

# Black Lives Matter: A Call to Action for Counseling Psychology Leaders

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## Abstract

Police brutality and widespread systemic racism represent historical and current sources of trauma in Black communities. Both the Black Lives Matter movement and counseling psychology propose to confront these realities at multiple levels. Black Lives Matter seeks to increase awareness about systemic racism and promote resilience among Black people. Counseling psychology states values of multiculturalism, social justice, and advocacy. Executive leadership in counseling psychology may seek to promote racial justice, yet struggle with how to participate in Black Lives Matter movements and address racial discrimination within larger systems spontaneously and consistently. However, counseling psychology trainees and professionals are actively involved in the Black Lives Matter movement, leading the way forward. Through the framework of spontaneity in social movements, this manuscript highlights what counseling psychologists are currently

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contributing to Black Lives Matter and makes recommendations that build on the opportunity counseling psychologists have for further involvement in the movement.

**Keywords**

Black Lives Matter, counseling psychology, activism, social justice, spontaneity

Counseling psychology has distinguished itself from other applied professional psychology specialties by embracing multiculturalism, diversity, and social justice as core values that define the discipline (Norcross, Sayette, Mayne, Karg, & Turkson, 1998). The 2001 Houston Conference reestablished social justice as inextricably connected to counseling psychology (Speight & Vera, 2004). Years later, Atkinson, Wampold, and Worthington (2007) noted that counseling psychologists' embrace of these values is integral to our discipline. Thus, the centrality of social justice to the professional identities of counseling psychologists is firmly established (e.g., Helms, 2003; Vera & Speight, 2003). However, a recent survey of counseling psychology graduate trainees found that they wanted more social justice training than they were receiving in their programs (Beer, Spanierman, Greene, & Todd, 2012). The Black Lives Matter movement presents one such training opportunity. In a pioneering article on Black Lives Matter, Larson (2016) articulated the ways organizations, in their case labor unions, could build coalitions with Black Lives Matter to promote the shared mission of social justice. Given the importance to counseling psychologists of addressing social justice issues, there is a professional responsibility to address one of the most urgent social justice issues of our time: the disproportionate extrajudicial killings of Black people, which in turn has birthed the Black Lives Matter movement. The purpose of this article is to articulate the overlap of Black Lives Matter principles with counseling psychology values and encourage spontaneous, consistent action from the Society of Counseling Psychology (SCP) leadership and members as a complement to, and in support of, ongoing work in this area.

Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi created the Black Lives Matter movement in response to the February 12, 2012 killing of Trayvon Martin as well as the justice system's failure to convict his killer, George Zimmerman (Garza, 2014; Rickford, 2016). The Black Lives Matter movement is a grassroots network of social justice agents whose work uses social media, technology, and public protests to achieve justice for Black people in the midst of racial oppression (Garza, 2014). Reactions to the killing of

Trayvon Martin and many others remind us that frustration, mistrust, and anger have long characterized Black communities' feelings about the numbers of Black people who have died at the hands of law enforcement (Brunson, 2007; Chaney & Robertson, 2015).

The Mapping Police Violence research collaborative estimated that in 2015, police killed 336 Black people in the United States, 30% of whom were unarmed (Mapping Police Violence, 2016). According to statistics published by *The Guardian*, in 2015 Black people were killed at more than twice the rate of non-Latino White people, and Black men were nine times more likely than other Americans to die at the hands of police officers (Swaine, Laughland, Lartey, & McCarthy, 2015). Over the past two decades there have been numerous high profile deaths of unarmed Black men at the hands of police (e.g., Amadou Diallo, Sean Bell, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile). Unfortunately, there is a dearth of data about the numbers of Black women who die at the hands of police. Other than Sandra Bland, the deaths of Black women typically do not receive the media attention of Black men in this country (Larson, 2016). Whether police killings of Black people are high profile or not, these statistics demonstrate that the extrajudicial killings of Black people are commonplace and disproportionately higher than those of other racial or ethnic groups (Swaine et al., 2015). Failure to criminally charge and/or convict many officers continues to fuel unrest and protests. The Black Lives Matter movement addresses these and other racial justice issues, specified in the Black Lives Matter section next.

Counseling psychologists in training, as well as counseling psychologists, have been involved in movements across the country, challenging universities to attend to the calls for racial justice. Recently, counseling psychology trainees were among students at the University of Missouri who played an activist role resulting in the resignation of former President Tim Wolfe for his failure to respond in a timely and appropriate manner to numerous incidents of racial injustice on campus (Izadi, 2015). Counseling psychologists are increasingly becoming active in the Black Lives Matter movement, training others about racial justice and allyship (Mosley, Crowell, & Stevens-Watkins, 2015), blogging about social justice (Adair et al., 2015), writing Op-Eds about implicit bias and the relationship between the police and Black communities (Cokley, 2014, 2016; Cokley & Awad, 2016), developing social media campaigns to promote love and equity for Black people (Crowell, 2015), and serving heavily impacted communities through healing circles and other forms of therapeutic intervention (Falconer, 2014). These examples are not comprehensive, but rather illustrative of the types of activism and social justice work being conducted by some counseling psychologists.

Despite the contributions by individual members, it has taken four years for the SCP Executive Board to formalize a position on Black Lives Matter. There have been sporadic, albeit important actions undertaken, but a lack of spontaneity and consistency has created an opportunity to set a clear course of action for how we engage in this specific social justice movement.

No publication in the field of counseling psychology has yet to explicate the Black Lives Matter movement, the current involvement of counseling psychologists, and the necessary future directions for our leadership and membership. This manuscript serves multiple purposes: as a first step in detailing the alignment of the Black Lives Matter movement with counseling psychology values, it records the current involvement of counseling psychologists within a historical context; brings wider attention to racial justice for Black people in our field; recommends next steps for those who are currently engaged in the movement; and calls to action those who have a greater opportunity to be involved, especially the counseling psychology executive leadership. Next, we provide a detailed explication of the Black Lives Matter movement and conceptualize the potential for the SCP to be involved through the framework of spontaneity in social movements. We will also describe the ways in which counseling psychologists have been and can be involved.

## **Black Lives Matter**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century civil rights movement for Black racial justice is broadly referred to as the Movement for Black Lives (Movement for Black Lives, 2015). The Movement for Black Lives is an umbrella term that includes several organizations, such as the Black Lives Matter Network. There are countless individuals and groups organizing for justice as a part of the movement (Garza, 2014). A list of participating member and endorsing organizations can be found on the “About Us” section of the “*A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom, and Justice*” website (Movement for Black Lives, 2016). Since its inception, Black Lives Matter has developed into the most recognizable network of people and organizations advocating on behalf of all Black people (Cooper, 2015; Larson, 2016). Despite wide, international use of the rallying cry and social media hashtag “#BlackLivesMatter,” many people lack understanding of the aims and principles of the movement. The following literature review includes texts, interviews, websites, and conference materials emanating from Black Lives Matter founders and activists (Cooper, 2015; Cullors, Tometi, & Garza, 2015; Garza, 2014; Movement for Black Lives, 2015), alongside the limited extant scholarship on the movement (Garcia & Sharif, 2015; Larson, 2016; Mosley et al., 2015; Rickford, 2016). Our goal is to illustrate some of the distinctive

aspects of Black Lives Matter that coalesce with counseling psychology's professional values.

### *Black Lives Matter's Aims*

In a "herstory" (a historical account framed and told by a woman) of the movement, Garza (2014) explained that Black Lives Matter refers to an "ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks' contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression."

These two aims, intervention and affirmation, guide the movement and also mirror the work of counseling psychologists. Yet, Black Lives Matter acknowledges that Black liberation efforts must be rooted in the historical and contemporary culture of Blackness as well as the articulated and embodied experiences of Black people (Movement for Black Lives, 2015). This specificity is novel for the field of counseling psychology. It means counseling psychologists seeking to engage in Black Lives Matter work must value and utilize sources of knowledge beyond the psychology canon (e.g., data emanating from social media, videos and texts from activists on the front line of a protest, the narratives of Black children or elders). Black Lives Matter work also requires counseling psychologists to engage in a systematic analysis of Black oppression and liberation processes from an ecological perspective. Individuals and collaborative teams of counseling psychologists have heeded this call, and SCP executive leadership has recently endorsed and promoted this involvement formally. In September 2016, the SCP Executive Board issued a position statement on Black Lives Matter (SCP, 2016). This position statement was published during the second revision of this manuscript. In doing so, they joined the ranks of other professional organizations that have posted statements of support for Black Lives Matter (see American Family Therapy Academy, 2016). Issued partly in response to considerable encouragement from its members, this position statement builds upon years of conversation about whether and how counseling psychology should align itself with this movement.

Counseling psychologists and Black Lives Matter activists alike seek to intervene against the oppression Black people face at the collective, relational, and personal levels. For example, Neville and Pieterse (2009) and Neville, Spanierman, and Lewis's (2012) psychosocial model of racism articulated a model that captures the ways in which racism operates on the individual and interpersonal levels within a larger institutional/structural system. Racialized discrimination experienced at the collective level such as police

brutality, mass incarceration, the school-to-prison pipeline, joblessness, and media bias, has both inter and intrapersonal costs to wellness for Black people (Larson, 2016); Black Lives Matter activists seek to reduce and ultimately eliminate these disparities (Mosley et al., 2015). The more relationally focused aims of Black Lives Matter include, but are not limited to, campus-based discrimination (see #NotJustSAE and #ITooAmHarvard on Twitter; Jones, 2015), sexual assault and street harassment (see #SayHerName and #YouOkSis on Twitter; Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies, 2015; Chatelain & Asoka, 2015), and fair wages and safe working environments (see #FightFor15 on Twitter; Cancino, 2015; Larson, 2016). Finally, at a personal level, Black Lives Matter aims to reduce internalized racism and its consequences, by promoting self-love, collective efficacy, increased joy, and resilience (Young, 2015). This ecological view of the Black Lives Matter movement's goals helps illustrate the motivations for activists, including counseling psychologists, who are working to combat the problem.

### *Black Lives Matter's Principles*

To reach the aforementioned goals, Black Lives Matter outlined a set of principles to guide the process of liberation for those engaging in activism under the banner "Black Lives Matter." These principles were outlined at the Movement for Black Lives National Convening in July 2015 (Movement for Black Lives, 2015) and were later expanded via the official website (Cullors et al., 2015). The principles have been collapsed down to four overarching areas (see Table 1). Each principle maps onto counseling psychology's recent and historical foci. For example, the "All Black Lives Matter" principle aligns with the recent attention to intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) emerging in counseling psychology discourse (Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Brown Hunt, 2016; Reimers & Stabb, 2015). The fourth principle "training and leadership development is a constant," undergirds the present article's call to action for the consistent and spontaneous action of counseling psychology executive leadership. Black Lives Matter activists employ a leaderfull model, explicated next, that presents an opportunity for greater involvement from individuals in our field.

### **Leaderfull Leadership and Spontaneity: Framing Counseling Psychology's Opportunity for Involvement in Black Lives Matter**

The *leaderfull Black Lives Matter leadership model* prioritizes multiple actors rather than a central leading figure in its movement (Cooper, 2015; Larson, 2016). The leaderfull model equitably disburses power outside of the

**Table 1.** Black Lives Matter’s Principles

Principle	Meaning
All Black Lives Matter	All Black lives have value, including queer, transgender, formerly incarcerated, poor/working class, differently abled, women’s, immigrant, elderly, and young Black lives. BLM supporters have a respect for diversity, identify with the international Black community and their issues, and a desire to create spaces that affirm those Black individuals who are disproportionately subjected to oppression.
Love and self-love are signposts of success	This principle is broad and involves having (a) empathic understanding; (b) desire to pursue restorative justice; (c) loving, forthright, and honest communication; (d) a constant and active self-care practice supported by human and financial resources; and (e) a belief that “To love and desire freedom and justice for ourselves is a necessary prerequisite for wanting the same for others.”
360 degree vision guides work	The past, including Black historical struggles and Black elders or ancestors, and the future, including the generations to come, are to be honored. “Black villages,” where people join communities of extended families to care for one another as a collective, are cultivated and avoid ageism. BLM facilitates reflexive innovation by requiring supporters to “embrace the best tools, practices, and tactics, and leave behind those that no longer serve us” (Movement for Black Lives, 2015, p. 10).
Training and leadership development is constant	Individuals who are most directly affected by oppression are experts who should lead the movement. The movement has been described as leaderfull because there are leaders across the United States working locally, and in national and international coalitions, for Black liberation.

Note. BLM = Black Lives Matter. Adapted from Cooper, 2015; Cullors et al., 2015; Movement for Black Lives, 2015.

traditional White, male, heterosexual norm (Cooper, 2015). Western (2014) described this type of leadership model as autonomist and identified five guiding principles of networks utilizing autonomist leadership: spontaneity, autonomy, mutuality, affect, and networks. However, we choose to privilege the term leaderfull over autonomist to highlight and promote the members of

the movement's ways of naming and describing themselves. We specifically highlight the principle of spontaneity in relation to the Black Lives Matter movement and counseling psychology's opportunity for contribution, given the executive leadership delayed action directly related to Black racial justice. Specifically, with the many opportunities to be responsive to media highlighted incidences of police brutality and other forms of racial injustice towards Black people, the executive leadership has often followed the lead of a few members, rather than leaders leading the way for members. Thus, members who are not currently involved can look to the leaderfull model as their invitation to engage in action as counseling psychologists. Executive leadership can look to the concept of spontaneity as one way to realize opportunities for self-initiated involvement more consistently.

### Spontaneity

*Spontaneity* has two complementary definitions forwarded by Western (2014) and Snow and Moss (2014). Western described spontaneity as the process by which leaders move into, and shift from, leadership roles as a response to a social injustice. Various temporary leaders emerge to fill roles that best fit their talents and interests, allowing all members to employ their talents at different times for different positions. Western (2014) established spontaneity's definition as "*events, happenings, and lines of action, both verbal and nonverbal, which were not planned, intended, prearranged, or organized in advance of their occurrence*" (p. 1123 [italics in text]). Thus, combining these statements, we define spontaneity as the unplanned verbal and nonverbal actions taken by various people who move in and out of leadership (indicated by their actions, rather than their titles) as a response to social injustice.

Snow and Moss (2014) proposed it is the "interplay between spontaneity and organization, rather than their presumed antithetical opposition" that bolsters a movement like Black Lives Matter (p. 1139). As the field of counseling psychology has an established hierarchal organization, and the Black Lives Matter movement uses a leaderfull leadership model, an opportunity to engage this interplay based on shared values remains underutilized. Currently, some counseling psychologists involved in the Black Lives Matter movement are role modeling the use of spontaneous action. SCP executive leadership and other members may benefit from learning about this work to prime and prepare them for spontaneous action. Recent efforts, including the SCP executive committee's position statement on Black Lives Matter, represent a strength of the organization, but these efforts lack consistency in the face of continued, unexpected instances of violence against Black people. Spontaneity



fills that gap. Snow and Moss (2014) highlighted four conditions that promote spontaneity, which we describe next. Following our description of the conditions, we provide some examples of counseling psychologists' involvement in the Black Lives Matter movement that we hope primes the field for further involvement.

### *Four Conditions for Spontaneity*

In their grounded theory study of social movements, Snow and Moss (2014) found four conditions precipitating spontaneity: (a) nonhierarchical movements, (b) ambiguous moments and events, (c) behavioral or emotional priming and framing, and (d) ecological or spatial contexts and constraints. The first condition is perhaps what limits SCP executive leadership from acting spontaneously on Black Lives Matter issues in a unified way. Nonhierarchical leadership structures are more likely to promote creative, impromptu action than hierarchies (Snow & Moss, 2014). With an established hierarchy of leadership, SCP's organizational structure does not, nor should it, match the autonomist leadership model (Western, 2014). Snow and Moss (2014) made the case that hierarchical organizations are not completely void of spontaneity. For example, drawing from aspects of the Black Lives Matter leaderfull model, some SCP members can and do serve as leaders outside of the confines of the Executive Board. We see evidence of this on Division 17 listservs, at conferences, and in our training programs. These individuals and small groups of counseling psychologists, however, do not have the power to speak on behalf of the SCP. They are counseling psychologists, not an organization that represents the field of counseling psychology. However, as the formal voice of the SCP, the executive leadership can condone, or even further, value and celebrate these spontaneous actions.

The second condition, ambiguous moments and events (Snow & Moss, 2014), are plentiful in today's racial climate. The authors described ambiguity as script break down, script dissolution, or an off-script square-off during protests. During preparation of this article, two incidents of police killing Black men entered into the media focus: the killings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile. Black Lives Matter protests ensued in various cities across the United States. Following that, five police officers were killed in Dallas, TX during an initially peaceful protest. The SCP listserv experienced spontaneous activity in the form of statements of solidarity for the loss of Black lives; however, the executive leadership did not present a formal SCP statement on the issue during that time. Upon revision of this manuscript, three other Black men, Terence Crutcher, Keith Lamont Scott, and Alfred Olando were killed by police offers. Protests again ensued in Charlotte, NC, with

violence among police and protestors representing off-script square-offs. The SCP executive leadership, again, followed the lead of certain members who made statements about these occurrences. Despite a newly published formal statement on Black Lives Matter, the members' emails embody the leaderfull model, whereas the leadership's hesitation represents the opportunity to respond more spontaneously.

The third condition precipitating spontaneity is behavioral or emotional priming and framing. Snow and Moss (2014) argued that this condition moves beyond the labels "mimicry and contagion" to explain the psychological underpinning of the resulting spontaneous actions (p. 1134). When people involved in a movement have been activated by a familiar stimulus, which for people in the Black Lives Matter movement could be a police officer shooting a Black person, what has been done in response before is already primed for those ready to engage in action. Holding an impromptu vigil, march, or die-in are current examples. People may take to the streets on the evening of hearing about a police killing, with little planning.

Finally, the fourth condition is ecological or spatial contexts and constraints (Snow & Moss, 2014). This condition describes where people are located in relation to each other and the various movements, as well as how they interact with each other. Using the Division 17 Discussion listserv as a site of resistance, it is a digital space that provides a ready platform for spontaneous dialogue among counseling psychologists as well as for issuing statements about events related to the Black Lives Matter movement. In the physical sense, being in a city or university where protests are occurring provides the opportunity to spontaneously get involved, even if one had not planned to do so, based on emotional connection and proximity to action. Thus, the nature of the environment (e.g., digital space, university, city center) may influence the type of spontaneous actions in which people are likely to engage.

As counseling psychologists, intervening as activists through education, practice, research, advocacy, and outreach is an important part of our work (Speight & Vera, 2004). Through the framework of spontaneity in social movements (Snow & Moss, 2014), executive leadership in counseling psychology can take advantage of the latter three of the four conditions that precipitate spontaneity, to allow the SCP to consistently act when spontaneity is most useful. The first of the four conditions goes against the organizational structure of SCP, and there is no need to change the structure, as the interplay between spontaneity and organization is beneficial. Spontaneity, even on the part of one person or a subgroup within counseling psychology, has the potential to "lead to the kinds of outcomes that generally have been thought possible only through highly organized strategic action" (Snow & Moss,

2014, p. 1139). It is not inaction, but a lack of consistent and spontaneous action where executive leadership has an opportunity to grow. The interplay of organized and spontaneous action among some members has led to some important contributions in the Black Lives Matter movement, which is presented next.

## **Black Lives Matter and Counseling Psychology**

The historical commitment of a few counseling psychology pioneers sets a precedent for continued racial justice work through Black Lives Matter. Although not an all-inclusive list, Carter (2007); Cokley (2007); D'Andrea and Daniels (2000); Helms and Cook (1999); Neville, Coleman, Falconer, and Holmes (2005); Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, and Browne (2000); Parham (2002); and Pieterse, Todd, Neville, and Carter (2012) have been at the forefront of anti-Black racism resistance. Currently, some counseling psychologists engage in the Black Lives Matter movement. Yet, outside of advocacy specific to the SCP, many counseling psychologists are unaware of similar work by their peers unless it is publicized in the media or unless these individuals are personally known to them. Next, we detail both the continued need for this work and the involvement of counseling psychologists as well as counseling psychologists in training in the Black Lives Matter movement. We cover several areas in which efforts exist, including (a) therapeutic intervention and practice, (b) training and continuing education, and (c) multiple forms of activism, such as advocacy and outreach.

### *Therapeutic Intervention and Practice: Healing for Black Lives*

Many stressful experiences occur within the context of systems of social stratification such as socioeconomic status, race, and gender; stressors are often related to a person's place within that structure (Pearlin, 1989). Race-based stressors influence the psychological and physical health of Black people (Carter, Forsyth, Williams, & Mazzula, 2007; Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Harrell, 2000). Although stressful events occur daily for most individuals, trauma describes emotionally painful and distressing experiences or situations that overwhelm people's ability to cope, leaving them powerless (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). For race-based traumatic stress to be present, a person must perceive the class of racist event(s)—racial discrimination, racial harassment, or discriminatory harassment—as negative (emotionally painful), sudden, and uncontrollable (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Carter, 2007). In other words, individuals have to feel like the event is significant enough to cause lasting effects.

The cumulative effects of persistently experiencing racism can be quite severe (Carter, 2007). *Racial battle fatigue* describes the physiological and psychological strain exacted on racially marginalized groups, including the amount of energy lost by coping with racial microaggressions and racism (Clark et al., 1999; Essed & Stanfield, 1991; Sapolsky, 1998; Scaer, 2001; Smith, 2004; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Williams, Spencer, & Jackson, 1999). Even for individuals who react to racism with increased social justice activism, burnout can emerge. Thus, the healing of Black lives is crucial and serves as a way to rejuvenate Black minds and souls.

In 2009, The Association of Black Psychologists began building a worldwide movement for the emotional emancipation, healing, wellness, and empowerment of Black people. Counseling psychologists Taasogle Daryl Rowe and Cheryl Tawede Grills led these efforts. They developed the Emotional Emancipation Circles, which are safe, flexible gatherings where Black people can share stories, deepen understanding of the impact of historical forces, and learn essential emotional wellness skills to help improve lives (Grills, Aird, & Rowe, 2016).

Another healing space exemplar occurred following death threats aimed at Black students during the height of campus unrest at the University of Missouri in November 2015. Following threats, Reuben Faloughi, a member of Concerned Student 1950 and counseling psychologist in training, met with over 200 students and allies from the University of Missouri, Lincoln University, University of Missouri-Kansas City, University of Missouri-St. Louis, and abroad. The group facilitated breathing exercises, a demonstration to recenter and celebrate all Black identities, and finally divided the audience into subgroups of 20 to 30 people to process the collective trauma experienced by many Black students (Florida, 2015).

In 2016, counseling psychology trainee Della Mosley organized and facilitated two healing events at the University of Kentucky. The first was held in response to student demonstrations about institutional racism on campus and provided opportunities for (a) students and staff of color to process their emotional reactions and share coping strategies in a safe space, (b) non-Latino White students and staff to engage in separate ally development activities, and (c) collective processing and advocacy planning. The second event was initiated following the nationally publicized murders of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling, and utilized mindfulness, Black empowerment-based interventions, as well as discussion. Counseling psychology trainees Roberto Abreu, Blanka Angyal, Whitney Black, Holly Brown, Chris Jordan, and Kathryn Owen contributed to these events, creating self-care resources, providing brief counseling, and facilitating ally development sessions.

Counseling psychologist Jameca Falconer provided crisis counseling and conducted workshops in the Canfield Apartment community in Ferguson, where Michael Brown was shot and killed (Falconer, 2014). Additionally, Candice Crowell (now Hargons) developed the Black Lives Matter Meditation for Healing Racial Trauma, which uses mindfulness, affirmation, and metta (loving-kindness) in guided meditation. Healing spaces, such as Emotional Emancipation Circles and those created by Concerned Student 1950, as well as university and community-based crisis work are vital to addressing racial trauma, thus healing Black lives (Utsey & Ellison, 1999).

### *Training and Continuing Education: Educating for Black Lives*

Although counseling psychology training programs have begun to explicitly incorporate social justice advocacy in their training models, there is still a need for training that includes a specific focus on racial justice and Black liberation, given the continued anti-Black racism and violence in this country. Providing education that will equip counseling psychologists to eradicate anti-Black racism is a goal aligned with values of the discipline (Goodman et al., 2015; Norsworthy, Abrams, & Lindlau, 2013; Singh et al., 2010; Vera & Speight, 2003; Watts, 2004), yet limited resources and training models are available to guide professionals in this endeavor. Singh et al. (2010) have argued that counseling psychology programs lack sufficient guidelines and accountability measures related to social justice education and training in general. Counseling psychology doctoral students in Singh et al.'s (2010) study cited a need for guidance and modeling of social justice from their professors and supervisors.

Comprising 13% of counseling psychology doctoral students in 2015 (APA, 2015), Black students may have different educational needs as a result of their history of oppression (Watts, 2004). An educational focus for these students necessitates increasing awareness of the African worldview and advancing sociopolitical development (Watts, 2004). Training counseling psychologists to combat anti-Black racism and its biopsychosocial health outcomes may require diverse strategies given the racial composition of the discipline. White people comprised approximately 60% of counseling psychology doctoral students in 2015, but 74% of U.S. counseling psychology faculty. Black faculty represented nearly 7% (APA, 2015). The lack of racial diversity in the field suggests that racial justice trainings specifically aimed at White psychology students and faculty are needed. Creative techniques need to be employed in order to facilitate true consciousness development.

Several critical areas should be taught to all psychology students and lifelong learners, irrespective of their racial identities, if Black wellness is to be

valued. Through continuing education, counseling psychologists must require training to explicate the links between wellness and justice, political oppression and psychological oppression, and power and access at personal, relational, and collective levels (Prilleltensky, 2008). This means that SCP must advance beyond cross-cultural acceptance and multicultural competencies, to a more rigorous and holistic approach to social and racial justice training and education (Goodman et al., 2015; Singh et al., 2010). Such an education would require that psychologists expand their knowledge to include constructs rooted in Black and liberation psychology (e.g., racialization, channeling indignation, resistance; Watts, 2004).

Conferences were important sites for facilitating Black Lives Matter-related training in 2015. For example, a training session was offered at the National Multicultural Conference and Summit (NMCS) in January of 2015 in Atlanta to help psychologists work toward racial justice broadly and Black healing specifically (Payne, Dawes, & Falconer, 2015). A special session for Black men only was spontaneously created and offered at the 2015 NMCS as well. At the APA Annual Convention in Toronto, Mosley, Crowell, and Stevens-Watkins (2015) facilitated a workshop for graduate students wherein the goals of Black Lives Matter, the skills and privileges afforded psychologists that align with Black racial justice efforts, and salient avenues for advocacy and activism were discussed. This training included discussion breakout groups on community activism, campus-based activism, and research-related activism. The Teacher's College Winter Roundtable 2015 theme “#hoodiesup2015: Breaking Cycles of Violence, Building Alliances, Mobilizing Resources” responded to the killing of Trayvon Martin and other Black men and boys killed by police. Webinars have also become an increasingly popular way to provide education on matters related to the valuing of Black student lives. For example, Cokley (2015) conducted a webinar for the Stephen C. Rose Legacy Fund examining the challenges facing African American students on predominantly White campuses.

Translating these trainings into courses and curriculum would provide greater access to the methods and resources of Black Lives Matter, promoting advocacy. At the University of Kentucky, the 2016 Social Justice Scholarship Series was facilitated by students with a specific focus on race and class. Counseling psychology students Roberto Abreu, Blanka Angyal, Holly Brown, Brett Kirkpatrick, MiKeiya Morrow, Kathryn Haynes Owen, Jonathan Todd Ryser-Oatman, and Igor Vasilj hosted monthly book-based discussions open to the university community, using an intersectional approach to discuss racism and classism, specific to the Black Lives Matter movement. Students were able to receive enrollment credit for participation.

## *Advocacy and Outreach: Activism for Black Lives*

The Black Lives Matter movement seeks to broaden the conversation around violence against Blacks, to include all of the ways in which Black people are treated inequitably (Garza, 2014). To that end, being actively engaged helps to ensure the equal rights and fair treatment of Black people. Activism is a means to facilitate this process. In counseling psychology, activism has been evident in student-led actions, the development of social networks through discussion and Op-Eds, and research. These three areas of activism will be reviewed.

*Student activism in Black Lives Matter.* As the Black Lives Matter movement has grown, Black students across the country have played a pivotal role. For instance, the Black Liberation Collective is “dedicated to transforming institutions of higher education through unity, coalition building, direct action and political education” (Black Liberation Collective, n.d., para. 1). Counseling psychology students within the Collective are considered leaders and offer feedback and mentorship based on personal experience, skills, and training. Over 86 campuses have set forth their demands for institutional change creating a large network of student activists (Black Liberation Collective, n.d.). Additionally, the website [www.blmactivism.com](http://www.blmactivism.com) was created by Della Mosley in order to facilitate ongoing dialogue and action planning among psychology graduate students. These examples highlight how Black students are operating independently and in large coalitions for equity. Black graduate students and allies are also forming other groups to advocate for change.

The original organizers of Concerned Student 1950, an interdisciplinary group of Black students representing different aspects of diversity (ethnicity, ability, gender, sexual orientation, class), formed as a result of ongoing racial tension, oppression, and individual and institutional silence regarding racism at the University of Missouri. The name represents every Black student since the first was admitted in 1950. Reuben Faloughi, a counseling psychology student, and Abigail Hollis, both original members of the Concerned Student 1950 collective, were tasked with providing insight into group self-care, awareness of group dynamics, and de-escalation techniques for Black students. This was especially important following terrorist threats focused on Black students on campus after the resignations of the University System President and Chancellor. They engaged in additional efforts, which included a demand to increase

funding and resources for the University of Missouri Counseling Center for the purpose of hiring additional mental health professionals; particularly those of

color, boosting mental health outreach and programming across campus, increasing campus-wide awareness and visibility of the counseling center, and reducing lengthy wait times for prospective clients. (WeTheProtesters, n.d.).

Concerned Student 1950 encouraged other students in higher education across the United States and internationally to hold higher education institutions accountable for providing an equitable learning experience for marginalized students.

Other campus collectives and organizations continue to fight for systemic change on college campuses including Eradicate #BostonCollegeRacism at Boston College. The organization combines the efforts of several counseling psychology graduate students, staff, faculty, and administrators to advocate for changes in policy and procedures that negatively influence people of color. Additionally, counseling psychology students initiated, coordinated, and led the Black Lives Matter Solidarity March at the 2016 APA Annual Convention in Denver. With hundreds in attendance, speakers such as Kira Hudson Banks, Kevin Cokley, Jasmine Jenkins, Gilbert Jew, and Della Mosley charged the marchers to realize the full potential of psychology through advocacy and activism in the Black Lives Matter movement. After much dialogue, executive leadership of both the SCP and APA attended this march to show support.

It is important to discuss why students involved in student activism have decided to use their names. Because of the relative isolation of student activism within counseling psychology (and psychology in general), many marginalized people still feel discouraged or unsafe participating within formal settings and governing bodies such as APA and the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students. For this reason, students believed that it would be ideal to highlight personal narratives and the influence individuals can have on large systems. Additionally, this visibility allows the formation of informal networks that work to support and empower other students.

*Current network-building in Black Lives Matter.* Counseling psychologists advocating for Black lives may benefit from building networks of support with their professional colleagues. SCP and the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students demonstrated methods for cultivating such networks. For example, the SCP executive leadership created the blog *After Ferguson*, “to help people make sense of what we see in the news, act in a more socially just way, and understand how counseling psychology can help us respond to racial injustice” (Adair et al., 2015, para. 1). Blogs such as this provide a venue for education, commentary, and public dialogue. Counseling psychologists have also written Op-Eds for national news and media outlets



about Black racial justice concerns (Cokley, 2016). Privileging more intimate oral communication, Candice Crowell (now Hargons), Brittan Davis, Sabrina Esbitt, Becca Fix, James Garcia, Leighna Harrison, Melanie Lantz, Amanda Mitchell, and Ashley Oliver cofounded the initiative Graduate Students Talk (Lantz et al., 2016), that works to provide space for graduate students to network with other students, as well as discuss and process social justice issues. This student network addresses the hopes, fears, ideas, and challenges graduate students experience as professionals in training in the face of ongoing racial inequity. Another example of network-building undertaken at NMCS involved raising funds for The Association of Black Psychologists by selling Black Lives Matter T-shirts. Early career professionals such as Anneliese Singh, Daniel Walinsky, and Katharine Hahn-Oh initiated this effort, which visibly showed support for Black lives and offered financial assistance to Black psychologists engaged in racial justice work.

Finding or creating networks of support is vital in the continued struggle for racial justice and equity, both in the profession and on a broader level (Foran, 2015). Both students and professionals in the field advocating for Black lives have been able to share resources and consult about their concerns, sometimes collaborating on racial justice projects as a result. This network-based approach to advocacy (Western, 2014) may help maintain racial justice efforts while minimizing burnout (Belton, 2015) of any one counseling psychologist.

*Current scholastic activism Black Lives Matter.* Research for Black lives should have epistemic psychopolitical validity (Prilleltensky, 2003; Prilleltensky & Fox, 2007; Prilleltensky, Prilleltensky, & Voorhees, 2008), which attends to global, political, and economic factors and their relationship to psychological well-being. Several counseling psychologists study components of, and strive toward, Black racial justice. The research programs of Dawn Szymanski (Szymanski, 2012), and Jioni Lewis (Szymanski & Lewis, 2015) serve as exemplars of counseling psychologists producing psychopolitically valid research for Black lives. Szymanski (2012) modified a feminist activism scale to account for Black activism. Although it was noted that it might not capture all aspects of Black activism, the Involvement in African American Activism Scale represents an attempt to begin to catalog the range of critical actions undertaken on behalf of Black racial justice (Szymanski, 2012). Using this measure, Szymanski (2012) found that Black participants ( $N = 269$ ) who experienced higher levels of racial discrimination were more likely to engage in activism than participants who experienced lower levels. Szymanski and Lewis (2015) corroborated and expanded upon this finding in a subsequent study that showed race-related stress also mediated activism

among Black participants ( $N = 185$ ). Such research draws connections between anti-Black racism, Black wellness, and resistance. Maryam Jernigan et al.'s (2015) recent project #racialtraumaisreal embodies the scientist-practitioner model of training, combining scholastic and practice activism to produce a manuscript on racial trauma that includes intervention in the form of a "Racism Recovery Plan." In this resource, they advocate for racial trauma to be studied as a mental health issue.

The Black Lives Matter movement is the newest wave in civil rights. By giving voice to the frustrations of the oppressed, the Black Lives Matter movement is aligned with the goals of counseling psychology in various ways. In order for the field of counseling psychology to continue toward social justice, a critical transformation is needed regarding the ways that discourse, education, and advocacy are applied. We are appreciative of the people who have historically and/or currently taken an active role in dismantling systems of racial injustice toward Black people. Recommendations for those who wish to continue this work or begin it are next.

## **Recommendations**

As noted previously, there are both opportunities and challenges for counseling psychology within the Black Lives Matter movement. Counseling psychology student leaders have been at the forefront of the movement in many significant ways alongside long-time scholars in Black psychology and social justice. Their spontaneity in this social movement, even as leaders within the SCP, has prompted this article and other efforts nationally. However, there are numerous next steps for those who are currently engaged, but more importantly for those who have yet to be involved. The examples of Black Lives Matter involvement just presented are answers to the oft asked question, "But what can I/we do?" from SCP members and leadership alike. Additionally, the SCP executive leadership has an opportunity to increase its spontaneity and involvement, and to encourage the involvement of the membership, through the following recommendations.

First, spontaneity requires courage, not fearlessness. SCP leaders must be willing to tolerate their collective anxiety about saying and doing the "right thing," which can result in stalls that are often perceived as indifference. Furthermore, humility when correction and feedback are offered bolster this work. Specifically, SCP executive leadership can enact spontaneity by responding as a governing body to the incidences of racial injustice each time they happen. These responses via listservs, blog, social media, or other communications, should affirm humanity and offer tangible coping, healing, and resistance strategies grounded in both Black lived experience and exemplary

science. Additionally, the SCP executive leadership can reach out to the sponsoring and member organizations in the Movement for Black Lives website to share the recently published statement and indicate its willingness to provide support through educational and social capital.

Second, social justice and advocacy are valued competencies within counseling psychology (Motulsky, Gere, Saleem, & Trantham, 2014); however, counseling psychologists must decide that social justice is not only an important value of counseling psychology, but also identify increased ways to connect social justice and advocacy to the lived experience of being a counseling psychologist. The latter naturally leads to more explicit support of the Black Lives Matter movement, in addition to other social justice liberation movements. For instance, there are various levels of involvement counseling psychologists can engage in within the Black Lives Matter movement—from legislative lobbying and writing Op-Eds to protesting and engaging in street activism. In such activities, counseling psychologists within academia and practice can demonstrate to the field how to use counseling psychology values to frame engagement in the Black Lives Matter movement. This collaborative approach is key, as research on advanced counseling psychology trainees and social justice training has suggested that students want to “see” examples of how their instructors participate in social justice and advocacy to understand more clearly how to engage in social change effectively (Beer, Spanierman, Greene, & Todd, 2012; Singh et al., 2010).

Third, being involved in leadership within, and educating for and about, the Black Lives Matter movement requires that counseling psychologists open themselves up to underutilized sources of education, including the Black people already in their professional and personal circles and nontraditional sources outside of academia. Trusting the embodied knowledge that is shared by Black individuals about their experiences, instead of solely relying on communication shared via a listserv or at a counseling psychology professional meeting, has the potential to foster network-building and make sustained social justice change. To do so, counseling psychologists must be able to see and hear the experiences of Black people, while managing their own emotional reactions in a healthy way (see Bishop, 2002 for strategies). Active and ongoing self-reflection on issues of power related to individual experiences of privilege and oppression are key to grounding one’s activism and leadership in a larger movement and connecting one’s leadership to actual social change experiences. Examples of this might include using the theoretical principles of critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; e.g., racism is pervasive) to guide admissions decisions, course content, student mentoring, faculty discussions, and community engagement (Haskins & Singh, 2015). Other examples might include counseling psychologists intentionally

initiating conversations within their professional and personal networks about the importance of the Black Lives Matter movement. Regardless of the social change action selected, it is imperative that Black voices be believed, supported, and uplifted by counseling psychologists due to the systemic silencing of Black perspectives within society.

Fourth, counseling psychologists can recognize that education for Black racial justice involves systemic change and may consider programmatic or institutional efforts in order to become leaders within the Black Lives Matter movement. For example, ensuring the recruitment and retention of students who are interested in using their skills for antiracist action is important at a programmatic level. Additionally, faculty can initiate program policies that uplift and value Black faculty and student voices about social justice and advocacy regarding the structural racism that Black people experience within the United States. Counseling psychologists will be better equipped to then advocate against institutional racism influencing the Black community (e.g., policies requiring disclosure of convictions on applications, policies allowing university endowments to be invested in the prison industry). Counseling psychologists can learn much from their colleagues already engaging in education for Black Lives Matter through consultation and attending trainings facilitated by leaders in the movement.

Fifth, counseling psychologists can begin to more meaningfully integrate information about the Black Lives Matter movement, as well as other social justice liberation movements, within their courses. Suggestions for classroom-based education centered in Black Lives Matter have been proffered as well. Goodman et al. (2015) suggested assigning tasks that require detailed exploration of political issues from a personal and community wellness perspective. For example, the cases of police brutality and extrajudicial Black murders in current news media can effectively be “used to teach about crisis response and posttrauma community-wide interventions” if explored in concert with relevant policy-related materials (Goodman et al., 2015 p. 162). Other exercises include using ethnographic fiction (Chung & Bemak, 2013) and building additional exercises into cultural immersion experiences, such as conducting sociohistorical research and debriefing groups (Goodman et al., 2015). Another example is to provide education on the history of Black liberation movements within the United States and around the world. For instance, in 1967 during a speech at the American Psychological Association Annual Convention in Washington, DC titled *The Role of the Behavioral Scientist in the Civil Rights Movement*, Martin Luther King Jr. called for psychologists to engage in three areas of study: Black leadership, political action, and speaking out on societal oppression. Counseling psychologists and counseling psychology executive leadership can reflect on this call and integrate

these three areas into all of their activities by intentionally identifying ways to engage in and support the activism of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Finally, in order to prepare counseling psychologists for practice in the context of Black Lives Matter, it would also be helpful to focus on building interdisciplinary training opportunities. Counseling psychologists will be better able to address macro-systemic issues in collaborative teams with scholars from public health, criminal justice, African American studies, and sociology, among others. Black Lives Matter activists have also articulated that people in the movement should be able to contextualize current events. This contextualization requires (a) learning salient sociopolitical history (e.g., history of colonialism, social movements, one's own local community), (b) increasing technological savvy (e.g., teaching the use of social media and live streaming platforms in order to be prepared to document instances of structural racism in society), (c) increasing understanding of the ways in which oppressions interlock (e.g., the role queer Black women have played as early founders of the Black Lives Matter movement), and (d) dismantling the politics of respectability (Cooper, 2015; Editorial Board, 2015; Smith, Gossett, & Carruthers, 2016; Stephen, 2015; Tesfamariam, 2015). Psychologists need to be better trained and prepared to go into communities when the needs arise and offer crisis services. In order to do this, they need to be very familiar with what trauma in urban communities looks like. They can partner with communities to have designated spaces or partnerships with formal organizations such as churches and health centers that will allow healing services to be offered. Following the Black Lives Matter principles that "All Black Lives Matter," recognizing that Black people are not a monolithic group, and understanding the impact of our intersectional identities creates a better opportunity to help with healing. In addition, counseling psychologists can explore how White clients and clients of other races or ethnicities are influenced by the Black Lives Matter movement, identifying areas of privilege and potential engagement with the movement.

## **Conclusion**

The Black Lives Matter movement, in many ways, is the ultimate expression of a social justice movement (Rickford, 2016). It seeks to disrupt and stop the harmful discourse and racially oppressive institutional practices that result in deadly consequences for Black people. Activists within the Black Lives Matter movement are unapologetic in their indictment of institutional racist oppression. Their tone and tactics, at times, may not comport with a certain respectability politics, or with the belief that only nearly perfect behavior and emotional containment best promote social justice. In seeking to support the

Black Lives Matter movement, it is important that counseling psychologists not judge, dismiss, or apologize for the emotional tone and “aggressive” tactics used by some Black Lives Matters activists. The killings of Black people, many unarmed (Mapping Police Violence, 2016), understandably necessitate a strong emotional response. Cokley (2014) explained the all-consuming, raw, and unbridled anger from Black people that results from a profound sense of alienation and helplessness in society. Although we do not suggest counseling psychologists must engage in the same tactics in order to support Black Lives Matter, we suggest that counseling psychologists should not be emotionally dispassionate observers. As previously stated, support of the Black Lives Matter movement can come in many different forms, including providing crisis counseling, conducting workshops, writing Op-Eds, and educating and training students to be social justice activists. With the added understanding of spontaneity’s value in social movements (Snow & Moss, 2014), SCP can trust that impromptu action has a place in our work. When we, as counseling psychologists and members of the SCP, respond to this call to action to support the Black Lives Matter movement, we begin to truly live the values that define us as counseling psychologists. We become what Bayard Rustin, the architect of the 1969 March on Washington, called “angelic troublemakers,” who envision a more just and equitable world.

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