

Chapter 8

Decolonizing Alterity Models Within School Counseling Practice

Lance C. Smith and Anne M. Geroski

School Task Force: A Case Vignette

The school board of a local, predominantly White high school appointed a task force to examine issues of diversity, equity, and achievement. The school counselors in the district all identified as White, egalitarian, culturally pluralistic, and inclusive, and all had training in the profession's multicultural counseling competencies (MCCs; Sue et al. 1992) and were trained in master's programs that emphasized the ASCA National Model (ASCA 2012). The counselors were aware of cultural nuances germane to the community, such as a willingness to integrate spirituality into their work with students, and had historically promoted the annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Day school-wide celebration. They prided themselves in fostering a school community that celebrated diversity. When working with their Latina/Latino students, the counselors were sensitive to cultural values regarding the importance of elders and familial unity. Recently, a few of the school counselors sponsored a workshop for the teachers to develop knowledge regarding the cultural differences between students of Puerto Rican and Mexican descent. They took seriously their call to provide knowledge to teachers, staff, and students about differences in their school.

The school counseling faculty felt fairly confident that the task force would identify areas for improvement, but that overall the evaluation would be favorable—they had done exactly what their training had asked of them. However, the task force found that significant disparities existed within the school along racial lines—specifically with regard to dropout rates, graduation rates, mathematical achievement, and disciplinary actions. The task force report, which was published subsequently

L. C. Smith (✉) · A. M. Geroski
The University of Vermont, 102 Mann Hall, 208 Colchester Ave, 05405 Burlington, VT, USA
e-mail: lance.smith@uvm.edu

A. M. Geroski
e-mail: ageroski@uvm.edu

in the town newspaper, made references to “subversive and institutional racism.” The predominantly White faculty in the school felt scolded for not working hard enough and judged for being incompetent. Parents of color praised the report for identifying the unequal academic “playing field” within the school.

The task force findings also caused quite a stir in the proudly liberal and progressive community who demanded accountability on the part of the school. Others in the community, however, expressed frustration along the lines of the sentiment expressed in an op-ed piece in the local newspaper which rang out, “Why can’t students of color be held individually responsible for discrepancies in achievement? They are given more resources than other students—maybe they just don’t want to achieve.” A small number of students of color organized a protest and walked out of class claiming that their needs were identified in the task force report and that the school and community were not taking them seriously.

Not wanting to exacerbate tensions and not clear on how to resolve the larger problems unveiled in the report, the school counselors empathized with the students of color who felt marginalized as well as those in the community who were complaining that the task force report would result in new mandates and higher taxes; thus they publicly took a position of neutrality.

Alterity is defined as the state of being *Other* (Bauman and Gingrich 2006). Addressing alterity means dealing with the social processes that position some identities on the social margins, on the outside looking in—those forces that imbue certain identities with “otherness” as opposed to “sameness” or “belonging.” Models of alterity identify the existence of othering and address working with and for those who have membership in nondominant, traditionally undervalued, and underrepresented social groups. This chapter will argue that the current models that guide the field of school counseling in addressing alterity—the American Counseling Association’s (ACA) multicultural counseling competency model (MCC; Sue et al. 1992), the American School Counseling Association’s (ASCA) National Model (ASCA 2012), and the ASCA Position Statement: The Professional School Counselor and Cultural Diversity (ASCA 2009)—are problematic. They are insufficient for addressing the needs of students from traditionally underrepresented and undervalued groups. We will present the case that the guiding assumptions upon which these models were created reinforce colonizing practices, and call for replacing these models with a social justice model.

Multicultural Counseling Competencies

Etiology of the MCC Model

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the counseling and counseling psychology professions established the still-emerging multiculturalism movement as the “fourth force” in the history of counseling (Lee and Richardson 1991; Sue 1991). Finally,

there was unstoppable momentum within the field towards acknowledging alterity as axiomatic to the profession. The upswell of this fourth force culminated in the drafting and adoption of the MCCs by the ACA. The MCCs attempted to operationalize the awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary for counselors to work with individuals from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds (Sue et al. 1992). The MCC movement quickly spread into the field of school counseling (Pedersen and Carey 1994).

The primary purpose of the MCC model was to replace monocultural counseling practice with multicultural counseling practice (Sue et al. 1992). No longer would diverse cultural and ethnic approaches to mental health, emotional well-being, and human development be ignored. Inclusion would supplant exclusion and become the new norm. All of the various cultural and ethnic threads of the human experience would be woven into the tapestry of counseling and psychology, adding greater richness and complexity to what had been a rather bland quilt of Euro-Western cultural uniformity.

Substituting the paradigm of monoculturalism with multiculturalism was a significant and long-overdue undertaking. While the MCC model was cutting edge for its time, we will see that the model's assumptions do not adequately deal with alterity because they do not focus on interrupting the discourses that promote cultural hegemony. Indeed, the tapestry of counseling, however colorful and diverse it has become, still serves as a colonizing shroud for those from traditionally under-represented groups. In the words of Figueira (2007), "The reality is that before any theory of alterity can be successful (be it multiculturalism, postcolonialism, transnationalism, posthumanism, or the Global South), there needs to occur a decolonization of the other" (p. 144).

Assumption of Cultural Pluralism

Early on, the set of ideas that encapsulate multiculturalism was also referred to as *cultural pluralism* (Anderson and Collins 2006; Rothenberg 2007). The premise of both "multiculturalism" and "cultural pluralism" is linguistically self-evident: Both constructs underscored the fact that "multiple" and a "plurality" of cultures are present in the human experience. They affirm that more than one single cultural approach to the human experience needs to inform the fields of counseling, psychology, and school counseling. The movement away from monoculturalism and towards multiculturalism entails an egalitarian assumption—that everyone benefits from cultural plurality, therefore we must preserve, protect, promote, and respect cultural variance and heterogeneous expressions of ethnicity (Manning 2009). In its simplest form, this set of ideas is expressed by the bumper sticker "Celebrate Diversity."

What is important for us to understand is that the premise of multiculturalism requires an *egalitarian pursuit* of inclusion. As stated by the National Coalition for Cultural Pluralism in 1973, "Each person must be aware of and secure in his [or her]

own identity, and be willing to extend to others the same respect and rights that he [or she] expects to enjoy himself [or herself]" (as cited in Manning 2009, p. 15). If the aims of multiculturalism are to be met, then there must exist a level playing field and a social context of good faith—that rather than being threatened by inclusion, the dominant culture must act beneficently and make room for others. In other words, if the goal is to have a society-wide celebration, then everyone in the society must experience an equal degree of hospitality and safety. To state this from one more angle: Multiculturalism is anchored in the assumption that there *is not* a large, powerful, and subversive force that seeks to subjugate all nondominant cultural expressions.

American School Counselor Association

At around this same time, in the late 1980s, the profession of school counseling was working to identify its scope of practice. Its professional organization, ASCA (a division of ACA at the time), was attempting to distinguish itself from other counseling organizations. To this end, a series of position statements, including one on cultural diversity, were drafted and have been continually revised, updated, and officially adopted by the organization's governing body. Furthermore, in the late 1990s a task force was charged by ASCA to draft a more cohesive and comprehensive directive outlining the full scope of practice of school counselors. The results of these efforts were the ASCA Position Statement: The Professional School Counselor and Cultural Diversity (ASCA 2009) originally published in 1988 and The ASCA National Model (ASCA 2012), which was originally published in 2003.

ASCA—Pluralism, Egalitarianism, and Advocacy Position Statement

Within the ASCA Position Statement: The Professional School Counselor and Cultural Diversity (ASCA 2009), one can clearly see the assumptions of cultural pluralism carried over from the MCC model. Within this single-page document, phrases that speak to "embracing," "welcoming," "appreciating," and "celebrating," cultural diversity abound. In addition, the position statement underscores an egalitarian premise that school counselors "collaborate with *all* stake holders" to meet the needs of "*every student*" and "*all students*" [italics added]. Finally, the position statement calls on school counselors to take up the role of an advocate—a function not articulated in the MCC model. School counselors are to advocate for students "who are marginalized," particularly, "students of culturally diverse, low socioeconomic, and other underserved and underperforming populations" and to "address inequities within schools."

ASCA National Model

The pluralistic assumptions of the MCC model are clearly evident in the ASCA National Model (ASCA 2012) as well. The National Model specifically addresses “multicultural competence” (p. 14) and “cultural sensitivity” (p. 38). School counselors are called upon to improve their “cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills,” to “value, respect, and be responsive” to diversity (p. 37), and to “create a vibrant school climate where cultural richness and strengths are celebrated” (p. 38). An egalitarian approach to school counseling is strongly emphasized—language that underscores meeting the needs of “every student” and “all students” occur no less than 55 times. The National Model further highlights the role of advocacy within the profession. School counselors are called upon to engage in the work of advocacy to “identify systemic barriers to student achievement” (p. 8) and “remove barriers to access” (p. 9) so that “equity and access to rigorous education [is possible] for every student” (p. 1).

Benefits of the MCC and ASCA Models

The shift toward multiculturalism within the profession of school counseling has been generative. Now, all counselors are expected to approach their work with the understanding that individuals have different ways of defining and experiencing mental health and wellness, that there are culturally variant paths toward healthy development, and that they all have value. The MCC model has been infused into counselor education standards (CACREP 2012) as well as ethical standards (see ACA 2005; APA 2002; ASCA 2010).

Specifically regarding school counseling, the integration of these models has fostered beneficial reflection, questions, and actions. For example, as these models of cultural “competence” spread throughout the field, school counselors began to advocate for “diversity days” within their local schools, assuring that the cultural heritage of students from “minority” groups is recognized and celebrated. Multiculturalism resulted in school counselors adding images of students of color in their offices and hallways, updating their play therapy toys to include nonwhite figures and heterogeneous ethnic symbols. Rainbow stickers were displayed on office doors. Advocacy efforts on behalf of students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) resulted in gay/straight alliances (GSAs) being formed in some schools around the country. Advocacy efforts taken on behalf of students with disabilities resulted in older school buildings being remodeled to be more accommodating, including improvements such as the installation of elevators and incorporation of wireless audio networks.

Publications in the flagship journal of the profession of school counseling also suggest that school counselors are beginning to explore the ways in which the work of school counselors can be culturally informed. A recent volume of the *Professional*

School Counseling (Dec 2012, 16(1)), the flagship journal of the ASCA, has articles about obesity among Latino/Latina youth, counseling “multiple heritage” adolescents, college readiness for youth with autism-spectrum disorders, and issues related to achievement and self-esteem in a population of English language learners.

With this important paradigm shift, monoculturalism has been sufficiently problematized. Counselors are no longer granted a free pass to assume that traditional counseling practices created, implemented, and measured by a homogeneous or dominant social group are relevant or effective for persons of ethnically heterogeneous backgrounds and diverse social identities. Thanks to the MCC model, *Other* cultural and ethnic identities are being included, celebrated, studied, and honored within the fields of counseling, psychology, and school counseling. Thanks to the ASCA model, school counselors now see advocacy for marginalized students as a part of their professional identity. And yet—and this cannot be emphasized enough—institutional apartheid thrives (Bemak and Chung 2005; Shin and Kindall 2013).

Significant Flaws

We will now lay out the argument that the assumptions of cultural pluralism and egalitarianism found within the MCCs, the ASCA National Model, and the ASCA Position Statement are inadequate for addressing alterity within the field of school counseling. Moreover, in our minds they are anemic and far too easily allow school counselors to unintentionally collude in the oppression of students from traditionally undervalued and underrepresented groups. Models of alterity that are built on the assumptions of cultural pluralism and egalitarianism are problematic because they neither directly identify nor account for the forces that are advancing inequality and cultural hegemony in our schools. That is to say, the existing models not only ignore but also aid in veiling from our awareness the social, institutional, and structural powers that drive colonization; they allow these forces to remain concealed, uninterrupted, and thereby protected.

Discourses and Discursive Positioning

The prevailing forces at work within individuals, institutions, and social systems that seek to defend cultural hegemony, to subjugate nondominant cultural expressions, and to maintain power for the powerful have been identified as colonizing, dominant discourses. The term *discourse* refers to the culturally constructed set of “truths” that serve as the structuring “rules” governing social practices (Winslade and Geroski 2008). That is, discourses are what we take for granted that (1) allow us to know how to act in social situations, (2) become the structuring ideas that allow us to make meaning of our experiences in the world, and (3) construct

our identity—how we see ourselves in the world. According to Foucault (1972), “Whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say...that we are dealing with a discursive formation” (p. 38).

Furthermore, discourses are integral to social power (Foucault 1980). They are not neutral. They are webs of meaning that serve to shape and constitute the world in ways that inevitably promote or undermine social power. They are stories and frameworks about the human experience that are prescriptive, not descriptive. And they are everywhere, all the time, creating “[t]he ways in which people act on the world and the ways in which the world acts on individuals” (Robinson 1999, p. 73).

Narrative theorists use the term *discursive positioning* to describe the ways in which discourses are acted on and circulated within a culture (Monk et al. 1997). The term *dominant discourses* refer to the set of social “truths” that are so salient in a given culture or community, they tend to drown out other discourses. Many of the dominant discourses that are awarded social capital in contemporary US society are colonizing, in that they reinforce positions of power for those that are already powerful: those who occupy commanding social locations, including Whites, men, heterosexuals, the wealthy, the nondisabled, and those who are cisgender (persons comfortable with the gender identity assigned to them at birth). Simultaneously, colonizing dominant discourses position those with nondominant identities—persons of color, women, persons who identify as LGB or transgender, persons with disabilities, and the poor—as subordinate, less than, and *Othered*. What is particularly insidious about colonizing dominant discourses is that they generally go unnoticed and are particularly invisible to those in power. The term *counter-discourses* refer to the stories and social truths that interrupt, problematize, complicate, and question the dominant discourse.

The concept of colonizing dominant discourses offers an explanatory account of the unequal social playing field in our schools and communities: Playing fields that privilege those from dominant social locations and disadvantage those from nondominant social locations. Media accounts of Hurricane Katrina provide stark evidence of how the colonizing dominant discourse of White supremacy privileges whites while subjugating persons of color. When news footage displayed images of White people making off with goods and supplies taken from merchants without permission, they were discursively positioned as “residents” and “survivalists.” Captions of persons of color engaged in the *exact* same activity framed the subjects as “looters” and “criminals” (Jones 2005).

Discourses tell the story of people even before actions and events take place. In the school setting, we consistently witness colonizing dominant discourses telling different stories about persons depending upon their social identity. For example, when a male principal becomes visibly frustrated and raises his voice during a staff meeting, the colonizing dominant discourse of patriarchy discursively positions him as a “strong leader.” When a female principal behaves in the same manner, however, she is storied as “demanding,” “out of control,” and perhaps, a “bitch.” During lunch in the teacher’s lounge, when a heterosexual school counselor

announces her recent engagement, the colonizing dominant discourse of heteronormativity frames the announcement as celebratory. When a lesbian woman or gay man expresses the same sentiment, she or he is discursively positioned as pushing a political agenda.

In another example, the colonizing dominant discourse of cisgender normativity was at work when a gender-nonconforming student in one of our schools approached the middle school counselor complaining of bullying and harassment. With great empathy, the school counselor invited the student and the student's parents to consider how certain behaviors (a gender-neutral haircut and clothing) were a provocation to others and the cause of the problem. Rather than attempting to interrupt systemic discrimination against this transgender student, the school counselor provided the student with social skills training.

If models of alterity are to have any substantive effect, they have to deal directly with the power of colonizing dominant discourses. As captured by Monk et al. (2008), "If counseling practice is not based on addressing the effects of power relationships, we do not believe it is adequately multicultural" (p. 49).

Dominant Discourses and Cultural Pluralism

As we saw earlier, the MCC model is reliant upon the assumption of societal good faith and an egalitarian playing field. The influence and pervasiveness of colonizing dominant discourses shatters this critical central assumption. That is to say, the assumption that those with social power—both individuals and institutions—will extend to the *Other* the same cultural capital that they themselves enjoy is erroneous. The notion that there is an egalitarian playing field upon which cultural pluralism can take root and grow is fallacious.

Colonizing dominant discourses are mighty; they are intractable. The colonizing dominant discourse of sexism continues to secure the power of men while subjugating women (Bernstein 2010; Johnson 2010). The colonizing dominant discourse of White supremacy remains successful at advancing White dominance over all other ethnic identities (Lipsitz 2010; Wise 2005). The discourse of heteronormativity has been highly successful in maintaining legal sanctions against persons identifying as LGB (Human Rights Campaign 2014). The dominant discourse of the cisgender normativity perpetuates an abominable rate of hate crimes and violence against transgender and gender-nonconforming persons: 40% have experienced physical assault and over 50% have reported sexual assault (Stotzer 2009). Colonizing dominant discourses grant power to the powerful, and they are, in turn, sustained by those with the power. It cannot be assumed that institutions and systems will relinquish their power beneficently. As stated by Douglass (1857/1985), "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."

The central notion of cultural pluralism, while admirable and desirable, will never be possible until colonizing dominant discourses are identified and interrupted.

Understanding that dominant discourses advance some “truths” while marginalizing others is crucial to the practice of school counseling. Operating from a model of alterity that pretends that a social context of good faith exists and that ignores how colonizing dominant discourses position students from undervalued groups not only hinders the efficacy of school counseling, but, in effect, colludes in protecting these discourses. For example, engaging a school-wide celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King on January 21st that positions the civil rights movement as an event that only occurred during the 1950s and 1960s, suggests that racial inequality is a thing of the past. The dominant discourse of White supremacy fosters the belief that systemic racism died with martyrdom of Dr. King. Celebrating Dr. King’s birthday is the ideal opportunity to introduce a counter-discourse. To better address the force of racism in the present, the day should include events like a school-wide essay or art project on how covert racism manifests itself in the halls and classrooms; a staff meeting wherein teachers and faculty are asked to examine instructional methods to be sure that they accurately account for a broad range of experiences, styles, and understandings; a lesson on microaggressions (Sue 2010) in each and every classroom; and an in-service training on White privilege (Johnson 2006).

Dominant Discourses, Egalitarianism, and the Unequal Playing Field

At first glance, the egalitarian principles found within the ASCA National Model (ASCA 2012) and ASCA Position Statements (ASCA 2009) may seem highly appropriate, if not enlightened. It goes without saying that the profession of school counseling should value “all” students, approach “every” student regardless of their social location with equal respect, and construct a comprehensive program that considers everyone’s needs equitably. However, upon looking more closely, one can notice the subtle influence of colonizing dominant discourses here. A narrative strategy that emphasizes “any,” “all,” and “every” student(s) assumes a level playing field: that all students regardless of social location or identity, upon receiving equal effort and resources, will develop in a relatively equitable way. Colonizing dominant discourses remain concealed when we think that “every” student has a fair share in society, that “all” students were dealt an equitable set of cards. The evidence suggests otherwise.

To unpack the production of an unequal playing field in our society and schools, we will focus specifically on how the colonizing dominant discourse of White supremacy positions students of color in schools. We realize that the idea of white supremacy relating to the field of school counseling may sound like a radical and even absurd statement to many readers. Let us clarify that by White supremacy we do not mean the overt, fascist ideology that brings to mind images of swastikas white hoods, and burning crosses. No, the form of white supremacy that we are talking about, and that we will now unpack, is virtually invisible. It is subtle. Covert. It is a way of living that secretly yet insidiously positions “Whiteness” as supreme

to all other ethnic and cultural identities. It produces a playing field that advantages White students and disadvantages students of color. And it is maintained by some of the nicest, most beneficent school counselors you are likely to ever meet.

As a result of the social and economic conditions that are produced by the dominant discourse of White supremacy, students of color must contend with a litany of contextual factors that will impede success in schools. For example, diminished economic opportunity—unemployment or jobs that pay less than a living wage and lack benefits—have a direct correlation with low academic achievement (Alliance for Excellent Education 2003). Compared to their White counterparts, students of color tend to grow up in households with far less wealth and far greater rates of unemployment, poverty, and insufficient healthcare (Hines and Boyd-Franklin 2005). Due to the legacy of *formerly legal* racist economic policies like the Homestead Act and the FHA Home Loan Program that privileged Whites and discriminated against Blacks, the typical college-degreed Black couple begins life with one fifth the net worth of the typical White couple (Council of Economic Advisers 1998). With identical resumes, parents of White children are twice as likely as parents of Black children to receive a callback for a job interview (Bertrand and Mullainthan 2004). Young Black college graduates earn on average 11% less than their White counterparts, and by the time they retire the gap grows to 42% (Roth 2012). The recent recession has hit families of color much harder than White families, with the rate of unemployment for college-degreed Blacks being twice that of college-degreed Whites (U.S. Congressional Joint Economic Committee 2010). The economic deck has been stacked against families of color, affecting their children's ability to achieve in school.

Inequities in the criminal justice system illustrate another way in which the playing field is not equal. White supremacy propagates an unjust prison industrial complex that targets persons of color (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Brewer and Heitzeg 2008) and we know that having a parent in prison has a significant effect upon a child's success in school (Kjellstrand et al. 2012; Merenstein et al. 2011). Compared to White families, parents of students of color are twice as likely to be pulled over by police; and if pulled over, they are twice as likely to be arrested; and if arrested, they are twice as likely to be prosecuted; and if prosecuted, they are twice as likely to be sentenced to jail (Johnson 2006). For students of color in our schools, White supremacy results in a prison rate for their parents five times that of Whites (Mason 2012).

As these examples illustrate, White supremacy disadvantages students of color before they ever arrive at the school's front door, and equally harms them when they walk in. Students of color navigate school environments that are filled with stereotypes, discrimination, and unconscious teacher bias (Moore et al. 2008). White supremacy produces inequitable suspension and expulsion policies in schools that directly inform the school-to-prison pipeline (Brown 2007; Casella 2003; Fenning and Rose 2007). In studies that control socioeconomic status, placement for African Americans in special education classrooms is disproportionate to that of their White peers (Moore et al. 2008). Unconscious teacher bias results in lower teacher

expectations for students of color (Colorblindness: The new racism? 2009; Gorski 2007). The educational achievement gap between African American and White high school students is unmistakably large (Dillon 2009). African American students are twice as likely as Whites to drop out of high school (Chapman et al. 2011), Latina/Latinos five times as likely, and Native Americans four times as likely (U.S. National Center for Education Statistics 2010).

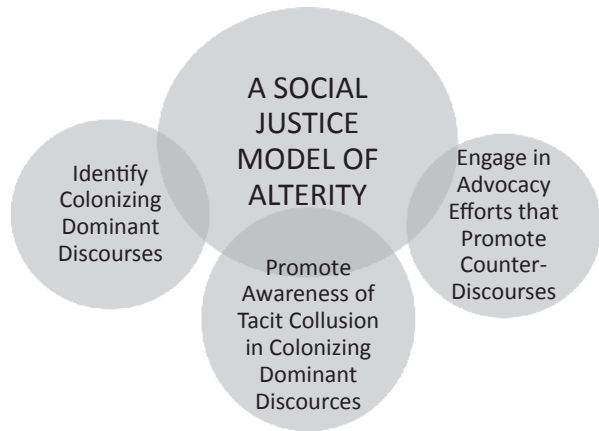
If the field of school counseling approaches the work in a myopic egalitarian manner, devoting equal time and equal energy to “every” and “all” student(s), then we are tacitly supporting the inequitable status quo. Ignoring the unequal playing fields produced by dominant discourses is equivalent to giving some runners a two-lap head start in a five-lap race and blithely cheering along for “any” and “all” runners as if the race were fair.

Dominant Discourses and Unnamed Advocacy

Finally, we see the power of colonizing dominant discourses at play, even in ASCA’s call for advocacy. Recall that the National Model (ASCA 2012) calls upon school counselors to engage in the work of advocacy to identify systemic barriers to student achievement” (p. 8) and “remove barriers to access” (p. 9) that impede the success of “any” student. It is commendable that ASCA is promoting the role of advocacy within the profession of school counseling. However, even in ASCA’s call for advocacy, colonizing dominant discourses have yet again succeeded in cloaking themselves. Given that the ASCA National Model addresses “systemic barriers” and “equity and access issues” over 30 times, it is severely problematic that these constructs go unnamed and unspecified.

Why the ASCA model fails to name the “systemic barriers” is a bit of a mystery. There is no shortage of scholars that have clearly identified the systemic barriers that promote inequality, marginalization, and oppression (For more on this topic, see Aldarondo 2007; Johnson 2006; Shin and Kindall 2013; Smith et al. 2012). By refusing to name these systems as White supremacy, heteronormativity, patriarchy, classism, and ableism, the ASCA National Model buttresses the invisibility of these colonizing discourses, thereby colluding in their sustainment. A model that ignores the dominant discourse of white supremacy—along with such corresponding constructs, such as White privilege, modern racism (Bonilla-Silva 2003), and microaggressions (Sue 2010)—yet calls upon school counselors to address “disproportionate discipline rates for [...] students of color” (ASCA 2012, p. 15) or the “underrepresentation of students of color in advanced courses” (p. 16) is predisposed to maintain the status quo of White supremacy. We need a model of alterity that does not hesitate to name these forces for what they are and that promotes a discussion about the role of colonizing dominant discourses in schools and the effect that they are having on our students.

Fig. 8.1 A social justice model of alterity for school counseling



A Social Justice Model of Alterity

We call on the field of school counseling to make a commitment to work from a social justice model of alterity (Fig. 8.1). You see, the school counselors in our case vignette did not have a model of alterity that would aid them in recognizing the influence of the colonizing dominant discourse of White supremacy within their school. In other words, they lacked a working model that:

- Identifies colonizing dominant discourses
- Promotes awareness of tacit collusion in colonizing dominant discourses
- Calls for advocacy efforts that promote counter-discourses

Identifying Colonizing Dominant Discourses

Colonization occurs when school counselors are standing on the sidelines, unaware of the shaping effects of discourses. Refusing or failing to identify colonizing dominant discourses is perhaps *the most* significant way in which cultural hegemony is buttressed and reproduced. But acknowledging dominant discourses is not easy (Kiselica 2004). It is uncomfortable to sit with the pain that comes from accepting the disparity and oppression that some of our students experience and it is difficult to concede that inclusion and the celebration of diversity will not adequately interrupt colonization. Honoring diversity while letting systemic barriers go unnamed can be easier and more comfortable than social justice.

Had the counselors within our vignette been working from a social justice model, the institutional apartheid identified by the diversity task force would have been much less of a surprise. This is because colonizing dominant discourses like White supremacy would already have been named and defined. The school counselors would have had a clear understanding of how White privilege, modern racism, and

microaggressions impact the lives of their students of color. The school counselors would have already been working to expose White supremacy as part of their mission.

Promoting Awareness of Tacit Collusion

While they may focus on inclusion and celebrating their students' ethnicities, if school counselors ignore the uneven playing field, they are tacitly colluding in the powerful forces that perpetuate inequality and oppression. Howard Zinn famously made the argument that one cannot be neutral on a moving train (Ellis and Mueller 2004). In our case vignette that opened this chapter, the uneven playing field resulting from the discourse of White supremacy is the train.

A social justice model asks us to examine how we tacitly support hegemony by not speaking up, how we buttress colonization by not calling attention to dominant discourses that result in an unequal playing field, and how we reproduce suffering by choosing not to invite conversations about institutional apartheid. A social justice model requires us to recognize how colonizing dominant discourses situate those of us from dominant social locations in positions of power and it asks us to interrupt our own positions of privilege. And, of course, taking up a social justice approach often results in pushback and even sanctions from our families, friends, colleagues, and employers.

With regard to identifying tacit collusion, a social justice minded school counselor would recognize that elementary school libraries without children's books that normalize same-sex parenting (such as *And Tango Makes Three* by Richardson and Parnell 2005) are libraries that tacitly reinforce the colonizing discourse of heteronormativity and devalue children of same-sex parents. Within a social justice model, the absence of gender-neutral bathrooms in the school will be recognized as an act that promotes the colonizing discourse of cisgender normativity, marginalizing gender-nonconforming students. School counselors who are alert to the colonizing discourse of classism will understand that offering parent-teacher conferences during the workday, when hourly wage earners have to take off from work in order to visit with their children's teachers, reinforces the discourse of classism and the oppression of working-class parents. A school counselor that is trained in a social justice model will understand that in the absence of any discussion of white privilege or modern racism, the ASCA National Model's well-intended emphasis on "achievement gaps for African-Americans" (p. 26) or "boys of color [who are] over represented in special education" (p. 16) will likely result in blaming the victim, wherein the problem is attributed to the student's parents or "ghetto" communities.

Advocacy that Promotes Counter-Discourses

Finally, colonization will continue as long as school counselors are untrained in how to promote counter-discourses. In terms of advocacy that introduces counter-discourses, a social justice model of alterity would have had the school counselors in

our case vignette foster awareness among the teaching staff and the larger community about the unequal playing field for students from traditionally underrepresented groups and advance an understanding that not “every” student is granted equal societal privileges. To promote a counter-discourse, the school counselors could provide in-service training to colleagues or psychoeducational lessons to students on topics like White privilege (McIntosh 1992), dominant discourses (Greenleaf and Bryant 2012), internalized racism (Johnson 2006), and microaggressions (Sue 2010). They could write op-ed pieces in the local paper to promote counter-discourses and raise awareness. They could work with the principal in developing a coordinated school-wide response to the issues raised. Moreover, when their students of color walk out of class in a display of activism against White hegemony, a social justice model would incite the counselors to interrupt their own White privilege and join their students on the sidewalk in solidarity.

School counselors who desire to write counter-discourses can offer critical consciousness groups for students from marginalized and devalued social locations (Shin et al. 2010). They can be intentional about forming school counseling advisory committees with members from traditionally undervalued and underrepresented groups. Social justice-minded school counselors will conduct annual needs assessments that seek data from students with marginalized social identities, such as students who identify as LGB, transgender or questioning, those who identify as multiracial, and those students with a significant religious identity. School counselors operating from a social justice model understand that referring to students from nondominant social locations as “minorities” contribute to their marginalization, but that referring to such students as “traditionally underrepresented” or “traditionally undervalued” subtly exposes and flattens identity hierarchies.

Conclusion

Let us be clear that we are not condemning or disparaging the school counselors in our case vignette or any other school counselor who has yet to take up a social justice vision. Such an act would be overtly hypocritical, as we, the authors—who both identify as occupying the dominant social locations of White, heterosexual, cisgender, educated, and nondisabled—continue to recognize our own colonization practices. We, too, have spent far too much time riding the train of colonizing dominant discourses while assuming positions of beneficence, pluralism, and neutrality. Learning how to more effectively decolonize our practice will be a lifelong endeavor for all of us.

As discussed in the introduction of this book, colonization occurs when counselors *knowingly or unknowingly* promote a dominant cultural belief and practice that has the effect of maintaining dominant group positions of power and influence (McDowell and Hernandez 2010). Integrating a social justice model of alterity in school counseling means acknowledging that no matter how inclusive we are, how

egalitarian we are, or how much we seek to honor and celebrate the *other*, we often collude with the forces that marginalize and devalue our students from nondominant social locations. A social justice model will acknowledge that a “politically neutral” approach to school counseling contributes to the inequity experienced by students from traditionally underrepresented groups. A social justice mode of school counseling acknowledges that the race to academic success is rigged. We join Figueira (2007) in stating that without decolonization, “all theories and pedagogies of alterity serve as mere dogma and orthodoxies” and contribute to “institutional apartheid” (p. 144) within the profession of school counseling.

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