



Maryland  
Counselors for  
Social Justice

A MESSAGE FROM THE  
2020-2021 MCSJ  
PRESIDENT



HONORING BLACK LIVES  
MATTER



COVID-19 GRIEF AND  
IMPACT ON COUNSELORS  
AND STUDENTS



DECOLONIZING,  
DECONSTRUCTING, AND  
PRACTICING SOCIAL JUSTICE

# Maryland Counselors for Social Justice

## NEWSLETTER

October 4, 2020

### Mission of MCSJ

Our mission is to work to promote social justice advocacy in our society, through confronting oppressive systems of power and privilege that manifest in a lack of equal access, benefits, resources, and opportunities to large segments of our population. We work to address mental health issues caused by social marginalization, and oppressive issues that affect professional counselors, students, and the clients we serve. Our goal is to work to assist in positive change in our community and society, and call attention to additional ways counselors could be better advocates in their work with diverse, marginalized, and disenfranchised clients, through professional development.



#### Land Acknowledgement

Maryland Counselors for Social Justice recognizes the genocide, forceful removal, and displacement of tribal communities from this land. In particular, we honor the diverse Indigenous peoples connected to this territory that we now occupy in Maryland, District of Columbia (DC), Virginia, and surrounding areas, including the Nacotchtank (Anacostan), the Piscataway, the Massawomeck, the Accomack, the Manahoac, the Powhatan, and the Pamunkey tribal nations. This land acknowledgment is read to recognize and honor the indigenous people, their ancestors and elders, and the genocide, forceful removal, and displacement of the peoples whose lands and territories were stolen from them.

*If you are interested in learning about which Native land(s) you're residing in, text your city and state to (907) 312-5085.*

# MCSJ President's Remarks

Dear MCSJ community,

Welcome! We are so grateful to have you here. As your 2020-2021 President, I am humbled and honored to be here with you, in our fight for equity, justice, and liberation for *all*. In this first newsletter of the season, I am thrilled to introduce to you the incredible humans who are a part of the 2020-2021 executive leadership team. We've been meeting monthly since July 2020 to discuss our goals for this year, and we are so excited to share our theme and ideas with you. I am pleased to invite you to join us on our journey this year in rising and standing up against the racial and systemic injustices that have plagued our country since its inception.



This year has been relentless. Between the COVID-19 pandemic, racism and police brutality, the persecution of Black and Brown bodies, the growing threat of climate change, the violent treatment of our Earth, and other continuous forms of systemic oppression, it may come as no surprise that the impact on our mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness has been egregious. Our bodies are not meant to be in such a constant state of grief, despair, crisis and distress; yet, the need for finding resilience and hope may be greater than ever. While some of us may have lost loved ones, struggled with loneliness and fear, or found ourselves in situations that we had never imagined, others may be relishing the time to slow down, reconnect with ourselves, and spend quality time with those around us. Regardless of how we may be feeling, I truly hope that we are able to recognize that each of us is deserving of rest, replenishment, and restoration.

## MCSJ Executive Board - Leadership (2020-2021)

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Several mighty trees have fallen in our forest this year. Our hearts have been heavy as we learned about the tragic passing of significant role models, such as Congressman John Lewis, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and the King, Chadwick Boseman, amongst others. We thank each of them for their service, their wisdom, their tenacity, their commitment, and for the paths that they have paved for us, so we can continue to follow in their footsteps of getting into "good trouble".

Our theme for the year is "***Decolonizing our Minds***". The term *decolonizing* has been trending as of late, but what does it mean? To us, decolonizing means to uplift the voices of communities that have typically been marginalized in the United States and placed on the sidelines. It means to emphasize and center the narratives of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), queer and trans folks, immigrants and refugees, individuals with disabilities, and others who experience discrimination and disenfranchisement.

*Decolonizing our minds* means to allow us to recognize and break free from the systems that have been used to oppress us, and return to our roots in order to find healing and justice, with love, authenticity, and self-compassion. For mental health practitioners, decolonizing may look like de-centering the Western/Eurocentric frameworks that the fields of psychology and counseling have been built upon, and allowing our notions of mental health and therapy to expand beyond pathology and the DSM-5 to address the historical impact of systems of oppression on the health of our clients.



*This is the work of activist and art therapist, Alyse Ruriani, purchased and e-printed with permission.*

*Please check out her website:  
<http://www.alyseruriani.com> and  
 follow her on Instagram:  
<http://instagram.com/alyseruriani>.*

This year, MCSJ commits to providing spaces for community healing by offering Restorative Justice Circles for Black and BIPOC therapists on an alternating monthly basis. We will be offering a Wellness Workshop to help us collectively find a glimpse of restoration from the stress of 2020. We will also be providing educational workshops throughout the year that are focused on advocating for and practicing social justice during such unprecedented times. Finally, our 3rd annual conference will be held on June 25 & 26, 2021, where we will pass the torch to a new leadership team.

We look forward to embarking on this journey with you.

In solidarity,

Kshipra Jain, LPC, NCC  
 President, Maryland Counselors for Social Justice

Interested in being more involved with MCSJ?

Become a member!

Website: <https://mdcounseling.org/mcsj>  
 Email: [MCSJ@mdcounseling.org](mailto:MCSJ@mdcounseling.org)

Follow us on social media!

Facebook: @MarylandCSJ  
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# On The Passing of Representative John Lewis

By Dr. Chioma Anah, MCSJ Founder/Executive Director



1940- 2020

We are deeply saddened by the passing of Representative John Lewis, Civil Rights Leader, who died on July 17, 2020, at age 80. John Lewis was a fearless giant, a legend, who courageously spoke out, and marched against the racial and social injustices of his time. He was one of the Freedom Riders, and he was assaulted and jailed for his protests. His activism spanned his entire life, and we are better for it. John Lewis was one of the major inspirations for the forming of Maryland Counselors for Social Justice (MCSJ), and we owe him a debt of gratitude for his work on behalf of Racial and Social Justice Advocacy, and for encouraging us to bear our own torches for justice. Thank you, Sir. For we know that “we are in a

struggle of a lifetime,” and we will “never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble.” Rest in Power, Sir.

## Honoring Black Lives Matter

### Breonna Taylor’s Death and the Importance of Mental Health Counseling Amongst Black Women

By Winter Carruth, BS (Graduate Student, North Carolina Central University)

The tragic death of Breonna Taylor is one that will never be forgotten. A young black woman with such a bright future ahead was killed in her home without warning. People everywhere mourn the death of Ms. Taylor and demand justice for this careless killing.

Still, justice was not served on Wednesday, September 23, 2020. Teary-eyed and trembling with emotion, many communities were inflicted with the pain of the incident once more as the verdict came to light in the murder of Breonna Taylor. The Kentucky Grand Jury convicted Officer Hankison, one of three officers involved, to three counts of felony first-degree wanton endangerment.

Adding further insult to injury, none of the officers involved were charged for their involvement in contributing to Breonna’s death. The singular



indictment handed down within this nightmarish debacle was directed toward the safety of the residents in the neighboring apartment, due to the firing of stray bullets. Stray bullets that hit no one. An outrage this verdict was, to Breonna and her family, as well as every black woman in this world. As for the protection of black women in America, this outcome is evidence that there is little to none. As the popular quote by Malcolm X states, “The most disrespected person in America is the black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the black woman. The most neglected person in America is the black woman.”

**“The most disrespected person in America is the black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the black woman. The most neglected person in America is the black woman.”**

-MALCOLM X

In wake of Taylor’s death, there has been a plethora of traumatic events encompassing the black community. Black women have been exceedingly affected concerning the outcome of the Breonna Taylor trial. The Criminal Justice System is viewed as broken in the eyes of many, as this is not the first death of an innocent black woman in recent times. The negligence and nature of these deaths has given birth to new trauma as well as triggering the resurfacing of previous trauma within the mental health realm of black women.

Occurrences such as this and the countless others are detrimental to the emotional well-being of black women. In addition, there is a lack of sense of security from law enforcement within minority communities.

The need for mental health counseling is dire in times like these. Black women are often faced with a variety of societal pressures including but not limited to, racial micro-aggressions, objectification through media, employment disparities & discrimination, etc. Yet, black women are expected to be the consummate superhero, carrying the weight of all things on their shoulders for everyone. So, is it safe to say that sometimes she who does the saving may also need some saving herself? Who will save her? Mental Health resources are a necessary provision that should be made available for and by black women to ensure the trauma spawned from police brutality is addressed, alleviated, and eradicated. Even though there is stigmatization surrounding mental health services and therapies in the black community, these tools are vital to the well-being, survival, and ability to thrive in the lives of black women. The aim of drawing attention to the availability & usage of counseling services by black women is to emphasize the importance and necessity of healing from the obstacles placed upon them from society and existential traumas.

There are a variety of user-friendly access routes for black women to locate therapists from traditional modalities to niche specializations. As such, one amazing resource is *Therapy for Black Girls*, created by Joy Harden Bradford. The website houses a variety of informative podcasts surrounding mental health & relevant discussions on the daily struggles that black women face in America, in addition to a Therapist locator tool.



Protest happening after the verdict of no charges being faced for the killing of Breonna Taylor.

Now more than ever, it is incredibly vital for black women to be invested in their mental health and wellbeing. So, if you are reading this article and are dealing with emotional & behavioral concerns due to the trauma of the circumstances surrounding the Breonna Taylor case as well as simply being a black woman, explore mental health resources near you and schedule a session. Remember, no one ever said you couldn't carry the weight. Although the weight may fluctuate, the load isn't always yours to carry. Do your research, develop good coping skills, and join support groups or even form them. It is incredibly important to focus on your mental health in times like these, especially with seasonal depression being right around the corner.



## CSJ Call to Action

Counselors for Social Justice (CSJ) calls counselors, counseling students, counselor educators, and mental health workers to actively engage in dismantling racialized violence of Black and Brown persons by police force and to fight for racial equity locally and nationally.

We call you to action:

- CALL your state Governors, Attorney Generals, Senators and Representatives, and your City Council Members, City Law Directors, and Mayors to express contempt for the continued senseless murders of Black and Brown persons at the hands of police officers and to advocate for police reform that includes immediate investigation and removal of officers who have acted outside the call of the badge via biases in speech and behavior.
  - To find your state contacts, check out: <https://openstates.org/>

- CONNECT with local police agencies, school, and healthcare systems to offer counselor-based training on multicultural competencies (e.g., addressing unconscious bias, cultural competence) and trauma-informed care.
- COLLABORATE with local agencies and organizers who are fighting for sustainable change and racial justice. Partner in the community around education, action, and reform.
- COMMUNICATE with clients, students, and colleagues about the justice system's failure to indict Breonna Taylor's murderers. Be willing and ready to ask for emotional responses- allow for and support feelings of anger, fear, and confusion. Provide space for clients, students, and colleagues to be heard, to feel supported, and to know you stand in solidarity with them.
- CONTRIBUTE to bail funds and local organizing efforts in support of dismantling racist systems.

We want to hear the actions you are taking to dismantle racist systems in our nation and in your community. Share the actions you are taking to fight racial inequities and injustices locally and nationally using **#CSJCall2Action**.

### TALKING POINTS FOR LOCAL & STATE DECISION MAKERS

Calling local and state decision-makers to voice your concerns and wishes is an active way to be a change agent for your community. Calling about the lack of indictment for Breonna Taylor's murder will not bring her back to life. Calling may challenge current policies and develop new policies that can prevent future murders of Black and Brown neighbors and hold police officers accountable for their actions. Research your local and state decision-makers and prepare to make calls. To find your state contacts, check out: <https://openstates.org/>. To find your local/city contacts, use online search tools to identify decision-makers and contact information.

#### When you call:

1. Make certain you are focused and emotionally able to communicate your wishes to the listener. Being direct and polite positions your message to be heard well.
2. Make certain you know the name of the person(s) to whom you are calling. Be prepared to speak to administrative assistants or staffers who will take your message and share it with the decision-maker you are contacting.
  - If that happens, still communicate your wishes.
  - Write down the name of the admin or staffer. This can be helpful for future calls or written communication to the same office/decision-maker.
3. Know your script and develop specific talking points related to your investment in your city/state and how your unique experience as a counselor/counselor educator/mental health worker can benefit policy changes and implementation.

#### Calling Script:

- Hello. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a [COUNSELOR/COUNSELING STUDENT/COUNSELOR EDUCATOR/MENTAL HEALTH WORKER] residing in [CITY or STATE NAME].
- I am calling to speak with \_\_\_\_\_. Are they available to hear my concerns at this time?

- *If yes, wait and speak directly to that decision-maker. Introduce yourself again and thank them for their time.*
- *If no, ask with whom the message may be left and when your message will be communicated to the decision-maker. Express your plans to follow-up with that decision-maker as well.*
- I am calling to advocate for the adoption of Breonna's Law in our [CITY or STATE] that would regulate no-knock warrants.
- Breonna Taylor was a 26-year-old Black female shot and killed in her home in Louisville, Kentucky by unnecessary police force.
- If the officers would have knocked on Breonna's door that night, she may very well still be alive today, but they didn't.
- The only indictment issued after a Black woman was shot and killed in her own home by police force was about the bullets that missed her!
- In light of this horrendous situation and the lack of indictments of the police officers responsible for Breonna Taylor's death, I want to make certain a travesty of this magnitude will not occur in our [CITY or STATE].
- Additionally, I advocate for every police officer to wear and actively operate a body camera to ensure police officers are held to their ethical and legal expectations of the badge. Officers who have infractions related to unethical or biased statements or behaviors should be placed under investigation immediately and have their badges revoked.
- As a [COUNSELOR/COUNSELING STUDENT/COUNSELOR EDUCATOR/MENTAL HEALTH WORKER], I advocate for greater training of our police force related to unconscious bias, cultural competence, and trauma-informed care.
- I commit to...
  - continuing to CALL this office/decision-maker to ensure preventative action is taken.
  - CONNECT with our [CITY/STATE] decision-making processes focused on the development and implementation of policies that affect policing and safety of Black and Brown persons
  - COLLABORATE with local agencies fighting for racial justice and the dismantling of corrupt systems
  - COMMUNICATING with my Black and Brown students/clients ways they can process their legitimate fears around their safety and survival in our community
  - CONTRIBUTE to those fighting for justice through personal finances and time
- In summary, I am advocating for the adoption of Breonna's Law, for every officer to wear a body camera, for the immediate investigation and removal of officers acting unethically or illegally, and for greater unconscious bias and cultural competence training of our police force.
- Thank you for taking my message today. What are the next steps to enacting sustainable changes and improvements to our local policing policies and the protection of Black and Brown neighbors?
  - *Thank the listener for their time and hang up the phone.*
  - *Take a breath and make your next call to another decision-maker. Great work!*



## Coping with COVID-19 Grief

**By Dr. Kizzy Pittrell, EdD, LCPC, ACS**

On March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the world stopped. The life that we once knew as normal and safe was snatched from us, leading to feelings of anxiety and sadness. The anxiety caused people to rush out to the stores and stock up on food and other necessities, while the sadness caused us to sit in silence, fear, worry and dread. COVID-19, the respiratory disease that is passed from person-to-person through social contact robbed us of our plans- routines, graduations, weddings, family gatherings or just enjoying a stroll at the National Harbor. And while America has experienced many other catastrophes from major hurricanes to 911; from the fear of the anthrax disease to massive school shootings, COVID-19 felt different. Maybe it is different because of the initial shock we felt when we learned that we could not return to our workplaces, schools, gyms, places of entertainment struck us all deeply. The feelings we share are synonymous with grief. Although, as a nation we have experienced these feelings before, COVID-19 is different because of the loss of human connection. Human connection- the connection we need to grow, thrive and maintain has been destroyed by this virus. Social connectedness of hugs, kisses and closeness, we now fear. Instead we have had to resort to virtual communication for work, school and leisure. We are grieving, the physical loss of friends and family from COVID and the loss of our former lives and human connection.

Grief encompasses the stages of shock, denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. The stages are not linear, and people can move through each stage in waves. Grief is a process and therefore a person will experience each stage to fully understand the impact it has. Grief also looks different from one person to the next. Think of it this way- two people can witness the same event and walk away with a different perspective of it- *this is how grief works*. As our reactions vary to the grief we are experiencing with COVID-19, we have to be mindful that everyone grieves differently, so what may appear to be anger in one person, may appear to be depression in another and they are both reactions to grief. The stages of grief was developed as a guide to show how individuals may experience grief, however it does not take into account an individual's past experiences with loss, the type of loss, or the relationship of the deceased individual to the grieving individual. The stages of grief also did not discuss grief reactions to events, but individuals- and yet here we are grieving an event and the loss of our normal at the same time.

Despite missing the connections with family and friends this quarantine has taught us a great deal about grief and loss. While the world mourns the loss of normal, here are a few things that we all have learned about grief and ourselves amid COVID-19.

1) Cherish each day-

Some people go through life taking it for granted. We take for granted when we leave our homes for work and school that we will return to our homes at night with our families. We go to our workplaces knowing that our jobs are secure and that we will remain at that workplace until we resign or retire. We even take minimal things for granted such as toilet paper and bread, knowing that we can obtain these items in one store no matter the time or day.

COVID has taught us that things can change in the blink of a month, week, day, hour, minute and second. It has taught us to appreciate people and things because at any given second we can lose a loved one, our job, and even the ease of mind knowing that we will be able to find toilet paper without having to make preparations the night before and still not find it until three stores later.

2) Be gentle-

Everyone is fighting a battle of some sort and this was even before COVID arrived. The arrival of COVID just made it more evident of how people cope through times of catastrophe and chaos. We saw how people with anxiety cope as evidence of how they tore up grocery stores purchasing every and anything leaving minimal behind for others. We also saw how people with anger cope as evidenced by them getting into arguments with others over wearing the mask in stores- this happened in Michigan when a security officer at a Dollar Store was shot and killed for advising a customer to put on a face mask. We must be reminded to be gentle, not only with ourselves but with one another. Everyone is fighting a battle of some sometimes if we can keep that in mind it may remind us to be slow to speak and react; treat people nicely and remind us that some are struggling sometimes more than others.

3) We need social connections

Out of all the lessons COVID taught us, one of the most important lessons is how much we need social connections- not the virtual connections- but real connections in the human form. The pandemic has taught us that we need social connections more than we think. During this time people struggled with losing connections, limited connections or just trouble navigating through the virtual platforms. One thing we can all agree with is that the virtual connections require so much energy and cannot replace the human connection. While we must maintain physical distance, we must find ways to maintain social connections for we need that for survival and maintenance.

4) We need to have balance-

Unfortunately, life continues even during tragedy and loss. As we have seen with COVID, we had to find ways to take care of our basic needs- despite the pandemic we still needed groceries, had to attend doctors appointments and many of us continued working whether it was from the comfort of our homes or outside. Although the world came to a halt life continued-differently of course. Finding balance means giving ourselves permission to grieve, while slowly navigating back to our normal. This pace will vary for many of us, but we must learn to balance even if it means asking for support from family and friends.

5) Embrace the new-

Losing all of the old normal has not been a horrible experience because it allowed us to reconnect to the more simple things that we easily take for granted like spending time with family, cooking together, taking walks together, reading, playing board games, gardening, knitting and the list goes on. Yes, losing our normal was shocking, depressing and even confusing at times, however we would not have been able to explore our creative side or connect more closely with our families if we did not learn to embrace the new. Let us allow some of the new activities we have found to stay around for a while.

6) Acceptance-

It is ironic that acceptance is the last stage of the grief process and the final lesson we have learned during this pandemic. This pandemic has not been easy or accepting by far and for many reasons, nonetheless we have learned to accept what it is- despite how difficult. And while we plan to slowly move forward and return to some sort of routine, we will have to accept the grim reality of what is to come- how will things look be different; will we be able to continue this way of living while embracing some of our old norms; when will it be safe for our children to return to school, to have birthday parties and other celebratory events; will we keep some of these virtual platforms that we have made in lieu of physical distance; will we continue to wear masks and what does this mean for when we go out to dine. All we can do now is prepare, embrace and accept...

*“Nothing ever goes away until it teaches us what we need to know” --Pema Chodron*



# The Impact of COVID-19 on Students

**By Diona Emmanuel, PhD, MPH, LPC, NCC**

Whether students have returned to the classroom or are engaged in virtual or distance learning, one thing is abundantly clear: the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on students of all ages. In addition to social and economic consequences, COVID-19 has had a negative impact on the mental health of many

students. The pandemic has not only increased feelings of anxiety, depression, loneliness, grief and loss but it has also exacerbated existing mental health conditions.

While virtual learning carries the lowest risk of spreading COVID-19, students are isolated and unable to continue to build relationships with their peers. Loss of friendships can lead students to feel lonely, sad, and stressed. Isolation can increase feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC; 2020), “in-person learning is in the best interest of students when compared to virtual learning.” Among students who are returning to school, there are concerns about the spread of COVID-19 and how to adjust to the precautions and mitigation measures. Depending on one’s age and level of comfort, how do students adjust to wearing masks for multiple hours of the day or maintaining social distance from their peers and teachers?

With the growing mental health crisis, it is imperative that the mental health needs of students be recognized and addressed in both in-person and virtual settings. Classrooms can incorporate social emotional learning in the daily routine; checking in with students and helping normalize and validate feelings can go a long way. Students can learn the importance of expressing their feelings, and find out that they are not the only ones experiencing them. Connect students and families to mental health professionals. Teaching and incorporating mindfulness into both school settings can help students stay in the moment and further develop a healthy coping strategy. Help students, families, and one another recognize that transitions are difficult, and even more difficult when so much uncertainty is involved. Keeping routines and structure can help students navigate some of the uncertainty. It is also important to have open, honest, and developmentally appropriate conversations with students when explaining the “state” of things and answering any questions. Parents, teachers, and school staff need to also make time to take care of themselves and engage in self-care; it is difficult to care for others when one’s own needs are not met.

[The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#), and [The Child Mind Institute](#) provide some helpful resources for supporting students and families during COVID-19.

*Reference:*

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). Operating schools during COVID-19: CDC’s considerations. Retrieved from:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html#:~:text=No%20mixing%20of%20groups%20of,masks%2C%20social%20distancing%2C%20hand%20hygiene>





May her memory be a blessing.

Artist: Mel Marcelo. Please follow him on Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/meltendo/>

## Deconstructing Career

**Deconstructing Career: Launching with a Helpful Resource to Guide our Conversations**

By Amanda Friday, LPC, NCC & Abigail Cawley, BS

As we start our year as the 2020-2021 Board for MCSJ, we are focused on decolonizing not just our field and practice, but also our way of life. One area in our work that is so intertwined with the history of our country,

its exploitative economy, and systemic and social injustice is the area of career itself. Over the course of this year, we will introduce ways in which we can become more aware and have more language for the way in which White-Dominant (read: white supremacist) Culture has infested our career culture. We will also share ways to practice more inclusive and critically conscious career counseling.

For our fall newsletter, we will talk briefly about the history of our world of work and share a resource on this topic that launches toward our path of deconstructing and decolonizing our practice.

The history of the world of work in this global environment and particularly in the United States is one of exploitation, dehumanization, a focus on productivity and quantity over quality and humanity. A brilliant, recent alumnus of Georgetown University, Abigail Cawley, shares the following about the history of our world of work:

“We contextualize ourselves based on where we are, what culture or community we are part of. But when it comes to national and even larger, international, institutions - like the resume, we should recognize that we operate within whatever the dominant culture is.

In the United States, the term we use to identify that dominant culture is White. This is because our constitution was penned by, our market economy was built by, and our history has largely been recorded by (typically and traditionally) **White, heterosexual, cisgendered, able, wealthy men.**

They built these institutions and systems using only their experiences and perspective - which were representative of a very small, very privileged group of people. This applies, too, to knowledge creation and valuation especially in institutions deemed “professional.”

For those of you that have ever felt like you don't fit into the professional standards expected of you... *now you know why*. For those of you who feel like you do -- ***you have been given a great power with which comes great responsibility to help others.***

In the world of work, the priorities and values of the market economy determine the standard. The founders of our economy and world of work established those institutions on *imperialism and a perversion of capitalist structures*. How that has been operationalized in our country is via the prioritization of productivity and the creation of a supremely productive labor force first and foremost.

What we mean is that through imperial designs our country stole land from Native Americans, that land was then decimated to make way for “productive” crops, which were cultivated by the violently forced labor of enslaved Africans. Our world of work started here.

Because our country's economy was built on *racialized slavery, superficial characteristics* were given specific, numeric, productivity values. (See the [1619 project](#)). *Race was, therefore, invented* to create stratified labor classes; determining place in society and ultimately who made up the most productive, and therefore, the most exploited, labor force.

***This is the foundation of our world of work.***

We no longer live in the afore-detailed slavery-based economic and societal structure--see the Civil War, the 19th Amendment, and the Civil Rights act--however, that structure, that slave-based structure, has had lasting impacts on the culture, expectations, and standards of our professional and career institutions today."

The history of our world of work has largely dehumanized various groups of people. We'll go into some details in our future newsletters and workshops about where this still comes up today, but know that in what we do in our work as counselors and therapists is to *humanize, to connect* with the individuals we are working with and serving. Our job is to offer brave and sanctuary space. Our job is to offer refuge from the atrocities of this world.

Now, that was a lot to take in. And you might feel a bit overwhelmed after reading that (who isn't feeling overwhelmed in general by the society and racist, fascist, white-supremacist government right now?). But if you feel overwhelmed by what you just read that could very well be because so much of this has been avoided in what we teach and excluded in what we talk about--particularly in the world of work.

***What's coming up for you as you take a beat to digest this history?***

After providing some historical and societal context, now we will share with you a resource so that we can better name some specific ways in which White Dominant Culture has infested our way of life.



Before reading this resource, it is important to note that our career culture, despite having very toxic qualities which the resource will dive into, has some beneficial qualities such as: brainstorming, frameworking, independence (beneficial to a degree), critical thinking, and emphasis on (at times) innovation and vocational discernment or purpose. But these beneficial qualities do not solely exist in our culture which means they live outside our career culture, outside *White Dominant Culture*. These beneficial elements can be brought with us as we deconstruct what has been and construct together a new, equitable, inclusive, collaborative, and radically healing way of practicing our work. That is our north star as we consider what is White Dominant Culture, what are the elements of it, and what are the antidotes to it. We are gravely in need of antidotes to the disease, the pandemic of racism. If you are still with me, I invite you to read this outstanding article [White Dominant Culture & Something Different](#) which provides language for the ways in which White Dominant Culture suffocates us and examples of antidotes to these atrocious aspects of this culture, particularly within career.

As you reflect on this resource, consider the following questions to guide your introspection:

- What stands out to you?
- In what ways do the "norms" on the left show up/infest in our career culture?
- In what ways can you offer yourself and clients something different as you meet with them?

Lastly, we leave you with a "[message from our future.](#)"



# Practicing Social Justice Daily

By Kshipra Jain, LPC, NCC & Grace Abraham Lewis, LCPC, NCC

What are some ways for us, as counselors, educators, or students to practice social justice on a daily basis without facing burnout? The list below provides some suggestions to actively engage in social justice while being cognizant of our own capacities and needs for replenishment.

*Note: Some examples may be more pertinent for White and other privileged individuals, while others may be more relevant for BIPOC and other marginalized communities.*

## COMMITMENT TO ACTION

- Make a commitment to practice social justice on a daily basis.
  - For example, ask yourself, “What can I do to be actively and intentionally anti-oppressive and anti-racist today?”
- Support Black, Indigenous, & People of Color and other minoritized communities
  - Educate yourself by reading anti-racist and anti-oppressive literature, particularly those written by Black and Indigenous authors, immigrants and refugees, queer and trans folks, people with disabilities, and those with marginalized intersectional identities.
  - Support small businesses and local artists rather than making purchases through Amazon or bigger corporations, whenever possible.
- Be aware of performative allyship, particularly with social media
  - Are you only speaking up and showing support when something is trending? Do you still care about Black lives, and systemic injustices, even when the news, media, or even your friends have “moved on” from posting about it?
- Engage in courageous, uncomfortable conversations that challenge your beliefs
  - Be open to learning and growing. Challenge yourself to hear different perspectives. Find humility in changing your perspective and making mistakes, because being aware of our mistakes are often how we grow.
- Engage in self-reflection
  - Increase awareness of your privileges and how they impact your interactions. Use tools such as your own therapy, reflective journaling, peer support groups, and supervision or the classroom setting to be honest with yourself and hold yourself accountable for any assumptions and biases that you may have.

- State your pronouns
  - Regardless of your sexuality/gender identity, writing your pronouns in your email signatures, on your social media pages, or expressing them in the beginning of meetings or in the classroom setting can be a simple way to normalize and destigmatize gender diversity. Be wary of writing the term “preferred pronouns”, as pronouns are not preferential, they are fact.
- Language matters. Be mindful of your words
  - When you mean to refer to Black people, say Black rather than BIPOC. Be clear and specific in your messaging, rather than hiding from notions that may challenge the system.
  - Understand that race isn’t the issue, racism is. Sexuality isn’t the issue, sexism and homo/transphobia are. Being BIPOC or belonging to a minoritized identity is not a detriment or ailment, but a treasured experience of joy and beauty.
  - Try not to assume someone’s gender by their appearance. Use “they/them” pronouns if you are unsure, or until you’ve been introduced.
  - Not all families look the same. Normalize cultural differences of what a family looks like, particularly when speaking with children. For example, in classrooms, it may be helpful for teachers to use “parents and caregivers” rather than “mom and dad” to be inclusive of different family structures and family systems.
- Recognize the power of your voice
  - If you are in a position of privilege, use that privilege by speaking up against injustice. Consider the difference between feeling unsafe and feeling uncomfortable. Challenge yourself to speak up against notions and ideologies based in racism and oppression and racism, especially within your own family and community if it is safe to do so.
  - Call your Senators and congresspeople to advocate for equity and justice.
- Vote
  - Voting ought to be a right, but in this country, it is a privilege. Do not take lightly your power to vote. While it may seem like you are voting for one president, whom you may or may not fully support, remember that you are also voting for an entire community of cabinet members, policy makers, and possible Supreme Court justices. Vote to support representation and diversity.
  - Educate others on the importance of voting and exercising their right.
  - Volunteer for organizations, donate to causes and campaigns you believe in, write letters and postcards to individuals to remind them to vote, or sign up to be a poll worker.
- Care
  - Showing kindness, compassion, and empathy to yourself and others is a sign of strength, not a sign of weakness. Care for yourself. Care for your community. Care for others. Care for our Earth. Wear a mask and socially distance.
  - Recognize that environmental justice is also social justice. Make sustainable choices that are beneficial for the Earth. Recycle, repurpose, and utilize environmentally-conscious products when possible.



detriment to your own mind, body, and spirit. Set boundaries to protect your energy and space, and allow yourself to say no.

- Be authentic
  - Make an intentional choice on a daily basis to be authentic to yourself, to give yourself the space to bloom, and allow yourself to feel whole. Recognize that everyone has a right to enjoy the fullness of what the universe has to offer. Allowing yourself to express yourself fully and freely is modeling to others that it is safe and okay to be themselves.
- Strive to be human, rather than perfect
  - Making a mistake is human. Making a mistake helps you learn and grow. Find your humanity in your mistakes, in your failures, and strive for authenticity rather than perfection.
- Seek support
  - There is no shame in asking for help. Learn to fill your cup and address your needs in order to be there for others. Seek support from others, be it friends, family members, colleagues, peer support groups, religious communities, or a therapist. Seek therapy for yourself for the purposes of growth. You do not have to have a diagnosable mental illness to benefit from being in therapy.
- Questions to ask yourself when approaching burnout:
  - How do I make myself full?
  - How do I make myself whole?
  - Can I learn to forgive myself? Can I learn to forgive others?
  - Can I find my humanity in the mistakes that I may make?
  - What is my energy towards myself? What is my energy towards others?
  - How can I build myself up today?
  - How can I show myself kindness? How can I show kindness to others?
  - What do I need to fill my cup today?
  - How can I find joy and laughter today?
  - What am I grateful for today?
  - What gives me hope? Where can I find hope today?

This list was inspired by content shared by the following accounts:

- *The Nap Ministry*: <https://linktr.ee/thenapministry>
- *Thems Health*: <https://linktr.ee/themshealth>
- *So You Want to Talk About*: <https://linktr.ee/sywtta>
- *Decolonizing Therapy*: <https://linktr.ee/decolonizingtherapy>
- *The Conscious Kid*: <https://www.theconsciouskid.org/>
- *The Great Unlearn*:  
<https://rachel-cargle.com/the-great-unlearn/>



# MCSJ 2020-2021 Executive Leadership Bios



## ***Kshipra Jain, LPC, NCC, President***

Kshipra Jain (she/her) is a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) and Supervisor in Washington, D.C., and a board certified counselor (NCC). She graduated with her Master's in Mental Health Counseling and Behavioral Medicine from Boston University School of Medicine in 2013. Kshipra currently works at a private practice in D.C., and is a Doctoral Candidate in the Counseling (CES) program at the George Washington University. Kshipra is also a recipient of the 2018-2019 NBCC Minority Fellowship Program-Doctoral Cohort award. She is passionate about serving and advocating for individuals with marginalized intersectional identities, such as immigrants and children of immigrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, LGBTQ+ folks, women, racial/ethnic minorities, and others who endure sociopolitical/socioeconomic disadvantages.

Kshipra approaches counseling by integrating her Western/Eurocentric education and training with intersectional and social justice lenses, such as by addressing systems of oppression, power, and privilege in the counseling session. When appropriate, she helps her clients explore the impact of historical and ancestral trauma, cisheteropatriarchy, capitalism, and White supremacy on their mental health and wellness, and empowers them to find restoration and revolution through self-love, authenticity, self-compassion, community, and healing, particularly for BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities.

Through her service as 2020-2021 President of Maryland Counselors of Social Justice (MCSJ) and Student Representative at Counselors for Social Justice (CSJ), Kshipra is consistently attempting to increase her engagement in social justice and advocacy efforts to empower and uplift the voices of those who endure systemic oppression and societal discrimination. To her, social justice is a movement that strives for equity, acceptance, and liberation for all members of society. Social justice asks that we take action towards eradicating racism, oppression, and the mere concept of dehumanization by embracing both our similarities and our differences. Social justice requires us to have awareness of our privileges and the power that each of us may hold, by taking a deeper look at our assumptions and biases. Social justice means that we must take into account the ever-changing sociopolitical environment, and reflect on how we can be anti-racist and anti-oppressive on a daily basis.



## ***Dr. Kizzy Pittrell, Ed.D., LCPC, ACS, President-Elect***

Dr. Kizzy Pittrell, Ed.D. (she/her) is a graduate of Argosy University, Washington DC from the Counseling Psychology program. Dr. Pittrell received her Masters of Counseling from Towson University and Bachelors of Science in Psychology from Bowie State University. Dr. Pittrell is a Licensed Professional Counselor, an Approved Drug and Alcohol counselor, a Master Addiction Counselor, and an Approved Clinical Supervisor in Maryland. Dr. Pittrell has worked in the community sector providing mental health and addiction counseling and treatment to adults and adolescents for 15 years. Currently, Dr. Pittrell is owner of Ross Counseling, a private practice providing therapy to individuals, families and couples and manages a community mental health facility in Baltimore. More recently, Dr. Pittrell along with her husband opened a psychiatric rehabilitation program in Baltimore county called Strengthening Families Building Communities.

In addition, Dr. Pittrell has conducted several discussions and trainings related to grief, trauma, COVID, and effective ways to cope with mental illness. Dr. Pittrell is passionate about educating the community about mental health and reducing the stigma of mental health. In her spare time Dr. Pittrell loves blogging, spending time with family, reading and she is certified Zumba instructor. She is also an author of a children's book about maternal depression.

When I think about social justice, what comes to mind is service and advocacy for those marginalized persons and communities who otherwise cannot support and advocate for themselves. It means that everyone deserves equal

economic, political and social rights and opportunities. As a mental health clinician, my role is to help clients manage disturbing emotional issues, but often times it involves understanding deeper societal issues that impacts ones' emotional and mental health; it involved being a space for those communities inflicted by racism, sexism, colorism and advocating to remove systemic barriers that impact individuals from receiving adequate healthcare. As a clinician, my work is to continue to use my voice to support my clients and minority communities to seek the appropriate treatment and mental health services needed.



**Dr. Ann Diona Emmanuel, Ph.D., MPH, LPC, NCC, *Secretary***

Diona Emmanuel is a licensed clinician in D.C., clinical supervisor, and adjunct faculty at The George Washington University. She holds her Ph.D. in Counseling, Master of Public Health in Maternal and Child Health, and a Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. Her research interests revolve around linking public health to mental health, and includes various topics like bullying, cyberbullying, the impact of social media on adolescents and emerging adults, substance use, HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, and the role of employment. There are so many components to social justice, and it involves working towards a just society, and raising awareness about and advocating for equality and fairness among all.



**Bahar Alagheband, *Treasurer***

Bahar is a higher education manager with broad experience across multiple student services platforms including xissions, academic advising and financial aid. She began her career at the Kuwait Cultural Mission advising International Students from Kuwait. This role sparked her interest in Higher Education administration. For the last 11 years Bahar has worked in various roles at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, where she is currently a Student Affairs Specialists. In addition to advising graduate students, Bahar is the chair of the diversity committee for events on campus where she organizes the annual Diversity Week and various other events. Bahar is committed to providing the campus community with opportunities to explore and engage in discussions that bring new perspectives, and celebrate the presence and contributions made by people of all identities and experiences. Bahar is enrolled in the Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling at the Johns Hopkins School of Education. She has an interest in individual and couples counseling, as well as addictions and substance abuse counseling. Bahar received her Bachelor of Arts in Communications from the American University. She was born in Tehran, Iran, and very connected to her roots while she grew up in Maryland. Bahar currently lives in Washington, DC where she enjoys biking, museums, and everything else DC life has to offer.

To her, social justice means: providing access, opportunities, resources and a voice. It means reducing and eliminating inequalities for those who have been historically marginalized.



**Dr. Sade Dunn, Ed.D., NCC, LPC, LCPC, *Counselor Representative***

Dr. Sadé Dunn is an approved supervisor and Licensed Professional Counselor/Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor in Washington, D.C., Maryland and Virginia. She is a graduate from Governors and Bowie State University. Dr. Dunn is the counselor representative for the Maryland Counselors for Social Justice board and a Maryland Counseling Association Emerging leader for the 2020-2021 year. She previously served as the secretary for the MCA ALGBTQ board from 2015 until 2018.

Dr. Dunn is a Reiki Level I Practitioner and registered yoga teacher at the 200 level. Reiki is a holistic energy healing practice that promotes balance by helping to free the chakras of any blockages. It promotes clarity, is very relaxing and clients feel restored afterward. Dr. Dunn is continuing her yoga studies in order to become a registered yoga teacher at the 500 level.

“What social justice means to me is being able to fight and advocate for not only myself but others as well. Creating opportunities to educate those who may have a faulty depiction of what justice may look like for others while also continuing to educate and research social justice and injustices as they occur to others. I hope that we are able to facilitate a change and get others on board with the vision of our board and help continue fighting for social injustices as they occur.”



### *Ursula Cerro, LCPC, Student Representative*

Ursula Cerro (she, her, ella) is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor. She holds a master's degree in clinical mental health counseling from Johns Hopkins University and earned her bachelor's degree from Marymount University. Ursula's experience includes working for an outpatient clinic as a bilingual therapist with adolescents and adults from the Latinx community. Outside of the clinical world, she enjoys spending time with family and friends, going hiking, local events, and reading. For Ursula, social justice means to stand in solidarity with the marginalized, challenge the roots of oppression and injustice, and build a community for collaboration and action.



### *Donnette Deigh, LGPC, NCC, Membership Chair*

Donnette Deigh is a PhD student in Liberty University's Counselor Education and Supervision program. Donnette is currently an Education Services Specialist, National Certified Counselor and a provisional therapist working on her independent license in the state of Maryland. Donnette has been dedicated in helping underserved populations increase their quality of life. Her areas of specialization include anxiety, adjustment difficulties/ life transitions, job dissatisfaction/career counseling, and depression. Donnette's research interests include social justice and advocacy for counselors of color, multiculturalism, minority professional identity development, clinical supervision and academic achievement. She has a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Bowie State University and a Master of Arts in Rehabilitation Counseling with a concentration in Substance Abuse and Psychiatric Disabilities along with a graduate certificate in Counseling and Life Transitions focusing on Counseling Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Individuals from The George Washington University.

“I believe being an advocate for social justice is a lifelong task. Sometimes social justice is not what you THINK it is but what it has the potential to be. Everyone has the potential to be a gatekeeper. It is what you decide to do with that privilege is what makes you an advocate.”



### *Sahaj Kohli, Public Relations Chair*

Sahaj Kohli (she/her), a first-generation Indian American, holds the Public Relations Chair at MCSJ. Sahaj is currently a second-year master's student at The George Washington University where she studies clinical mental health counseling and interns as a supervised mental health counselor in training. Sahaj is also a 2020-2021 NBCC Minority Fellow and founder of Brown Girl Therapy (@browngirltherapy), the first and largest mental health and wellness community organization for children of immigrants. With a 7-year career in journalism under her belt, Sahaj's passion lies at the intersection of narrative storytelling and mental health.

“Social justice is actively working towards an equitable society where everyone has access to quality education, resources and care. Through that process, we must also be actively and internally dismantling the oppressive systems that are harmful and disadvantageous to BIPOC.”



### *Amanda Friday, LPC, Professional Development Chair*

Amanda is a LPC, with a particular focus in career counseling, and has lived in the DMV area most of their life. They currently work at Georgetown University as a career counselor and Assistant Director at the career center. Prior to Georgetown, Amanda earned their Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the University of Tennessee, a Master of Education from Virginia Commonwealth University, and a Master of Arts in counseling from The George Washington University. They are currently completing their Doctor of Philosophy in counseling with a focus on athletic retirement, career narratives during transition, and social justice from the George Washington University. Their career journey has been a winding one. Formerly a college coach and team-building facilitator, Amanda found their calling in the mental health field. They have a passion for creating communities, teaching students and clients ways to discover meaningful work, empowering and lifting up the voices of historically marginalized communities, and decolonizing career and therapy. Amanda also teaches undergraduate career courses at Georgetown University and is an adjunct professor at George Washington University.



### *Preet Kaur, LPC, Human Rights Chair*

Preet Kaur (she/her/hers) is a Licensed Professional Counselor working in private practice in the DC metropolitan area, and a doctoral candidate in the Counseling department at the George Washington University. She strives to maintain a balance between providing direct clinical services, conducting applied research on mental health disparities, and engaging in advocacy efforts to challenge oppressive systems of power and privilege and the ways in which these affect access and delivery of mental health care to minoritized or otherwise marginalized communities. To this end, Preet has served in various advocacy and leadership capacities in professional mental health associations. Additionally, she has also served on the boards of two DC area-based non-profit organizations, providing accessible direct mental health services as well community-based educational programming. In her role on the MCSJ board, she is passionate about unifying and empowering a community of students and professionals at various career stages, to learn together and develop an ecological understanding of mental health in BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities, including the influence of oppression and colonization.

To her, being a counselor committed to social justice means to question the systems of knowledge and power that frame dominant narratives on mental health, and to instead seek out contextualized and community-based knowledge and practices for health and healing.



### *Grace Abraham Lewis, LCPC, NCC, Social Justice Advocacy Chair*

I am an LCPC board-certified mental health therapist in Maryland and I am also licensed with the National Board of Certified Counselors (NCC). I am equally certified in Telehealth for mental health professionals, and I've been in practice for the past 6 years. I graduated from Walden University in 2014 with an MSc in Clinical Mental Health Counseling and I am presently a doctoral student in Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) at the PhD ABD (All but Dissertation) level. Hopefully, I'd complete the program by the end of 2020.

As a mental health counseling professional, I worked in methadone clinics where I saw clients with substance abuse and co-occurring disorders. Using the therapeutic community (TC) model, I also worked in the jail system at a male maximum security correctional facility with clients incarcerated for drug-related crimes who were getting ready to be released. When I worked in an out-patient mental health clinic, I saw clients from all cultural backgrounds including those within the LGBTQ+ community, and my clients had all kinds of mental health disorders and illnesses including anxiety, depression, relationship and blended family issues, OCD, ADHD, PTSD, as well as physical and emotional trauma. Presently, in my private practice, my clients include those in PRP programs as well as clients dealing with all kinds of

mental health and substance abuse issues. My dissertation interests include: Causes of Infertility in Women in Cameroon; Spirituality as an Influence on African American Women: What Counselors need to know; Spiritual Healing and Out-Patient Mental Health Treatment of African American and other Christian Pentecostal Black Women: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study.

Social justice means equal distribution of wealth, empowerment, and opening of doors of opportunities and privileges to everyone so they can be the best expression and fulfillment of themselves. Social justice means economic justice whereby everyone in the society enjoys the fruits of the nation's economic growth and has equal access and opportunities to create wealth. Social justice means ensuring everyone has direct access to basic necessities like fresh products, grocery stores, banks, clean streets, good roads. Social justice means social rights where political and economic opportunities are available to everyone irrespective of their cultural backgrounds. Social justice means respecting everyone's cultural beliefs and outlook on life. Social justice means political justice whereby everyone is able to speak up and cast their votes without discrimination. Social justice means police reforms. Social justice means restorative justice which acknowledges the need for alternative approaches in our criminal justice and school educational systems. Social justice means people taking responsibility to play their roles at their different levels in order to ensure positive social change in their communities. Social justice means not only advocating for the increase of access to educational and occupational opportunities, but also advocating for the marginalized, disadvantaged, helpless, hopeless, homeless and voiceless population.



***Sabrina Taylor, PhD, CRC, CVRC, CWIP, Newsletter Chair & MCA Emerging Leader***

Dr. Sabrina Harris Taylor is an Assistant Professor at Coppin State University and serves as the undergraduate program coordinator for the Undergraduate Rehabilitation Services Program. She also serves as the co-coordinator of the Comprehensive Post-Secondary Education Program for Transitioning Youth at Coppin State University, and teaches in the Graduate Rehabilitation Counseling Program.

Dr. Taylor graduated from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University with a PhD in Rehabilitation Counseling and Rehabilitation Counselor Education in 2016. She has a Masters Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University and a bachelor's degree from Elon University in Human Services. Dr. Taylor is also certified as a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor, Work Incentives Practitioner, and Certified Veterans Rehabilitation Counselor. Dr. Taylor has certifications in Vocational Evaluation and Work Adjustment, Work Incentives Counseling, Behavioral Addictions, and online teaching.

For the past four years, Dr. Taylor has taught graduate level counseling courses geared towards rehabilitation and addictions counseling majors at Coppin State University. Prior to working in academia, Dr. Taylor worked for the Department of Veteran Affairs as a rehabilitation counselor. She served over 200 veterans with service-connected disabilities and addictions during her tenure at the VA and assisted 65 veterans with obtaining a college degree and career. She has also owned and operated an adult care home in North Carolina.

Dr. Taylor serves her community by serving as a 2020-2021 Emerging Leader for the Maryland Counseling Association and a reading tutor of the Anne Arundel Literacy Council. In addition, she provides work incentives counseling services to consumers with disabilities privately. Dr. Taylor enjoys spending time with her husband, Whitney, and fur-baby, Seabreeze.

Social justice is a movement to eradicate injustices within the legal system, education, housing, law enforcement, banking, and any system in which the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment is not upheld. Advocates of social justice are responsible for educating the public about injustices against persons of color, members of the LGBTQ community, and vulnerable populations such as persons with disabilities. Through education and advocacy, vulnerable groups will be able to finally experience unalienable rights such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

# *Thank You, MCSJ 2020-2021 Leadership Team!!!*



Virtual 2020-2021 MCSJ board meeting



Virtual MCSJ Newsletter Committee meeting