. Notably, many of our colleagues have not experienced the classroom with our backgrounds. As a result, we have found their suggestions fail to align with being culturally responsive in the classroom. First, at our institution we have seen an (*over*)reliance on lectures. Lectures, expert-delivered oral presentations often paired with a visual aide containing an abundance of text, explicitly and implicitly communicate to students a stark power differential.

Second, we noticed our colleagues place a large emphasis on written communication, whether that be text-based discussion forums for online courses,

large course papers, or small assignments in which writing elements were required. Most of our students will not spend the bulk of their professional lives after graduate school engaging in formal writing. In our experiences, there is a misalignment in which what the students will do as future practitioners and how that aligns with the course activities.

My perspective (JD) is that lectures are helpful when the instructors provide the topic's main learning points. However, when instructors supplement their lectures with discussion as an avenue to talk through concepts and gain feedback comprehension, I have thrived. I have been in courses in which lectures are the dominant instructional format, and I have failed to demonstrate topic mastery. Thus, I would enter an exam or write a paper hoping I understood the contents of the course. Lectures (whether live or pre-recorded) do not provide a welcoming format for students to ask questions. It can be intimidating to be the student that interrupts a lecture to get clarification or to get validation that we understood a concept correctly. In my opinion, classes that are predominantly lecture based creates a large gap between professor and student, making it difficult to feel comfortable to address my concerns.

In addition, I (JD) have experienced course instructors emphasizing our need to write with a standard that mirrors expectations in academia. Though I understand the necessity of understanding and writing with academic rigor, I believe instructors must make written assignments applicable to what students will experience when working. For example, it might be worthwhile to develop assignments that mimic behavioral plans and reports submitted for funding or progress summaries outlining recommendations for a client. Additionally, many of us work with staff that do not have extensive ABA backgrounds and have varying educational experiences; therefore, we need to acquire a skill set that caters to effectively writing for staff from diverse backgrounds.

### **Classroom Strategies Executed**

Due to our challenges when navigating student interactions, selecting readings, and designing courses, we have implemented several strategies in our classrooms to facilitate culturally responsive pedagogy. Specifically, these practices include a) setting our expectations early, b) integrating a range of knowledge sources in courses, and c) designing courses to include active student responding and participation. We have found as instructors we have to take risks. Targeting sensitive topics, like racism and systematic barriers and confronting personal biases often elicit emotional responses from students.

### **Expectation Setting**

To address the likelihood of less diverse student pool in our classes and silent interactions in our classes, early in our courses we embed opportunities to provide rationale and self-reflection exercises to why examining our own culture, race, and identity, is important in our professions. Given their critical role as

future service providers, we inform students they need to be analytical of their own beliefs and values. We expect students to examine who they are as a person, what shaped their norms, values, and belief systems.

For example, in my (KA) courses, I encourage students to analyze where they were born and went to school using a cultural autobiography approach (Vontress et al., 1999) and identify how these factors have influenced who they have become as professionals. Also, students perform an exercise called personal-identity road map. Students draw a road map of incidents that have shaped their personal identity (e.g., *How did I learn about other races? How did this thinking shape me today?*). After this exercise, many students report exclusively being involved in white communities and expressed feeling cheated in their lives for not being exposed to different cultures.

As a first-year student in OL's behavior-analytic course (JD), I was optimistic about my educational experience. I recognized I was expected to address my racial and cultural biases and values. For example, the first two articles OL assigned were Machalicek et al. (2021) and Čolić et al. (2021). Both articles address racism, culturally responsive practice, and oppressive structures in behavior analysis. During the course, OL prompted us to discuss our racial/ethnic identities and biases that impact our interactions with families. We identified our biases by taking an implicit association test in which response times to positive and negative words to different dominant and historically marginalized identities (Greenwald et al., 1998) were assessed. OL encouraged us to be honest and address our biases through discussion with our classmates, to begin working through what might impact assessment and intervention with clients.

In addition, culture is discussed in relation to the social significance of our service delivery in multiple courses. The cultural values of an individual are important factors in determining what meaningful behavioral change is for that individual; thus, we have discussed the significance of involving family in the creation of behavioral programming to provide quality services that incorporates culture. Some professors create discussion questions focused on the lack of cultural aspects being addressed in the literature. Thus, provoking productive conversations on how to have a culturally responsive approach to ABA services.

### **Strategic Integration of Diverse Sources**

As instructors we make extraordinary efforts to ensure our courses highlight a range of voices and experiences. Often, we do not solely rely on peer-reviewed journal articles and textbooks. We make tough decisions about what should be included in our course content, balancing between what has historically been deemed acceptable with less traditional sources of media.

For example, I (KA) prioritize a video in my course rather than relying solely on the text or peer-reviewed papers. I show *The Color of Fear* (Lee et al., 1994), where group members discuss their experiences as Asian, Black, Latinx,

and Native American folks. I instruct students to analyze how the leader facilitates the group, and I ask students to write a reaction paper. Even though the video is dated, most students report being shocked and report the video is representative of current racial dynamics in the US.

Similarly, I (KA) use popular media sources to integrate a diverse range of perspectives. One source that has been helpful for advancing students' understanding of power, privilege, supremacy, and oppression has been the 21-day racial equity habit-building challenge (Moore, 2014). In this challenge, students are asked to read books, listen to podcasts, and notice how BIPOC characters are portrayed to heighten students' awareness of cultural biases. Though this challenge is from a popular media source and not directly relevant to counseling, it has been instrumental in increasing students' exposure to different voices and helping my students have a common language in our discussions.

We (KA and OL) also use books and articles by authors of color to demonstrate to students how these folks' approach, view, and discuss mental health concerns when compared to mainstream authors. We have found authors of color bring matters of race, ethnicities, and culture to the forefront. I (KA) use Vontress et al. (1999) and Walker (2020) *Unapologetic Guide to Black Mental Health* to highlight experiences of racial minority cultures. I (OL) have made efforts to decolonize my graduate course syllabi by including authors from a range of racial and ethnic identities covering content that has previously been dominated by White, male academics.

From a student's perspective, the diverse sources that some of my professors have made readily available have helped me become a more culturally aware clinician. I value the requirement for us to read or listen to voices from BIPOC members because it made me aware of the lack of BIPOC demographics in the field. It was through these resources I learned that the first step to addressing racism and promoting cultural inclusivity is by self-reflecting on our biases, so we can educate ourselves on how to provide anti-racist services. I found that course material selected from BIPOC authors emphasized the importance of the evolving expectations of practitioners to be more inclusive. For example, I learned that it is important to consider cultural variables when evaluating the factors influencing behavior. Without the inclusion of this content, we would be limited in our understanding of the importance of being culturally responsive practitioners and have a less thorough understanding of the role that client individuality plays in ABA services. Additionally, incorporating material that pushes students to analyze their own biases and investigate the histories that led to their own cultural values, promotes a generation of professionals that will have culturally responsive approaches.

### **Active Student Exercises**

To ensure our graduate courses are culturally responsive, we have wholeheartedly rejected relying on instructor-led activities like lectures or written assignments exams. Instead, we have created classes in which our students are active finders, critical analyzers, and presenters of content. These active exercises include prioritizing oral conversation and storytelling, which supporting evidence has shown historically excluded students value (Collins, 2011).

I (KA) encourage students to design research projects that require them to assess journal articles in counseling that examines interventions available to the BIPOC subjects compared to the White subjects. In my ethics course (OL), I have small groups of students take the lead of one section of our ethical code. Students are responsible for discussing the relevance of those codes for clinical practice through written, video, and audio formats. Additionally, students create assignments or assessments for their classmates based on the content of their assigned topics. From a student's perspective (JD), this class format promoted critical thinking and creativity in how to review the main points of our assigned content while simultaneously creating engaging materials.

Furthermore, to encourage connection, collaboration, sincerity, and authenticity during asynchronous courses, I (OL) have altered the structure of discussion boards. I provide autonomy to the students. Students have choices surrounding who is in their discussion group, their preferred response modality (text or video), and the questions they can address. Together, students conclude their conversations with a pressing question to me (OL). As a result, I have seen my students strive, achieving strong social presence among one another and enhanced participation (Akcaoglu & Lee, 2016). As a student (JD), I have experienced these discussion boards, and it has allowed time and space for students to discuss how to be culturally responsive which stimulated interesting conversations about how culture impacts each of us and our behavior-analytic discourse. Audio formats might promote sincere and respectful discussions and interactions when addressing challenging topics.

### **Instructor Recommendations**

Instructors who train future helping professionals cannot ignore the growing culturally diverse clients their students will serve. The United States is more culturally diverse than it was in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). As such, *all* faculty members must ensure their instruction integrates culturally responsive practices. We believe implementing culturally responsive pedagogy allows instructors to emphasize the importance of race, community, identity, and systemic structures to our students. In our classes, we shape service providers. We want the future workforce of providers to not be rigid and fearful and fail to serve the interest of clients and their families, but rather providers who are flexible, compassionate, and client driven. A culturally responsive pedagogy that informs

clinicians-in-training to recognize differences between and within races is important in building critical skill sets in our respective disciplines of rehabilitation and addictions and applied behavior analysis. Furthermore, culturally responsive pedagogy ensures students to recognize folks from diverse communities respond to our services differently given their socialization and history. Below we have outlined faculty recommendations to be culturally informed in the classroom.

### **Encourage Ongoing and Informed Dialogues**

We have found expectation setting a useful antecedent strategy when showing up in our classrooms as WoC. Not only do we begin courses with self-reflection exercises and rationale for the importance of race and culture in class and clinical work, we also regularly discuss and analyze our race, privilege, culture, and biases throughout the entire semester in each class. Furthermore, we recommend faculty members of all identities to have ongoing dialogues about race, culture, and domestic and international events throughout the course.

As an illustrative example, I (KA) have pulled in my own identities into our course discussion. I address Islamic beliefs (black magic and evil eye) and its influence on Muslims' perception of mental health. After such discussion, students have stated feeling more prepared in engaging with Muslim clients in their clinical work. I inform my students that learning a clients' belief system is crucial in providing and advocating for proper interventions.

We strongly believe instructors should integrate domestic and global events into the classroom and facilitate discussions on how these events impact our clients, their family, the therapeutic alliance, and students' perspective on the need for intervention. Instructors should discuss world events spanning political, economic, and social events. Culturally responsive teachers help students create knowledge that helps students come up with new ideas about the changing world rather than taking in information that has no personal meaning to students (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In addition, culturally responsive teachers discuss topics that are relevant but have previously been excluded from class discussions (Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990). Following George Floyd and Amir Locke murders, we wonder how many instructors, as we did, took the time, space, and vulnerable positions of telling our students about our personal hurt, anguish, and disgust on police brutality. These conversations can encourage students to analyze how systematic issues affect the mental health of communities of color (Bor et al., 2018; Fong et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990; Maddox & Wilson, 2003; Walker, 2020) and how systemic barriers exist for BIPOC children and adults to access these services.

I (KA) have also pointed out the discrepant media coverage when Afghans were flown to the U.S. (Demirjan & Horton, 2021) while simultaneously Haitian refugees were being denied entry to the US and were brutally whipped by border

patrol agents (Zullivan & Kannon-Youngs, 2021). I highlighted the differential treatment rendered and how biases are normalized. I have also addressed the Russian invasion into Ukraine. Students expressed their gratitude for having the space to discuss the war during group discussion. We have informed students that client's value when counselors and providers have knowledge and genuine concerns about local, domestic, and worldly events that may affect their well-being. Doing so, will ensure they are providers who can connect the effect of racism and discrimination on a broader scale.

### **Pursue Continued Education**

Part of our job description surrounds ongoing professional development. Through this education, we have participated in trainings to decolonize our syllabi and dismantle white supremacy practices (Okun, 2021). Though we have no opportunities for meaningful mentoring from more senior faculty of color colleagues in creating culturally responsive courses, we have learned with and from each other by attending and actively pursuing professional development opportunities in how to be culturally responsive in selecting our course materials. We urge faculty members to actively seek and participate in professional development regarding culturally responsive practices. Given our experiences, we now have a keen eye in spotting when and how multiculturalism is discussed in our respective professions' textbooks, policies, research articles, and other professional reading materials. For example, counseling authors tend to place the multicultural chapter as one of the last few chapters in a textbook (e.g., Chan et al., 2015; Tarvydas & Hartley, 2018). Because of this additional education, I (KA) am purposeful in addressing this chapter on the first day of class. Exploring multicultural chapters prepares students by examining and scrutinizing counseling theories and techniques from distinct perspectives. Additionally, it informs students to be cognizant of communication style and language, effects of tokenism, and culturally sensitive intervention strategies that increase disability consciousness in racialized groups (Chan et al., 2015). Similarly, this chapter contributes to counselors in training knowledge and skills regarding assessment tools and procedures used in dominant groups and whether these tools and procedures apply to culturally racialized groups. Prioritizing this chapter is an area we emphasize educators prioritize as an introductory to the course. This practice was a direct result of the training and ongoing professional development we have sought out during our time as tenure-tracked faculty.

By attending a pivotal, in-depth anti-racist training (e.g., Crossroads Antiracism Organizing and Training, 2022), I (OL) recognized my introductory, graduate level course in applied behavior analysis, solely focused on fundamentals and principles. The course was devoid of any mention of culture, race, or ethnicity. My syllabus was male and white centered, and exercises did not push students to critically evaluate power, privilege, race, and culture. As a result,



I adjusted the course readings, exercises, and practices, including in-person and online discussion forum regarding race and culture during the first week of my students' graduate school journey. In the second year of conducting these brief exercises I have seen an increase in the frequency and quality of the conversations my students have regarding race, culture, gender identity, and disability status. Without this additional training and support, we would have likely stayed with the status quo in teaching, emphasizing formal academic writing and monotonous lectures.

### **Consume and Conduct Scholarship of Learning and Teaching Research**

During our short time in academia, there is an unsaid rule to avoid disruption whether that be in course design, lectures, assessments, and instructional strategies. When changes are made, there real fear (one in which we have received student complaints) our courses, style, and approach to instruction will likely be perceived as challenging, different, and less informative. Despite this fear, we persist in creating and executing course activities that push the student to be an active participant in their learning. We recognize as instructors we are limited by our own experiences, training, and education. In the above sections, we have highlighted a few exercises to have the students teach not only their peer colleagues, but also us. We have taken great care and stride to adopt practices well documented in the scholarship and teaching learning literature, outside of our respective disciplines. As a result, we encourage instructors and researchers in our respective positions to use and publish research surrounding culturally responsive teaching and learning practices in their classrooms. Through our professional development and opportunities, we (KA and OL) were selected to participate in an institutional scholarship of learning and teaching program. Through our participation, we have dived into this line of research and have noticed our respective disciplines are notably absent in these endeavors. Though we are less versed in some of the methodological approaches (qualitative methods) of scholarship learning and teaching field, we believe we (WoC in rehabilitation counseling and ABA) can bring another perspective in how research and teaching align. Future researchers could systemically evaluate if our teaching strategies (e.g., guided discussion on global events; strategic integration of course materials, expectation setting) impact students' course learning outcomes and the student's interaction with supervisors and clients. In addition, it remains unknown (in our respective disciplines) if curated course materials from the BIPOC community and/or for BIPOC communities truly enhance the client experience and enhance compassionate and culturally humbly skillsets in our student-clinicians.

### **Student Recommendations**

As a student (JD) that is working toward a long-lasting career in a helping profession, I will continue to advocate for a culturally responsive approach with

my classmates, professors, and coworkers. I have observed the gaps and efforts of the incorporation of culture and race in educational and clinical settings, yet there is still a lot of improvement that can be made to extend clinical services to more families.

Self-assessment to identify the cultural variables that influence our own behavior is a key step in becoming a culturally responsive practitioner (Beaulieu & Jimenez-Gomez, 2022). Therefore, I encourage graduate students to share their experiences and discuss their biases with colleagues and instructors. These conversations can be challenging but we will be more responsive to our clients if we put in the work to learn how our cultural and racial biases can influence the way we provide service.

Second, I urge fellow students to also take an active role in their education. We are the next generation of practitioners, and as such we can put culture and race at the forefront of our services. We are living in a dynamic world with clients, families, and communities who have historically been excluded from the conversation. We should take the time to find literature, podcasts, and other relevant resources that discuss culturally responsive intervention and service. Jones et al. (2020) discuss that reporting demographics can assist in adapting behavioral intervention to include cultural components due to more accessible information on these populations. Thus, if you conduct research during your graduate studies, advocate for the inclusion of participant demographics to increase the amount of available literature for these specific populations. Taking initiative in our education will provide us with the knowledge on how race and culture impact the effectiveness of treatment and equip us to make better clinical decisions.

Finally, I encourage students to provide feedback to their institutions on how their programs lack culturally responsive pedagogy. I understand students might avoid providing feedback due to the fear of aversive consequences from our professors or institutions (e.g., being marked harder or being treated more poorly by professors) but as students, we have the power to advocate for evolving curriculums that incorporate culture and race to ensure we are providing services to our future clients that is socially significant. If students spark discussions with their professors on what information would be beneficial for their learning, then instructors will be provided with starting points for change. Therefore, I suggest emailing your professors with questions and concerns, report the lack of inclusion on course feedback forms, set up office hours to discuss these topics with professors, and address the lack of cultural responsiveness on your discussion boards. It is necessary for students to not only do this with professors of color but with White professors to indicate what areas they need to educate themselves to best deliver culturally responsive instruction. Additionally, if we use our voices to let educational systems know that they need to adjust to a more culturally

responsive pedagogy, then we will add to the incentive for researchers to focus on how culturally responsive pedagogy is important and influences our success as future practitioners.

### **Concluding Remarks**

We recognize the challenges, strategies, and recommendations are driven due to our experiences as WoC. We have worked hard to use our best judgement to create courses that highlights and references the BIPOC community to promote students to have a culturally responsive approach in their service delivery. Regardless of our efforts, there is more action and research required on how to maximize students learning while also addressing race and culture in graduate training. Race and culture are vital components of any discipline; thus, they cannot be ignored in coursework going forward. Therefore, educational settings need to create standards for professors that include how to incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy, so this responsibility is shared across all professors, not solely on the backs of WoC. In addition, students need to provide feedback to their programs on where the gaps exist in culturally responsive pedagogy to assist in creating change in curriculums that would help them become culturally responsive practitioners. In conclusion, students and professors can work together to learn how to approach their respective disciplines with a culturally responsive approach.

### **About the Authors**

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Dr. Odessa Luna is an associate professor in applied behavior analysis MS program at SCSU. She is interested in best practices in behavior-analytic supervision, open educational resources in higher education, and culturally responsive and anti-racist teaching practices in higher education.

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