

Taking Action: Reflections on Forming and Facilitating a Peer-Led Social Justice Advocacy Group



The Professional Counselor™
Volume 13, Issue 4, Pages 462–472
<http://tpcjournal.nbcc.org>
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doi: 10.15241/sms.13.4.462

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According to the American Counseling Association and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, social justice advocacy is an ethical imperative for counselors and a training standard for counseling students. As a group of socially conscious mental health counseling students and faculty, we developed and facilitated a social justice advocacy group to learn about tangible ways to engage in social justice action. Using the S-Quad model developed by Toporek and Ahluwalia, we formed and facilitated a social justice advocacy group for our peers. This paper will serve as a reflection of our experiences engaging in the process.

Keywords: social justice, advocacy, counseling students, S-Quad model, mental health

When describing the motivation for her political aspirations, Georgia gubernatorial hopeful Stacey Abrams (2019) stated, “We have to have people who understand that social justice belongs to us all.” This quote speaks to this group of authors who feel strongly about the importance of social justice in mental health counseling. This ethos served as the motivation to create a peer-led group to foster the development of our social justice advocacy skills. We used the S-Quad model (Toporek & Ahluwalia, 2020) to form and facilitate a social justice advocacy group for master’s and doctoral counseling students at our institution.

Historically, the counseling profession has been rooted in social justice advocacy (SJA) with Frank Parsons’s efforts to support White European immigrants in the United States to develop their vocational goals (Gummere, 1988; Toporek & Daniels, 2018). However, SJA has not been consistently operationalized across counselor training programs (Counselors for Social Justice [CSJ], 2020). Although ethical standards established by the American Counseling Association’s *ACA Code of Ethics* (ACA; 2014) encourage counselors to advocate for clients and communities when appropriate (A.7.a, A.7.b.), and training standards established by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP; 2015) state that SJA should be a part of counseling curriculum (2.F.2.b.), counselors have reported receiving little guidance about how to implement advocacy in practice (Field et al., 2019; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). As counseling students, we experienced the same concern. To address this gap in our educational experience, we created and facilitated a group based on the S-Quad model (strengths, solidarity, strategies, and sustainability) of SJA (Toporek & Ahluwalia, 2020). As a group of socially conscious mental health counseling students, our aim was to grow in our roles as professionals by learning about, teaching, and engaging in SJA. In the process, we learned about ourselves as budding counselors and educators.

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Literature Review

In their foundational article, Vera and Speight (2003) called on the counseling profession to expand its understanding of multicultural competence; they asserted that without SJA, counselors are perpetuating the systems of oppression from which their clients are attempting to heal. Utilizing intrapsychic approaches which neglect to account for contextual factors not only perpetuates oppressive counseling practices, but it also does a disservice to those with marginalized identities (Ratts, 2009; Vera & Speight, 2003). In order to properly serve clients, counselors must step beyond the classroom, expand the original conceptualization of our roles, and explore beyond the counseling office (Ratts, 2009; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018; Vera & Speight, 2003). Despite the increase in available resources such as the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Toporek et al., 2009) and the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC; Ratts et al., 2016), the number of sociocultural forces such as racial demographics of counseling programs and reliance on theories and interventions developed for White European clients prevents social justice from being a central force in the profession (CSJ, 2020).

As mental health professionals, we are positioned to understand the impact that oppression has on health (Nadal et al., 2021), which speaks to the need for operationalizing social justice counseling and SJA so counselors may support client wellness. Counseling students require more knowledge and practice to obtain appropriate resources and tools in order to intervene and resist systemic oppression (Vera & Speight, 2003). Ratts (2009) named social justice as the “fifth force” in counseling in an attempt to concretize the relevance and importance of challenging the status quo in counseling. However, the perceived attitude of the counseling profession toward social justice is reflected in the definition of counseling. The 20/20 initiative was a movement to unify the profession and solidify professional identity by arriving at the definition of counseling. Delegates from 31 counseling-related organizations (e.g., CACREP, Chi Sigma Iota) participated in a Delphi-method study to achieve consensus on a definition; however, only 29 organizations ultimately endorsed the definition (Kaplan et al., 2014). Although the definition for counseling includes the word “empower”; it does not include the words “social justice” or “advocacy.” Thus, CSJ was one organization that did not support the new definition (Kaplan et al., 2014). Despite these challenges, Ratts and Greenleaf (2018) assert that counselors must develop the advocate part of their identity, yet they note that there is more of a focus on traditional counseling skills rather than acknowledging the shifting sociopolitical climate and equipping counselors with the skills to address these concerns. The leadership and advocacy course (or the content in another course; CACREP, 2023) in CACREP-accredited counseling doctoral programs often only focuses on leadership and advocacy within and for the profession. Although CACREP (2023) standards do not dictate the courses a counseling program must offer, there continues to be limited discussion of SJA and social justice, nor are there solid instructional methods for counselor educators to use in the classroom (Chapman-Hilliard & Parker, 2022). This situation hinders students’ understanding of the role systemic issues have on minoritized communities, further deterring people in those communities from seeking help.

As counselors and counseling students, we understand our responsibility to advocate for clients, but we feel unprepared to fulfill our ethical (and for many of us, moral) duty. We did not learn enough about the concrete, tangible skills that a professional counselor can utilize to challenge oppression and inequity. We were unable to locate any studies regarding peer-led SJA groups for counseling students, thus we hope to contribute something novel to the counseling literature and encourage counseling students to better understand and grow into their roles as social justice advocates. Counselors-in-training (CITs) and practicing counselors within the profession sometimes question the relevance of SJA and report feeling confused about how to implement SJA in counseling (Field et al., 2019; Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018).

hooks (1994) notes it is imperative that a student accepts responsibility for their education and becomes “an active participant, not a passive consumer” (p. 14). Thus, we engaged in this process to support our colleagues in the counseling student body and take accountability for our education.

Taking Action: Social Justice Advocacy Group

Leading organizations in the profession claim a two-pronged approach to advocacy: one prong advocating for the legitimacy of the counseling profession, and the other advocating on behalf of the clients and students whom counselors serve (Chang et al., 2012). In our educational experience, SJA on behalf of and in partnership with clients was emphasized, but tangible interventions were not discussed. Further, systemic issues and inequities were often left unaddressed. Thus, we developed this group to more concretely address the second “prong” of advocacy in counseling. First and fourth authors Sunanda M. Sharma and MaryRose Kaplan were part of the executive board of Chi Sigma Mu (Chi Sigma Iota chapter at Montclair State University) and co-founded the social justice committee. Second and third authors Jennifer E. Bianchini and Zeynep L. Cakmak were the first members of the committee who proposed ideas and facilitated events and activities related to social justice that they felt passionately about. Bianchini proposed a social justice book club ahead of a presentation that the CSI chapter organized (hosting the authors of the book *Taking Action*). The book club met three times with up to three students, from whom we received feedback to help us form the SJA group.

The following semester, fifth author Muninder K. Ahluwalia proposed restructuring the book club into an advocacy group by utilizing the *Taking Action* text as a framework to teach students about systemic SJA. CACREP (2015) standards state that multiculturalism and social justice must be discussed throughout counseling courses (2.F.2.b.); however, in our experiences, we found that social justice is addressed as an ethical and moral imperative, but curricula do not address concrete SJA skills and strategies to combat systemic oppression. The counseling program in which the first four authors are enrolled and the fifth author is a faculty member offers a social justice counseling class as an elective. However, the class is not consistently offered every semester and has only been taught by that one faculty member. Thus, our aim with this group was to provide a space for our colleagues in which we could collaboratively learn about how to enact social justice. This section will describe the S-Quad model, explain the group structure, outline the proposed learning objectives, and provide a table that outlines the curriculum of the group.

The S-Quad Framework

As a profession, mental health counseling is positioned to “buffer” against challenges with oppression and changes to the status quo (Kivel, 2020). There is an emphasis on intrapsychic interventions to combat systemic issues, rather than attempt to uproot the oppression itself (Kivel, 2020; Ratts, 2009; Toporek, 2018). Toporek (2018) noted that upon reflection of the way the profession is positioned and her privileged identities, she developed a framework through which to take social justice action despite the challenges she continues to encounter. The S-Quad model includes four Ss for social justice advocates to formulate a way to address systemic injustices: strengths, solidarity, strategy, and sustainability (Toporek & Ahluwalia, 2020).

Strengths are described as a combination of one’s existing “skills, knowledge, and expertise” (Toporek & Ahluwalia, 2020, p. 27). Although strengths can be qualities one already has, both personal and professional, the authors also encourage budding advocates to reflect upon strengths that they would like to develop. *Solidarity* has multiple facets to its definition, as advocates are asked to support, honor, and respect communities they intend to engage with and to also seek support from their personal networks

to remain grounded (Toporek & Ahluwalia, 2020). Solidarity is enacted through collaborative efforts and through the lens of cultural humility (Toporek & Ahluwalia, 2020). *Strategy* is the implementation of strengths and solidarity to construct a plan of action (Toporek & Ahluwalia, 2020). It is important to evaluate the efficacy, efficiency, and impact of different strategic plans to ensure they work toward the stated goal and—most importantly—benefit the community that the action is intended for (Toporek & Ahluwalia, 2020). Finally, a unique facet of the S-Quad model is the fourth “S,” sustainability. *Sustainability* addresses the wellness of advocates; without it, there is a higher likelihood they may abandon their efforts. SJA can be an enriching and healing practice, but it can also be an emotionally draining pursuit, and one can feel helpless when attempting to combat the gravity and breadth of oppression (Toporek & Ahluwalia, 2020). Thus, the authors encourage budding advocates to take an inventory of the practices that replenish and nourish them in order to remain engaged in their work.

Group Structure

Sharma proposed structuring this SJA group as a biweekly, one-hour, peer-led, open (students were free to join at any point) psychoeducation group, whose grounding framework would be the S-Quad model (Toporek & Ahluwalia, 2020). Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we facilitated the group through Zoom. The objectives of the group were: to describe all components of the S-Quad model, to describe the ethical responsibility of being a social justice advocate, to create a solidarity network of fellow advocates, to increase awareness of how one’s positionality impacts their advocacy work, and to apply the S-Quad model (Toporek, 2018) through the creation of a social justice action plan (Sheely-Moore & Kooyman, 2011). Initially, the intention was to divide each group session into two parts. The first part of the session would be didactic, in which we would discuss the “S” of that week and ground it in a case study. The second half of the session would offer members the chance to process the content so they can apply what they are learning to their social justice plan. Upon reflection and discussion as co-facilitators, we recognized the challenges associated with attempting to address so much content in a 60-minute session and collectively agreed to shift the group and make it akin to a flipped classroom by including pre-recorded didactic videos. This afforded members the chance to view the videos at their own pace and come to the session prepared to engage in dialogue.

In our experiences, instructors who taught our counseling theories courses recommended for us to select one theory to learn about before declaring our theoretical orientation. Similarly, we asked members to narrow down their focus for the purposes of this group to a cause within a community that they feel passionately about. The other structural component we addressed with group members was that this curriculum is cumulative but not necessarily linear; so, an application of the previous “S” is necessary to study the following “S.” For example, once a group member identifies their strengths, we apply those strengths to inform what strategies they will use, but it does not necessarily mean that strengths are not revisited.

Given that this was a psychoeducation group rather than a traditional course, we did not want to use typical didactic methods to engage with this material. We intentionally paired each part of the S-Quad model with a story about an advocate from a minoritized community of whom others likely may not be aware. This demonstrated that SJA is not always done on a public stage. This narrative form of teaching (Hannam et al., 2015) allowed us to contextualize stories of advocates who are quietly resisting oppression in their respective communities. We spotlighted those stories so members could feel less intimidated by the prospect of SJA. In the interest of social justice and accessibility, the Chi Sigma Iota Counseling Honor Society’s Chi Sigma Mu chapter at Montclair State University funded books for interested members so they could follow along with the activities and didactic content. After the second session, we also introduced the idea of the social justice action plan.

Table 1 shows the structure/syllabus of the group that we utilized for the semester and describes the ways in which we adapted to agreed-upon changes.

Table 1

Taking Action Group Structure

Week	Topic & Activity Assigned	Content/Activities
Week 1	Introducing <i>Taking Action</i> S-Quad Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose, rationale, and structure of group • Group agreements/norms • Overview of S-Quad model (Toporek & Ahluwalia, 2020) • ADDRESSING model (Hays, 2022), a framework that explores individual identity in context • Difference between justice, charity, philanthropy
Week 2	1st S: Strengths Activity 4.2, p. 29**	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing agreed-upon group norms • Defining strengths • Case study: Arunachalam Muruganantham (“The Pad Man”) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Processing case study as a group • Introducing the social action plan
Week 3	Co-facilitators reflection meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This session was initially planned to address the 2nd S in the S-Quad, but no members attended the group this day. Instead, as co-facilitators, we met to discuss the progress of the group.
Week 4*	2nd S: Solidarity Activity 5.1, p. 55	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining solidarity • Case study: 4 young Black women, Black Lives Matter protests <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Combining strengths and solidarity - Processing case study as a group
Week 5	3rd S: Strategy Activity 6.1, p. 66	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining strategy • Case study: Cakmak <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strength, solidarity, and strategy - Processing case study as a group - Cakmak’s social action plan
Week 6	4th S: Sustainability Activity 7.6, p. 176	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining sustainability • Case study: Alexandria Ocasio Cortez <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strength, solidarity, strategy, and sustainability - Processing the importance and guilt of self-care - Processing burnout
Week 7	Final Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Apply ADDRESSING, S-Quad model • Feedback from members

*Marks shift to videos for the didactic portion

**All activities listed are from Ahluwalia & Toporek (2020).

Reflections

In this section, we offer our reflections on the group and extract salient collective themes that have come about through our processing. In our first session, we informed the group members that we intended to write a reflection paper, and they gave implicit consent to this writing; we did not collect data from group members for the purposes of this article. We begin by grounding the discussion of the group by acknowledging our positionality and social location and how that influenced how we approached our facilitation and planning of the group. Sharma, Bianchini, and Cakmak will provide their most salient takeaways from the forming and facilitation of the *Taking Action* group.

Positionality

Sharma identifies as a cisgender, South Asian (Indian), middle-class, able-bodied woman who is a doctoral candidate in a CACREP-accredited counseling program and a full-time lecturer in a CACREP-accredited counseling program. I bring a bicultural perspective to my counseling practice and education, and I have attended primarily White institutions (PWIs) for most of my life. As a master's and doctoral National Board for Certified Counselors Minority Fellowship Program fellow, I learned about the importance and practice of SJA. I am a practicing clinician in private practice (working mostly with White clients), and I engage in advocacy work with South Asian intimate partner violence survivors.

Bianchini identifies as a White, cisgender woman who grew up in a predominantly White community in the United States. My family has lived in the United States for several generations and the majority of my extended family identifies as part of the middle class. I do not have any disabilities and am a practicing Christian. I am a master's-level graduate student and joined Chi Sigma Iota's social justice committee in my first semester of coursework.

Cakmak identifies as a Muslim American, cisgender woman of Turkish origin. I do not have any physical disabilities, but I have been diagnosed with general anxiety disorder (GAD) and major depressive disorder (MDD). I identified as part of the upper middle class in Turkey as a child, and I am middle class as an immigrant in the United States. I have two graduate degrees, one in literature and one in counseling. I have done volunteer work with underrepresented religious and cultural communities since I was in high school.

Themes

As cocreators and coauthors, we reflected on our collective and individual experiences of facilitating our *Taking Action* group. We each completed individual reflection sheets within 48 hours of each group session to capture our takeaways, and we processed our experiences together after each group session. We reviewed our reflection sheets individually and noted themes that arose for each of us. We then collectively reviewed the sheets to determine what themes arose across our reflection sheets. We reengaged in the reflection process as we wrote this manuscript. In this section, we highlight the major themes among our experiences.

Fear

The most significant theme of our collective experience was fear. Throughout each session, fear came up under several different guises, which served as an umbrella for additional themes: judgment, self-efficacy, and humility. Fear was the main antagonist preventing us from doing social justice work before this program. Fear of not knowing the necessary information, fear of saying or doing the wrong thing, and fear of not helping enough or adequately were examples of how this feeling manifested.

However, engaging in this group helped us alleviate that fear through resources, support, and a plan of action. In the first session, we felt tentative and timid, and optimistic yet stagnant. After providing members with more information and concrete steps to create real social justice action, our fear dissipated, our passion for working as a group was ignited, and the motivation to take action began.

Judgment

In our first session, when we engaged members in a dialogue about group agreements, we noticed that there was more focus on the importance of the group serving as a judgment-free space than as a confidential one. We felt that members wanted to feel safe in the group because they feared being judged due to their self-perceived incompetence. We recognized they did not want to feel judged by others if their ideas were deemed unacceptable or incorrect. Establishing a nonjudgmental space permitted members to try, even if the outcomes were not as they hoped. We believe it allowed members to have a safe space to begin processing what they understand about SJA.

Judgment was a recurrent theme and shifted from self-judgment to judging others. Members reported feeling frustrated and upset when their peers in the program were not at the same level of advocacy awareness and action as they were. They reported feeling angry about others' ignorance. Through a shared reflection on these feelings, the group acknowledged that the judgment of others reinforces the barriers to change that we are trying to knock down. Members recognized the importance of being humble regarding other people (another theme discussed below) and empathetic to help manage feelings of judgment.

When discussing sustainability and self-care, members and facilitators shared our hesitations to implement sustainability practices, despite it being an ethical responsibility. This hesitancy revealed itself to be motivated by self-judgment of our productivity levels. It appeared that the group members would not allow themselves the breaks they needed to provide self-care because of the importance they gave to SJA. We then discussed the need to be unapologetic in our self-care as advocates and counselors.

Self-Efficacy

Related to judgment of self and others, we found self-efficacy was another significant and recurrent theme. Almost every group member expressed that they were struggling to feel like they could contribute enough to society to perform real social justice action rather than charity. Having members share similar insecurities resulted in an insightful and vulnerable conversation that helped us to feel connected and inspired. In the second session, members reported experiencing imposter syndrome, likely resulting from their low self-efficacy in social justice work. Our self-efficacy grew throughout the sessions as members received the information and tools they needed to take concrete steps in SJA. Once we clarified a reasonable idea of what was expected of them and had some direction, they felt more prepared to take action.

Humility

Lastly, the theme of humility appeared in several different iterations. The humility through humor with which we, as facilitators, approached this process helped break the ice and create a comfortable atmosphere in our initial meeting. Humility emerged in our second session when discussing the first "S" of the S-Quad model, strengths. In our reflection process, we noted that both facilitators and members appeared to be uncomfortable when sharing what they are "good" at. We, as female-identifying co-facilitators, noted the societal pressure and shame that have historically come with feelings of discomfort for behavior commonly regarded as boastful.

In the fourth session, the group discussed the importance of humility within their community. Members discussed how it was easy to humble oneself when trying to assist a community from the outside, but that it was an important lesson that we must be humble within our own communities. Members seemed to realize that their experience of their community and identity would not be the same as the next person's, highlighting the importance of intersectionality within the human experience.

Humility was next discussed in the fifth session in terms of failure. Members acknowledged the importance of possessing humility and patience regarding our work because we will generally fail more than we will succeed in our efforts to create change. If we never failed, we would never learn from our mistakes and there would be no more SJA to do. However, knowing this instills the hope to persevere, for you never know what your planted seeds of action will grow into.

Combining Themes

As facilitators, we noticed a parallel between what we were experiencing and our members' experiences. From the start of our group, we felt we needed to be more qualified to be teachers of SJA. This was our campus's first peer-led advocacy group, which meant we did not have any models to reference, and we had to rely on our own ideas, skills, and judgment. With faculty support, we went outside the confines of our curriculum because we wanted to share and engage with this content in a meaningful way. This was a large undertaking, with little training and even less confidence. Similar to what we observed in our members, we were afraid of making mistakes in the content, direction, and discussion of this group because of the weight of the topic of social justice—especially as the first group any of us attempted to create or lead. We had to adapt to constantly developing circumstances, and this felt inappropriate for us as leaders. Something we recognized much later was that we could teach and learn simultaneously; we did not need to reach a point of expertise before developing this group. Although we do not consider ourselves experts in SJA, the work we did to prepare for each session, combined with the humility with which we presented ourselves and our work, effectively allowed us to lead the group to the best of our ability.

Another source of our fear was that there was an ulterior motivation for creating this group, which was not purely social justice-oriented. We sought a sense of community, particularly given the isolating COVID-19 pandemic we were living through, and running this group gave us that community, support, and friendship. This longing for connection played into our feelings of being unqualified to do social justice work because a few of us became involved in this project out of a desire to work with friends, and not solely because we wanted to devote ourselves to social justice. However, this search for connection and participation in this SJA group gave us a passion for this work if it was not present beforehand. That feeling of connection and belonging provided us with the inner power to attempt something bigger than ourselves. The bond we authors created while facilitating this group instilled the importance of collaboration, especially when doing something new, significant, and daunting. The "S" for solidarity was also particularly salient in this case; we recognize that we could not have created or run this group alone. We needed each other to not only complete all the work required but also to hold each other accountable, support each other in times of need, and encourage each other to keep going even when our hopes dimmed. In a sense, this group and the connection to each other provided the "S" for sustainability and wellness for ourselves and our work.

While reflecting on these two sources of our fear as facilitators, we discovered our desire to make this call to the counseling profession: to strengthen the bridge between academia and counseling in practice. Applying the knowledge gained from our courses to daily practice could be less intimidating and feel more like the natural progression of our nascent counseling careers. However,

once the opportunity arose to test our skills, we felt hesitant and unprepared. Creating an advocacy group is not the only venue in which this fear of practice appears. As students, we authors felt a similar fear when stepping into our practicum and internship sites. It is natural to feel afraid when seeing clients for the first time as CITs, but this fear could be lessened by academic leaders guiding students into the field before their final year of studies. If more opportunities to work with real issues affecting communities were available to students and supported by faculty, the transition between the classroom and fieldwork would feel less daunting.

Discussion

Although this project was not an empirical study, our reflective process taught us about how it feels to learn about SJA and the labor required to teach about SJA. With this knowledge, we have identified potential implications for the counseling profession and counselor education training programs. We also acknowledge the limitations of the group we formed and facilitated.

Implications

Per our experience, we believe social justice counseling—and advocacy skills more specifically—must have a more prominent place in counseling curricula. Potential solutions may include consistently operationalizing social justice counseling and SJA in counselor training programs (CSJ, 2020). Furthermore, it is imperative to have more guidance from our institutional standards such as CACREP (2023) and to have more ethical standards regarding SJA in the next iteration of the *ACA Code of Ethics*. CACREP (2023) requirements establish content that should be covered throughout all coursework, rather than specific classes; however, each program might have a different approach to operationalize these standards because they are vaguely defined (Austin & Austin, 2020). For example, in the current CACREP (2023) standards, there is more frequent mention of social justice compared to the 2016 CACREP standards; however, there is still ambiguity about how this may present in a counseling course. Standard 3.B.1 (CACREP, 2023) says that counseling curricula must state how “theories and models of multicultural counseling, social justice, and advocacy” are addressed, but there is no mention of techniques, interventions, or skills for SJA. As a point of comparison, there are specific guidelines with respect to content like group counseling which delineate time that students must spend engaged in direct experience. However, it appears that social justice and SJA are still referred to in broader terms with fewer contingencies about how they must be addressed. We recognize that out-of-class work like advocacy might be left out of the curriculum because there are many required courses and training standards filling up students’ time in graduate school (Vera & Speight, 2003). However, we urge counseling leaders to consider the importance of SJA and the core role it plays in our healing work and our counseling identity.

Limitations and Future Directions

This group was developed and facilitated to encourage counseling students to develop their social justice advocate identity, but it was not an empirical study, and our collective reflections can only offer so much insight to facilitating such groups in the future. As this was an extracurricular group for which attendees took time out of their personal schedules, we do not know what motivated our peers to attend sessions that we offered. This would be important knowledge to address in future offerings of this group and to understand students’ attitudes toward social justice in counseling. Another limitation of our group was our inability to reach students who are unsure of what social justice is and might not recognize it as an inherent and imperative part of mental health counseling. Practicum and other service-learning opportunities for SJA within the profession have been explored in the literature (Farrell et al., 2020; Field et al., 2019; Langellier et al., 2020), but perhaps peer

encouragement can help CITs to feel more confident as advocates. Although we intentionally kept the group open for accessibility, new introductions and catching up took time away from the group plan and content. We do not have data to explicate a group like this, but we hope our master's and doctoral peers feel encouraged to start similar groups within their own programs. Finally, we wrote this article more than a year after our group ended; although we relied on our reflection sheets and notes from our experience, we are aware that there may be gaps in our recollections.

For future groups, we would be interested to complete an empirical study through an IRB in order to collect data regarding peer-led SJA groups. Screening or surveys before and after the group could not only provide valuable data, but also offer guidance for attendees even before the group starts and an opportunity for reflection after the group ends. Our decision to keep our group open led to attrition of members; thus, empirical studies might also investigate factors that contribute to student engagement. Collecting quantitative and qualitative data may provide further insight into effective strategies for describing and encouraging students to engage in concrete SJA skill development.

Conclusion

The experience of facilitating an SJA group was new, challenging, transformative, and important to our growth as CITs and budding counselor educators. As counselors, we understand our ethical duty to engage in SJA; however, we have not had adequate training in tangible strategies to utilize when advocating on behalf of our clients. The S-Quad model is an important guide that helped facilitate our understanding of how to implement SJA as mental health professionals. As co-facilitators and coauthors, we learned a great deal about ourselves as developing social justice advocates, CEs, and CITs and confronted fears parallel to those of the group members. Although SJA is a growing focus in the counseling literature, there is a great deal of research and training that must continue to occur so current and future counselors can develop their social justice advocate identities.

Conflict of Interest and Funding Disclosure

The authors reported no conflict of interest or funding contributions for the development of this manuscript.

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