

Building a Counseling Psychology of Liberation: The Path Behind Us, Under Us, and Before Us

The Counseling Psychologist
2020, Vol. 48(8) 1109–1130
© The Author(s) 2020
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/0011000020959007
journals.sagepub.com/home/tcp



Anneliese Singh¹

Abstract

In this 2020 SCP Presidential Address amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and global uprisings against anti-Black racism, Anneliese Singh reflects on the potentialities of liberation for all counseling psychologists in every setting in which they labor. In doing so, she invites the embodiment and practices of liberation as a key value of counseling psychology.

Keywords

presidential, address, counseling

Hello beloved community of counseling psychology! It is so wonderful to share some time with you, and of course I wish it was in person, so thank you for coming today. My name is Anneliese Singh, and I use she and they pronouns. I am a light-skinned, mixed race, South Asian, white¹-adjacent, Sikh, nonbinary, person with lots of current educational, class, ability, and U.S. citizenship advantage. Everything I will share with you today is rooted in these identities and experiences, as well as the interlocking oppressions and systems of advantage that influence them (Crenshaw, 1989).

¹Tulane University, New Orleans, LA, USA

Corresponding Author:

Anneliese Singh, Provost's Office, Chief Diversity Officer/Associate Provost of Faculty Development and Diversity and Professor in the School of Social Work and Department of Psychology, Tulane University, 6823 St. Charles Avenue, New Orleans, LA 70118, USA.
Email: AnnelieseASingh@gmail.com

It has been a true honor to serve as your president of the Society of Counseling Psychology (SCP) this past year. I am excited to be in conversation with you about my 2019–2020 presidential theme, “Building a Counseling Psychology of Liberation,” which has truly been a collective endeavor. I titled this talk, “*Building a Counseling Psychology of Liberation: The Path Behind Us, Under Us, and Before Us.*”

As I begin, I want to honor the indigenous land I am on as I Zoom with you. I am on land *now* called “New Orleans, Louisiana” in the “United States of America”—land that was unceded and stolen from the many indigenous nations that were, and many of which *continue to be here* pre-white European colonization—the tribes of the Chitamacha, Atakapa, Caddo, Choctaw, Houma, Natchez, Tunica, and more. Acknowledging the history of the indigenous land that nourishes our work is a part of our everyday collective liberation, so even though we are Zoom-ing from different parts of the world as an SCP community, I invite you to share your name, pronouns, and the history of the indigenous land you are on in the chat box.

As I get started, I need to express some gratitude for the many, many co-conspirators and collaborators in my life. I offer my deepest gratitude to the folx in the Liberation Incubator Presidential Special Task Group (STG) whom I have had the honor of working alongside the last 18 months incubating the idea of what liberation in counseling psychology might *feel* like: my Liberation Incubator co-chair and QTPOC (queer, trans person of color) sibling, Della Mosley—and also some incredible humans: Reuben Faloughi, Carlton Green, Elizabeth Cardenas Bautista, Germán Cadenas, Ankita Nikalje, Amy Reynolds, and Laura Minero-Meza. Thank you for your spirit and your commitment to living the work of liberation every day. Our time together has truly transformed me in the best ways, and I can’t wait to see how your work continues to challenge our field to expand.

I also want to give a shout-out to my beloved partner, Lauren Lukkarila, who lifts my wings and whispers, “fly, believe, soar, get free.” To be loved so well and so deep this past year and to be able to fall in love with you all over again each day is just beyond-words-incredible.

I want thank my family of origin and my chosen family in New Orleans and Atlanta who help me deepen my commitments to liberation and hold me accountable every day for the work of equity and justice. I want to thank my white brothers-of-choice Theo Burnes and Dan Walinsky who have held counsel and accountability with me this past year as a President of Color, supporting my leadership as I navigated the origins and vestiges of this historically-white-guy-space of counseling psychology leadership.

I want to also honor my cherished mentor, Dr. Barry Chung, who has been a touchstone for me as a counseling psychologist leader—I wouldn't be here without you Barry in many, many ways, thank you. Thank you to my Counseling Psychology Conference (CPC) 2020 Tri-Chairs, who are now siblings, Julia Phillips and Carmen Cruz, wow, did we have an important, rough, and inspiring journey together. We are now lifers! And a gigantic thanks to Debbie Nolan for organizational and thinking time so I could make sure I was dreaming some this past year.

I am naming some of the folx who have supported me as I have been incubating what a *Counseling Psychology of Liberation* would feel like and how we could transform as a profession. I want to hear from you in the Zoom chat box—who are the freedom fighters and the “angelic troublemakers” (to use Bayard Rustin's term) who have supported you as you lean into a dream of what a counseling psychology of liberation could be?

To set additional context for *Building a Counseling Psychology of Liberation*, it is important to note that we are always in history-making times when it comes to the struggle for freedom and justice—and we are certainly in history-making times right now. The last four months have been hard. I want to take you back to the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic and thank you for all you have done to support clients, students, research participants, colleagues, and more.

At the beginning of the pandemic, we saw a healthcare and government response that was steeped in anti-Asian racism (the current U.S. President continues to call COVID-19 the “Chinese virus”). We have seen ageism and ableism run rampant. Elliott Kukla summed this up in the *New York Times* March 19, 2020 Opinion article titled, “*My Life is More ‘Disposable’ During this Pandemic.*”

As we remember the beginning of the pandemic, we remember as counseling psychologists how we quickly pivoted and shifted to telehealth, noticing all the inequities that were in place—from queer and trans people who had to shelter in place within families and communities that were dangerous, to noticing how people without class advantage and people living with disabilities did not always have the access to technology they needed.

In the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, we also saw the internalized racism within some Black and Latinx communities, believing that they were “not as vulnerable to COVID-19” because of the “strength of their bodies and immunity,” when the truth really was that since the beginning of the pandemic Black and Latinx people were bearing the brunt of the impact of coronavirus in both infections and deaths due to already existing health inequities. And please, let's not call these “health disparities,” these were health inequities grounded in racism that were “unnecessary and avoidable but, in

addition, are also considered unfair and unjust” (Whitehead, 1991). This was all while Black and Latinx served in the frontlines of essential care for *all of us* as healthcare and service workers, saving us as they were literally facing death every day.

As these multiple and interlocking oppressions were being revealed across the news and social media at the beginning of the pandemic, Arundhati Roy wrote a brilliant article titled “*The Pandemic is a Portal*” (2020, April 3) where she called us all in to recognize that the world we are living in has completely changed. We have an opportunity, she said in this article, to recognize that we are never going back to the world pre-COVID-19, nor should we, *because* of the massive experiences of injustice for people on the margins of society.

A month before Arundhati Roy wrote this article, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Tony McDade, Dominique Rem’mie Fells, Riah Milton, and Rayshard Brooks were all still alive. I want to pause here, and say again, a month before Arundhati Roy wrote this article, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Tony McDade, Dominique Rem’mie Fells, Riah Milton, Rayshard Brooks, and many, many more Black and Brown people were still alive.

Now, more than ever, we have the opportunity to build a counseling psychology of liberation that centers Black liberation with every breath we take, because in working for Black liberation we all get free. I will say more about this in a moment.

I am setting all of this context so we acknowledge one truth. History will remember the things we decided to change in our profession in 2020, and history will also remember the status quo we decided to not question and continue to uphold in our profession, whether it was white-body supremacy, cisgender and straight dominance, able-bodied, wealth supremacy, and more. I hope we don’t just remember 2020 was the year we canceled our beloved family reunion, CPC 2020, because of the COVID-19 pandemic. I want to look back and say this was a year we felt the impulse toward liberation *even more deeply*, and that we followed that impulse to change everything we thought we know about what counseling psychology could be.

So, what does a *Counseling Psychology of Liberation* mean? In my monthly presidential announcements, I have defined it in these three brief paragraphs:

We all have a personal experience of liberation. It is the feeling deep in our bones when we are free from all the internalized messages we were taught of who we were supposed to be and the expansion we feel when we transform these messages into critical consciousness to act upon the world and change it.

The project of working toward liberation for all people who experience oppression is one that frees all of us along the way. Liberation is a psychological construct, but it only has meaning when we enact it. Liberation moves us beyond the debates of whether or not we should engage in advocacy and social justice, and moves us to envision the world we want to leave behind as counseling psychologists and actively build towards that world.

Think about it. What would a world free of racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, ableism, anti-immigrant sentiment, and other oppressions “*look like?*” Building a counseling psychology of liberation helps us dream that this new world can not only exist, but that there are also specific action steps as counseling psychologists that we can take right now to work towards that goal; and, this means “liberation” should take its place alongside our other hallmark counseling psychology values of lifespan and career development, prevention and wellness, multiculturalism, and social justice.

It was October 2018, when we first gathered in the Liberation Incubator STG to begin incubating the idea of what a “Counseling Psychology of Liberation” would feel like, and how we could transform as a profession. We started off every meeting with a body check-in, “How was our body reacting to, holding, numbing, and feeling a host of other emotions” as we explored our individual and collective liberation with one another?

We dug into the gifts of liberation psychology theory and science from critical theorists Ignacio Martín-Baró (1996), James Baldwin (1998), Frantz Fanon (1952, 1963), Gloria Anzaldúa (2012), Paulo Freire (1970), Derrick Bell, and Bobbe Harro (2018) along with Mary Watkins and Marlene Shulman (2008) to Black women scholars Sojourner Truth (1863), bell hooks (2014), Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), Brittany Cooper (2018), adrienne maree brown (2017), and many, many more. We held monthly webinars exploring how we could #Livefree in counseling psychology and beyond. We designed, facilitated, and participated in 4-week online Liberation Process groups with a liberation curriculum that guided members in exploring liberation in their own personal and professional lives. All of this liberation incubation on the question of “What would a counseling psychology of liberation feel like?” was planned to continue as we gathered at our discipline’s family reunion—the April 2–5, 2020 CPC. Nearly 300 people signed up for our Pre-Conference called “*Decolonize Your Everything in Counseling Psychology,*” and then COVID-19 hit and the conference was cancelled. A pandemic unfolded as I noted earlier, and a series of everyday injustices were elevated to everyday social media feeds. We each pivoted into everyday liberation work on the streets to challenge anti-Black racism and to uplift student voices who were asking, begging us to do this work.

As I look back on our collective work, I believe there is a specific path we've been on, are on now, and can move forward on in *Building a Counseling Psychology of Liberation*. I happen to be a big fan of Top 10 Lists as a community organizer, so here we go with a Top 10 recipe of sorts for our next steps in this collective work within our profession and why taking up "liberation" as a core counseling psychology value will *help us all get free*.

#10 - Decolonize and Re-Indigenize Counseling Psychology

When we start down a path of building a counseling psychology of liberation, we begin with our own history. We ask critical questions of "Who wrote the history of counseling psychology?" and "For what purpose and whose benefit does counseling psychology exist?" These are complicated questions, with many layers, as we are taught in our History of Psychology courses that William James invented "psychology" and then our own discipline's history currently traces our lineage in the transition from vocational guidance to who we are today (Whitely, 1984). Without critical theories such as critical race theory, firmly as the ground for counseling psychology, we are left with a history that has been largely written by and defined by white men—and then later white women. As Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe (1994) reminded us all, "There is that great proverb—that until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter."

I am not saying we should throw away the contributions of white men and white women in the early "roots" of our profession. However, a key tenet of liberation psychology as articulated by Martín-Baró (1996) is "recovering historical memory." This tenet asks us to go deeper and to note the larger perspective of the oppressed in this history.

From a decolonized and re-indigenized perspective, what are the other roots of counseling psychology? As I ask this question, my own colonized brain in counseling psychology begins to open up with possibilities. I remember that group counseling "kind of" acknowledges that people have sat in circles for healing with roots in indigenous peoples. I begin to imagine that there have been methods for mental health healing since the beginning of humanity, which would mean the cradle and birth of counseling psychology would sit right on the continent of Africa, and then follow human migration. I start to get excited about the project of recovering these historical memories that can inform the history of our profession and even how we practice, research, teach, and train today.

Why is history so important in the building of a counseling psychology of liberation? James Baldwin in his *White Man's Guilt* (1998, pp. 722–723) essay reminds us that:

History, as nearly no one seems to know, is not merely something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the *contrary*, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do. It could scarcely be otherwise, since it is to history that we owe our frames of reference, our identities, and our aspirations.

For this reason, we must find every way we can, and in everything we do, the possibility of naming how colonization, erasure of indigenous peoples, and more, influence our understandings of what counseling psychology is today, in the name of what we might become in the aim of liberation. Decolonization must not be a metaphor as Tuck and Yang (2012) remind us, as re-indigenization must be the aim.

#9 - Center Black Liberation in Everything We Do in Counseling Psychology

As we begin to decolonize and re-indigenize counseling psychology, we start to **decenter dominant white and male narratives in counseling psychology** and we come face-to-face with our internalized whiteness as a discipline. Yes, we strive for multiculturalism. Yes, we strive for social justice (DeBlaree et al., 2019). Yes, the ways we got to multiculturalism and social justice were through the vocational discussions in our field (Flores & Heppner, 2002) that later led to examinations of race and racism (Neville & Carter, 2005), anti-LGBTQ+ bias (Nadal et al., 2012; Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011), and other experiences of oppression (Alvarez et al., 2016). However, building a counseling psychology of liberation allows us to deepen our work in this area and to center Black liberation.

Centering Black liberation means many things. Mostly, it means understanding that until we have this explicit goal, Black people in our profession will continue to experience harm in the form of micro and macro-abuses. Here, I lean on Ibram Kendi's (2019) urging of us to consider using the more truthful term of "microabuses."

In the recent racial affinity groups we held within SCP after police officer David Chauvin murdered George Floyd, where we gathered in Black, non-Black People of Color, and white spaces to uproot anti-Blackness in counseling psychology, we heard the same story that has been there since the

beginning of our profession: the exclusionary and white supremacy norms of our counseling psychology profession are harming Black people (Hargons et al., 2018). Centering Black liberation in counseling psychology means we trust and believe these lived experiences and stories and get busy reducing the harm that Black people experience in our profession.

While our colonized minds tell all of us—white counseling psychologists and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) counseling psychologists included—that to center Black liberation is too big of a stretch, I want to note that it is already happening. It always has in our field. Our job as non-Black POC and white folx in counseling psychology is to follow Black leadership, *right now*, literally right now.

For instance, Dr. Della Mosley and counseling psychology doctoral student Pearis Bellamy are leading a Black liberation movement called “Academics for Black Survival and Wellness.” We have a compass of Black liberation that Dr. Della Mosley et al. (2020) gifted us in the article, *Critical Consciousness of Anti-Black Racism: A Practical Model to Prevent and Resist Racial Trauma* in the *Journal of Counseling Psychology*. We have the work of radical healing from former Division 45 President Dr. Helen Neville and her co-conspirators (French et al., 2019). We have the call for counseling psychologists to write op-eds challenging anti-Black racism from Dr. Kevin Cokley (2015, 2020), and we know about the science of how anti-Black racism works and lodges in the brain and body from Dr. Ezemanari Obasi et al. (2020), while Dr. Candice Hargons (2020) has provided counseling psychology a treasure in the form of “*Black Lives Matter Healing Meditations*.” Dr. Carlton Green and Dr. Reuben Faloughi and so many more are leading and teaching from a Black liberatory focus in counseling psychology practice and within higher education settings.

Our job in building a counseling psychology of liberation is to believe the lived experiences of Black counseling psychologists, and to follow their leadership without over-burdening Black people within and outside of our profession with educating us about our internalized whiteness. A lot of stuff is going to get in the way of us doing this, hence #8.

#8 - Name, Interrogate, and Unlearn Internalized Whiteness in Counseling Psychology

In order to center Black liberation, we all have the job of breaking with white solidarity in counseling psychology. This means bringing our decolonization work into every counseling psychology syllabi, every counseling psychology practice room, and every counseling psychology research space. Again, yes, multiculturalism is important. Yes, advocacy is important. Yes, social justice

is important. But if these values and practices we hold dear to us are not grounded in the larger project and work of liberation, we are lost. We are vulnerable to continuing to work from our own internalized whiteness, and we continue to do harm to Black people and other POC communities.

How do we break with white solidarity? We start with the groundbreaking work of Dr. Janet Helms (1995, 2008) on the racial identity development of white people and People of Color. Right at the center of Helms' white racial development theory is what Robin D'Angelo (2018) and Carol Anderson (2016) would later respectively call "white fragility" and "white rage."

As we center Black liberation in our profession, white counseling psychologists will resist with everything in them—not because they are bad people, but because in counseling psychology we have not adopted the practices Helms (1995, 2008) noted in white racial identity development that are key to noticing if they are in disintegration, pseudo-independence, and more, and they haven't *applied these schemas* to their everyday work in counseling psychology. There is a literal *retreat* in racial identity development where white folx *resist* the work with everything in them. We have lots of research for what to do with this in the counseling room (Cabral & Smith, 2011; Cardemil & Battle, 2003), but we don't apply this racial identity development to what happens within counseling psychology (Helms, 1993) when our, for instance, BIPOC students are calling in white faculty, supervisors, and trainers on their internalized and/or anti-BIPOC racism.

Similarly, we have not established counseling psychology practices of how to *apply* racial identity development for how non-Black People of Color and Black counseling psychologists, who are continuously moving into immersion and emersion, to find the comfort and protection BIPOC communities need considering the anti-Black racism embedded in our counseling psychology program, research, and practice environments. If we know a huge part of BIPOC racial identity development is this different type of retreat, we can know that this will also be what BIPOC folx experience in our counseling psychology settings and plan to transform our environments so they are pro-Black and pro-People of Color.

And as Resmaa Menakem teaches us in *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (2018), there are everyday practices we can use to heal from what he terms "white-body supremacy" that recognize that the epigenetics of racial trauma go back at least 14 generations. That means *we are all carrying* racial trauma into counseling psychology spaces—whether we are white (internalized white superiority) or BIPOC (internalized anti-Blackness)—14 generations

of racial trauma. Building a counseling psychology of liberation means we have a container to recognize and affirm racial trauma and engaging in harm reduction practices.

We can center Black liberation, and all of our liberation as humans, in counseling psychology by asking over, and over, and then over again:

How does internalized whiteness show up in me in counseling psychology?

And then repeat.

How does internalized whiteness show up in me in counseling psychology?

And, then repeat again.

How does internalized whiteness show up in me in counseling psychology?

As we gain understandings of our individual internalization of whiteness, then we can look to resources explicating how white body supremacy culture shows up in our professional counseling psychology settings and in our everyday practices that are so embedded they are hard to identify—from the performance of white time structures, white polices and procedures in the worship of the written word that push-out BIPOC people from our profession, the valuing of quantity-over-quality, the perfectionism, the power-hoarding, the right to white comfort, and so, so much more—see the work of Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun (2001) for how we all can learn how we internalize white supremacy culture characteristics and then enact it on others within counseling psychology. Once we start to reflect on our internalized whiteness, we can begin our individual and collective racial healing (Singh, 2019).

#7 - Uplift the Liberation of Black and Brown Trans Women and Nonbinary Communities in Counseling Psychology

This is a deep one. Deeper than we think. At its surface, trans and nonbinary activists suggest that the average life expectancy of BIPOC trans women is 35 years old.

Let that number truly sink in to your mind. Some of you are not yet 35 years old. Some are right at that age, and some are long past that age. See if your heart starts to feel some grief when I say that number again—Black and Brown trans women can expect an average life expectancy of 35 years old.

When I say that again, I feel my heart break, and then I feel some numbing. We must all feel that heart break, and then move past the numbing and retreat from this “truth” to get busy creating a counseling psychology of liberation where Black and Brown trans women have unfettered access to our discipline and we question how our admissions practices and our own participation in ignoring and neglecting the histories of trans and nonbinary people in the world have led us to a place where we have silence about Black and Brown trans liberation in our curriculum, in our training, in our practice, and in our research in counseling psychology. As we decolonize and re-indigenize counseling psychology, we have the opportunity to tell the truth about gender and how colonization and anti-BIPOC racism were powerful erasers of the existence, value, and sacredness of people who were outside of the imposed binary of “man” and “woman” (Singh, 2018; Singh & dickey, 2017; Singh et al., 2017).

In the fall of 2018, I began to get the first inquiries from Black and Brown trans women who wanted to come study with me because of my research with trans and nonbinary BIPOC. They would ask me about what their experiences would be like in the counseling psychology program, and how well-trained the faculty, supervisors, and incoming students were to be affirming and liberatory toward trans and nonbinary people.

I had to tell them the same thing I had to tell white trans and nonbinary students previously. *Our programs are not safe. Our training is not sufficient. You will experience harm.* And I will give whatever shelter I can if you come.

This is literally the most fucked up thing to have to tell a student, and even more so to bring this conversation to faculty who then would continue to refuse to integrate deep and embedded trans and nonbinary “awareness, knowledge, and skills” into our counseling psychology programs.

Building a counseling psychology of liberation means we build a discipline where BIPOC trans and nonbinary students do not find their lives as a “specialty” to learn about outside of our counseling psychology, but rather we center their lives and make sure every counseling psychology setting we have is one where BIPOC students, practitioners, researchers see their profession engaged in building a more gender-liberatory world.

#6 - Recognize That Patriarchy Is Harmful and Has Lasting Effects

I remember being a women’s studies minor as a student at Tulane University, and reading Gerda Lerner’s *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986). As a mixed-race, South Asian, white-adjacent queer and nonbinary person raised in the deep South, patriarchy was operating on my life in powerful ways I couldn’t

identify. Reading Lerner's book was like finding a new depth in my lungs to breathe, as she articulated that patriarchy had outlived itself and its original purpose (to procreate), yet patriarchy was still here inside of all of us, internalized in deep and profound ways. I remember I went on a journey to root out where patriarchy lived within me, and found ways that I had carefully practiced speaking and acting around cisgender, straight men so I would not get hurt. I had been taught to align myself with patriarchy so I could navigate life—so I could live my life with some self-determination. How have *you* internalized patriarchy, and how are *we* all enforcing it in counseling psychology?

And, it is not just the white patriarchy we have internalized, it is also the BIPOC patriarchy that BIPOC matriarchs have to resist every day (Bryant-Davis & Comas-Díaz, 2016) even though BIPOC women, cis and trans women, often provide the majority of the emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual labor in so many of our personal and professional spaces.

Building a counseling psychology of liberation means we look to womanism, feminism, and specifically Black feminist scholars and leaders who have been doing this work for years to guide us (Bowleg, 2008; Cooper, 2018; Crenshaw, 1989; Hill-Collins, 1990; hooks, 2014; Truth, 1863). And then we connect this work to our counseling psychology practice, research, training, and more.

For instance, we saw the “Me Too” movement, first founded by a Black feminist Tarana Burke in 2006, calling us all in to address the insidious experience of sexual violence in everyday society. In 2017, as the #metoo movement on social media continued, it is noticeable that we did not lean in publicly within counseling psychology to have this discussion—not about sexual violence, not about the driver of that violence—patriarchy—and not about any of the intersections of interlocking oppressions of this violence.

We know that one in five folx who identify as women and one in 14 folx that identify as men experience sexual violence (Smith et al., 2018), and yet we do not talk about this in meaningful ways within counseling psychology. People are coming in to our programs with experiences of sexual violence. People are teaching in our programs with experiences of sexual violence, and not just of survival, but also of enacted sexual violence. *We need to talk about this and find ways to heal.* This means creating spaces to talk about the fact that we are wounded healers finding ways to support wounded people, which means there are power and control dynamics *always* present that we can interrogate and create new practices of healing from sexual violence. I am excited about our potential to do this work in our profession.

Patriarchy has long and harmful effects in counseling psychology. How can we tie this knowing to the things we care about in counseling psychology—the counseling process, counseling outcomes, career self-efficacy, and the art and science of counseling and more? Building a counseling psychology of liberation calls us in to examine how the mental, emotional, sexual, and spiritual violence of patriarchy moves and lives within us, and how we can root it out.

#5 - Know Adultism Is the Root of All Oppression, Including Within Counseling Psychology

Adultism is the valuing of adult perspectives over all others—the power that adults have over young people. One of the main reasons I think we have not examined more deeply how patriarchy, anti-Black racism, racism in general, anti-trans, ableism, classism, and other oppressions have driven inequities, and not just within counseling psychology, but within any profession, I think rests within adultism.

This oppression is experienced by children and adolescents, but also extends to the experiences of people who are actually “young” or perceived as “young”—young students, young faculty, young practitioners, and young researchers in counseling psychology. Adultism teaches us as young people the scripts of what can be said, engaged, and *what must not be said* in everyday interactions.

In doing so, adultism creates the conditions where we are taught to accept *all* of the supremacies of dominance, from internalized whiteness, ableism, classism, fat-prejudice, and xenophobia to sexism, heterosexism and many more. Within counseling psychology, we can counter adultism, and throw open the doors to say “we are going to talk about adultism.”

Let me take us *all* back to our families, to those adultist scripts right now. We may or may not have had stupendous caregivers growing up in our families. Regardless, there were ways we learned as children *not* to use our voice. We were each taught through adultism to doubt ourselves and accept oppressive power and control scripts. Think of the children that you might see in your life right now—or might be raising. You can see the freedom and liberation in their bodies and spirits before adultism teaches them something different. You can see how children care for one another and use gentle touch when folx are hurting. You can also see how they giggle and belly laugh with their entire bodies. You can also see the exact points where they lose this ability as they interact with various people and societal institutions, and the devastation we feel when we learn we cannot wholly protect them from what Maureen Walker of the Stone Institute called power-over interactions (Walker, 2008).

Building a counseling psychology of liberation means we are going back to *reclaim* those kid parts of ourselves that got hurt by dominance, and then learned to enact dominance to align with oppressive power dynamics. We can do this by asking “How (*not* “if”) does adultism influence my everyday interactions, decisions, assumptions, and more as a counseling psychologist at my specific life stage (e.g., student, early-career professional, mid-career professional, and late-career professional)?” and “How does my life stage as a counseling psychologist influence the power I have—or am taught that I do not have—to make change in the work for liberation.”

#4 - Learn Our Migrant Stories as Counseling Psychologists to Heal From Historical Trauma

As we look back on the influence adultism has had on how we come to learn how we can (or cannot) use our voice and power to develop a counseling psychology of liberation, we can create spaces in our profession to learn more about our migrant stories as a site for healing. We often limit this to a multicultural class, a helping skills, and/or family counseling class, where we talk about the influences on our lives from one generation or a few generations back.

When we learn more holistically and truthfully about the migrant stories of our families and communities, we come face-to-face with the healing demanded across generations. Those of us who are Black, Latinx, Asian/Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, and/or white and/or mixed-race who are not indigenous to the land we live on, whether our family generations were moved by the forces of colonization and anti-Black racism or whether our families were the colonizers and aligning with colonizers, can begin to link historical traumas to the current experiences and traumas we have.

I can tell you as the child of an Indian, Sikh father who witnessed Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs who had lived amongst each other peacefully for years then murder, rape, and commit other acts of horrific violence toward one another during the British colonization and partition of India and Pakistan, that I have not had a place in counseling psychology to explore how this historical trauma of white supremacy and colonization affected my own life.

Yes, I have gone to counseling to address how the trauma numbed my dad out from being present with me in his own life, and how I developed healthy and unhealthy skills to deal with his numbing behaviors. My white mom's history goes back to the first white colonizers of indigenous land we now call the “United States” who were from Scotland, and were adjacent to the white enslavers of Black people. She, like all white people, numbed herself to the

brutality of whiteness, and handed that on to me as anti-Black racism. I had to teach myself how to cope with and deal with these historical traumas handed on to me, which was confusing, painful, and at times liberating as I was unlearning.

Imagine if all of us had a frame of reference for how to do this as a counseling psychologist. Making space to learn our migrant histories of experienced and enacted trauma over generations means we then can not only do the healing we need to do as white or BIPOC. It means that we learn that taking action on DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), the injustices ICE (Immigrations and Customs Enforcement) perpetuates, and more xenophobic transgressions are not isolated to counseling psychology “advocacy,” but rather become an everyday experience of being a counseling psychologist, where we lean into the complexity involved in resisting and seeking to dismantle xenophobia and the enforcement of borders that are often on stolen, unceded indigenous land.

#3 - Find Ways to Live in Our Bodies More as Counseling Psychologists

One of the greatest gifts of the Liberation Incubator STG has been our body check-ins. We ask each other each time (and we take the time we need), countering white supremacy notions of “there isn’t enough time to check in with our bodies,” to name what our bodies are experiencing as we work to center Black liberation, uplift queer and trans experiences, examine our internalized ableism and classism, and more. We slow down and make time, countering notions of white time, to move at what adrienne maree brown calls “the speed of trust” (2017).

Now, don’t get me wrong. We still feel the urgency to go fast and produce—that urgency is there. Heck, we mapped out an entire “12 Months of Building a Counseling Psychology of Liberation” for how we could “get and live free” as counseling psychologists.

But, we *also* resisted urgency at each step, were prepared to reinvent, refocus, reconnect, and reinspire at any moment because we focused “on [developing] critical connections more than critical mass – [we focused on] build[ing] the resilience by building the relationships” (brown, 2017, p. 42), which then supported our every decision.

A counseling psychology of liberation uses the body as a site of information and data to inform the larger project of liberation and change we want to see in our lifetimes. We find ways in our practice, research, and training environments to slow down and use the body as a site of liberatory engagement and information.

#2 - Plan for and Fund Generational Change to Create a Nexus of Liberation Leaders in Counseling Psychology

Our Society of Counseling Psychology (SCP) has always understood the importance of planning for the next generation of leaders, for that next generation is key to our survival. However, when we place liberation at the core center of what we do in counseling psychology, we realize that building a pipeline of leaders who are on the margins just won't work on its own. Because we haven't yet dismantled white-body supremacy and other oppressive structures, this type of pipeline will always be a leaky and bumpy one because BIPOC, queer and trans people, people living with disabilities, and other folx on the margins will continue to experience oppression within our profession at every level, and thus, a push-out.

Think about our recent 2020 SCP election. While we had majority POC candidates elected, and notably two Latinx men, none of the Black candidates were elected. There are many layers to this of course as we have been exploring in SCP Cabinet and Exec Board—our SCP membership, the ways that SCP lineage pushes forward some folx and not others.

Regardless of the reasons, when we *really* think about it, we cannot rely on the “traditional” structures within SCP or any other counseling psychology setting to give us the liberation we want to see and experience. Building a counseling psychology of liberation means we dream bigger and *act bolder*.

Within SCP right now, we pay vendors to help us in the everyday work of the division. This means we can also, right now, pay a nexus of Black leaders for their knowledge and expertise so we are clearly accountable in SCP to creating structures that do not harm Black and other communities on the margins in our profession. We can, right now, pay a nexus of Black and Brown trans women for their guidance on how to best teach about interlocking oppressions, resilience, liberation, and community engagement (see the incredible 75th Anniversary of Counseling Psychology Keynote by Mariah Moore, J'ai Celestial Shavers, and Toni-Michelle Williams for some initial guidance on this). There are ways that we can expand this everyday reparative work in counseling psychology. When we create a nexus of liberation leaders across many lived identities and experiences of oppression, we begin to more meaningfully identify the *exact* work that each generation of counseling psychology has in the dismantling of all oppression to create a world where all people can experience more and more liberation.

#1 - Know That Another World of Liberation Is Possible and Then Build This World Within Counseling Psychology

As we build this counseling psychology of liberation, we can and should experience *tremendous* resistance within and outside ourselves. I call Arundhati Roy's name again in her article, "*The Pandemic is a Portal*." In this article, she is speaking to India amidst the Coronavirus pandemic, and her words ring true for us as well:

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and to imagine our world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it (2020, April 3).

Students and early career professionals (ECPs), so many of you are leading us in our liberation movements right now—you always have, and you always will—and a counseling psychology of liberation designs careful links to your experiences of liberation as accountability markers. I believe and trust in and will work for your vision for our field for the rest of my professional life.

Mid-career professionals (MCPs) and late-career professionals (LCPs), I know we are tired and feel like the work we have done is not always valued, but in the work of building a counseling psychology of liberation, we actively develop accountability networks that help us remember we have a *long* way to go in unlearning our own oppression and participation in oppressive systems, which we have internalized and continues to impact the lives of those less senior to us. These can be accountability networks that hold us and help us retrain, relearn, lean in, support, and engage the most challenging conversations we can have about liberation in counseling psychology. We can nourish ourselves for each step of this journey, use our power and advantage for these conversations that challenge our own resistance, assumptions, and practice, because we know they are key to us all getting free in counseling psychology.

For all of us across the lifespan, when we develop a counseling psychology of liberation—we honor that liberation is love, and that love is liberation. So, we know that the ruptures we experience in liberation work can be healed over time with accountability and feedback, which are also forms of love.

We have so much to offer the world my beloved community of counseling psychology. We've laid a lot of important foundation for our values, and it is time to level up.

So, let's level up *now* and push farther than we ever thought we could in dreaming what the beloved community really is in counseling psychology. We don't have to dismantle everything, but we do need to dismantle many things. And mostly, we need to dismantle the parts of our hearts that have been taught to be numb to the pain people feel on the margins of our profession so we can step into the lineage of true and deep healing.

We are healers in counseling psychology *and* we are wounded. It is time to acknowledge the truth of that complexity so we can dig into the power dynamics and potentialities for liberation in our every interaction with others and within ourselves.

Now, I know this all seems really big, almost impossible, and like it's-not-gonna-happen. Oppression works that way. It is designed to work that way. Injustice does not want to be questioned. But as Arundhati Roy (2020) said, "Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing." Another world is possible in counseling psychology when we take up liberation.

We can be in a liberation movement that will not be stopped. And as we do that liberation work, we can be brought into the fullness of our own humanity. And, when we think of folx like U.S. Representative John Lewis, who fought for the beloved community with his each breath, we see our compass for liberation is inside of us. He reminded us of this at the very time of his own death. He said,

I urge you to answer the highest calling of your heart and stand up for what you truly believe.

I invite us all to place your right hand over your heart if that feels comfortable to you. Imagine that first moment you said "yes" to counseling psychology. Breathe in all the emotions and experiences that were there with you.

Next, place your left hand over your right hand that is still on your heart. Take a deep breath, and imagine what that same "meeting" of counseling psychology might have felt like if you were entering a counseling psychology of liberation—that on that very first day of your acquaintance with counseling psychology where you were told the whole point of counseling psychology was to get free yourself, and to help others do the same.

Imagine all that is possible in this moment of your first meeting, and take a deep breath in; then, imagine your very next step to building that counseling psychology of liberation right now, that next step that *only you* can do in your

own unique way. And take a breath of gratitude for this information. Slowly open your eyes when you are ready. Let's all get and live free beloved community of counseling psychology.

In solidarity, in community, in connection, in accountability, and in love, it has been an honor to be your SCP President this past year.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Note

1. I intentionally do not capitalize "white" to represent the importance of de-centering white-body supremacy in counseling psychology and larger society.

References

- Achebe, C. (1994). The art of fiction No. 139. *Paris Review*, 133(Winter).
- Alvarez, A. N., Liang, C., & Neville, H. A. (Eds.). (2016). *Contextualizing the cost of racism for people of color: Theory, research, and practice*. American Psychological Association.
- Anderson, C. (2016). *White rage: The unspoken truth of our racial divide*. Bloomsbury.
- Anzaldúa, G. (2012). *Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books.
- Baldwin, J. (1998). White man's guilt. In *James Baldwin: Collected essays*. Library of America.
- Bell, D. A., Jr. (1980). Brown v. Board of Education and the interest-convergence dilemma. *Harvard Law Review*, 93(3), 518–533. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1340546>
- brown, a. m. (2017). *Emergent strategy: Shaping change, changing worlds*. AK Press.
- Bowleg, L. (2008). When Black + lesbian + woman ≠ Black lesbian woman: The methodological challenges of qualitative and quantitative intersectionality research. *Sex Roles*, 59, 312–325. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-008-9400-z>
- Bryant-Davis, T., & Comas-Díaz, L. (2016). *Womanist and mujerista psychologies: Voices of fire, acts of courage*. American Psychological Association.
- Cabral, R. R., & Smith, T. B. (2011). Racial/ethnic matching of clients and therapists in mental health services: A meta-analytic review of preferences, perceptions, and outcomes. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 58(4), 537–544. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025266>
- Cardemil, E. V., & Battle, C. L. (2003). Guess who's coming to therapy: Getting comfortable with conversations about race and ethnicity in psychotherapy.

- Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 34(3), 278–286. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.34.3.278>
- Cokley, K. O. (2020, July 13). We need leaders to affirm that Black Lives Matter, not exploit the phrase to divide us. *USA Today*. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2020/07/13/black-lives-matter-exploited-for-political-economic-gain-column/5397072002/>
- Cokley, K. O. (2015, June 18). Improving race relations in an era of police brutality. *Texas Perspectives*. <https://news.utexas.edu/2015/06/18/improving-race-relations-in-an-era-of-police-brutality/>
- Cooper, B. (2018). *Eloquent rage: A Black feminist discovers her superpower*. St. Martin's Press.
- Crenshaw, K. W. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 139, 139–167.
- D'Angelo, R. (2018). *White fragility: Why it's so hard for White people to talk about racism*. Beacon Press.
- DeBlaere, C., Singh, A. A., Wilcox, Cokley, K. O., Delgado-Romero, E. A., Scalise, D. A., & Shawahn, L. (2019). Social justice in counseling psychology: Then, now, and looking forward. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 47(16), 938–962. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000019893283>
- Fanon, F. (1952). *Black skin, white masks*. Grove Press.
- Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth*. Grove Press.
- Flores, L. Y., & Heppner, M. J. (2002). Multicultural career counseling: Ten essentials for training. *Journal of Career Development*, 28, 181–202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089484530202800304>
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Herder and Herder.
- French, B. H., Lewis, J. A., Mosley, D. V., Adames, H., Chavez-Duenas, Chen, G A., & Neville, H. (2019). Toward a psychological framework of radical healing in communities of color. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 48(1), 14–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000019843506>
- Hargons, C. (2016). *Black Lives Matter healing meditations*. <http://drcandicenicole.com/2016/07/black-lives-matter-meditation/>
- Hargons, C., Mosley, D., Falconer, J., Faloughi, R., Singh, A. A., Cokley, K., & Stevens-Watkins, D. (2018). Black lives matter: A call to action for counseling psychology leaders. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 45(6), 873–901. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000017733048>
- Harro, B. (2018). The cycle of liberation. In M. Adams, W. J. Blemfeld, D. Chase, J. Catalano, K. S. DeJong, H. W. Hackman, L. E. Hopkins, B. J. Love, M. L. Peters, D. Shlasko, & X. Zuniga (Eds.), *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice* (4th ed; pp. 627–634). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Helms, J. E. (2008). *A race is a nice thing to have: A guide to being a White person or understanding the White persons in your life* (2nd ed.). Microtraining Associates.
- Helms, J. E. (1995). An update of Helms's White and People of Color racial identity models. In J. G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, L. A. Suzuki, & C. M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (pp. 181–198). Sage.

- Helms, J. E. (1993). I also said White racial identity influences White researchers. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 21, 240–243. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000093212007>
- Hill Collins, P. (1990). *Black Feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Unwin Hyman.
- hooks, b. (2014). *Ain't I a woman?: Black women and feminism* (2nd ed). Routledge.
- Kendi, I. (2019). *How to be an anti-racist*. Penguin Random House.
- Kukla, E. (2020, March 19). My life is more 'disposable' during this pandemic: The ableism and ageism being unleashed is its own sort of pestilence. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/19/opinion/coronavirus-disabled-health-care.html>
- Jones, K., & Okun, T. (2016). *Dismantling racism: A workbook for social change groups*. <https://www.dismantlingracism.org/>
- Lerner, G. (1986). *The creation of patriarchy, Vol. I: Women and history*. Oxford University Press.
- Martín-Baró, I. (1996). *Writings for a liberation psychology*. Harvard University Press.
- Menakem, R. (2018). *My grandmother's hands: Racialized trauma and the pathway to mending our hearts and bodies*. Central Recovery Press.
- Moore, M., Shavers, J. C., & Williams, T. M. (2020, July 18). *When we fight, we win: Implications for counseling psychology from Black trans intersectional liberation movements*. Webinar in the 75th Anniversary of Counseling Psychology Webinar Series.
- Mosley, D. V., Hargons, C. N., Meiller, C., Angyal, B., Wheeler, P., Davis, C., & Stevens-Watkins, D. (2020). Critical consciousness of anti-Black racism: A practical model to prevent and resist racial trauma. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000430>
- Nadal, K. L., Skolnik, A., & Wong, Y. (2012). Interpersonal and systemic micro-aggressions toward transgender people: Implications for counseling. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 6(1), 55–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15538605.2012.648583>
- Neville, H. A., & Carter, R. T. (2005). Race and racism in counseling psychology research, training, and practice: A critical review, current trends, and future directions. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 33(4), 413–418. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000005276733>
- Obasi, E. M., Chen, T.-A., Cavanagh, L., Smith, B. K., Wilborn, K. A., McNeill, L. H., & Reitzel, L. R. (2020). Depression, perceived social control, and hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis function in African-American adults. *Health Psychology*, 39(2), 107–115. <https://doi.org/10.1037/hea0000812>
- Roy, A. (2020, April 3). The pandemic is a portal. *The Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca>
- Shelton, K., & Delgado-Romero, E. (2011). Sexual orientation microaggressions: The experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer clients in psychotherapy. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 58(2), 210–221. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022251>
- Singh, A. A. (2018). *Queer and trans resilience workbook: Skills for navigating sexual orientation and gender identity*. New Harbinger.

- Singh, A. A. (2019). *The racial healing handbook: Practical activities to help you challenge privilege, confront systemic racism, and engage in collective healing*. New Harbinger.
- Singh, A. A., & dickey, l. m. (2017). Introduction. In Singh, A. A. & dickey, l. m. (Eds.) *Trans-affirmative counseling and psychological practice*. American Psychological Association.
- Singh, A. A., Hwhang, S., Chang, S., & White, B. (2017). Affirmative counseling with trans/gender-variant People of Color. In Singh, A. A. & dickey, l. m. (Eds.) *Trans-affirmative counseling and psychological practice*. American Psychological Association.
- Smith, S. G., Zhang, X., Basile, K. C., Merrick, M. T., Wang, J., Kresnow, M., & Chen, J. (2018). *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2015 Data Brief – Updated Release*. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Truth, S. (1863). *Ain't I a Woman*. <https://www.thesojournertruthproject.com>
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 1–40. <https://clas.osu.edu/sites/clas.osu.edu/files/Tuck%20and%20Yang%202012%20Decolonization%20is%20not%20a%20metaphor.pdf>
- Walker, M. (2008). Power and effectiveness: Envisioning an alternate paradigm. *Women & Therapy*, 31(2/3/4), 129–144.
- Watkins, M., & Shulman, H. (2008). *Toward psychologies of liberation*. Palgrave MacMillan.
- Whitehead, M. (1991). The concepts and principles of equity and health. *Health Promotion International*, 6(3), 217–228. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/6.3.217>
- Whiteley, J. M. (1984). *Counseling psychology: A historical perspective*. Character Research Press.

Author Biography

Anneliese Singh, PhD, LPC, is Chief Diversity Officer/Associate Provost of Faculty Development and Diversity at Tulane University and Professor in Social Work with a joint appointment in the Department of Psychology. Dr. Singh is the author of *The Racial Healing Handbook* and *The Queer and Trans Resilience Workbook*. Most importantly, she is wife to Dr. Lauren Lukkarila, daughter to Diane and Jasbir Singh, and born of New Orleans.