

14

Developing Social Justice Counseling and Advocacy Skills

The individual must not merely wait and criticize. He must serve the cause as best he can. The fate of the world will be such as the world deserves.

—Albert Einstein

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter focuses on the ways in which counselors can develop advocacy and social justice counseling skills. Due to the nature of work as a health professional, counselors have a personal, professional, and social responsibility to help those who are socially disenfranchised through social justice counseling and advocacy initiatives. Although the literature in the area of social justice counseling has not been well developed, this chapter describes the various strategies counselors may use in social justice-orientated counseling activities, practices, and advocacy actions. On a personal level, counselors may develop an identity as an ally for the purpose of promoting social equality and social justice. Professionally, counselors need to adopt a social justice counseling paradigm and learn to use social justice-informed counseling strategies, such as strength-based or prevention-oriented approaches or empowerment-focused interventions. Finally, counselors have a social responsibility to engage in social advocacy efforts that extend beyond the counseling milieu in order to promote positive social change for all people. From an ethical point of view, our mandate of *do no harm* will be best accomplished via advocacy efforts and social justice counseling.

SELF-ASSESSMENT OF PRE-EXISTING AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE

- How much effort have I made to integrate social justice advocacy in my work with clients?
 - How do I make myself an advocate for socially oppressed people?
 - How do I deal with situations in which I feel my clients are using discrimination as an excuse for not being able to succeed?
 - What skills do I possess to address social justice issues with my clients?
 - What skills do I possess to engage myself in social advocacy for promoting justice for the socially oppressed?
 - How well am I prepared to be an ally to the socially marginalized?
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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, students will be able to do the following:

1. Understand the importance of taking personal responsibility in supporting the oppressed in society by becoming an ally
 2. Understand the importance of taking professional responsibility in providing social justice-oriented services
 3. Understand the potential harm that conventional counseling practice may cause to socially oppressed groups
 4. Become aware of the necessity of adopting a social justice counseling paradigm in providing effective counseling services
 5. Become interested in using strength-based counseling and focusing on prevention
 6. Become invested in empowering diverse clients by employing social justice counseling
 7. Become more ready to take action toward promoting social advocacy and positive social change for all people
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CASE ILLUSTRATION 14.1

The Case of Alicia

Alicia is a 38-year-old computer engineer who just left her prior job with a large construction company on the West Coast and moved back home to a mid-sized town in the Midwest. Her racial and ethnic backgrounds include half Brazilian, a quarter

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Irish Caucasian, and a quarter Native Hawaiian. Currently, she is unemployed and actively looking for a job. She came to counseling for help with depression and anxiety. She had called the clinic 2 days earlier, asking to see Ronda, a White female counselor.

In the first session, she appeared nervous and fidgety and told Ronda that she had a long history of depression and anxiety but seemed to feel worse recently since she had moved home. She then said nervously that she had wanted to wait (until she found a job) to seek counseling, but some recent nightmares and panic attacks scared her, and she did "not want to do anything stupid." It took about 20 minutes for Alicia to relax and start offering information about her life more comfortably. Alicia disclosed that she asked to see Ronda because she saw Ronda at a rally supporting lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer (LGBTQ) groups 2 weeks earlier, so she thought "that would make this a bit easier." Alicia is a transgender woman who transitioned before moving back home. She stated being very happy about the transition process as she successfully passed as female but also shared that the process was "really hard" in terms of having to deal with "a lot of crap" from some people in her life circle. She commented that although she had some understanding and supportive coworkers, two of her supervisors had really made life difficult for her. They would check her work products frequently, assign her tasks that others did not want, and give her low ratings for job performance. Alicia said that she was not fired but had been told several times that "you probably do not want to wait to be asked to leave." Eventually, Alicia decided to quit her job and move back in with her mother, who had been supportive of her and who lives alone and is suffering from early signs of dementia. Her father died several years ago, and Alicia said that "he would have had a hard time if he knew that I did this (transition from male to female)." Alicia also felt she would like to "start all over" with her mother, whom Alicia had problems with on and off during her gender incongruence years.

Alicia reported a number of severe depression and anxiety symptoms, including weight loss, crying for no obvious reason, sleep disturbances with frequent nightmares, difficulties concentrating, and fear of being alone in the house. She felt frustrated because she was not like this before she quit her job and moved back home. Although she expressed being very happy about her decision to transition, she explained that all the "practical aspects" of her life had turned worse and presented her with new challenges. She felt conflicted about her decision to move back home, realizing that it was harder for her to find a job in her field than when she was a man; the small-town culture did not help. When asked about her social support since being back in her hometown, she said, "I am not sure if I have any, although I am still talking to several high school friends. What hurts me the most, though, is that Mother is no longer invited to her knitting group and was asked to move to another group in the Bible study program in church; she also has not received any phone calls for helping out in a local school like she did before I came back."

SMALL-GROUP CLASS ACTIVITY 14.1

In small groups of three or four students, share your initial impression and thoughts about Alicia:

1. What emotions does Alicia's story elicit in you?
2. What is your general impression about the influence of Alicia's social context on her symptoms?
3. What are the issues at hand that you as a counselor need to be attentive to?
4. What does it say to you that Alicia sought Ronda out as her counselor?

As discussed in the last chapter, the profoundness of social inequality and injustice calls the counseling profession to respond to the mental health needs of the socially oppressed and marginalized by integrating social justice work into our provision of services. Clients who are afflicted by social oppression and marginalization deserve our professional recognition, respect, and competent service. Therefore, in addition to providing individualized culturally sensitive counseling, multiculturally competent counselors in the 21st century must also “function as change agents at organizational, institutional, and societal levels” (Vera & Speight, 2003, p. 255).

There are both personal and professional challenges to making the counseling profession an institution of positive social change and counselors its active change agents. As such, persistent efforts are necessary for the continuity and advancement of our profession in the 21st century. We believe this important work will need to commence with individual efforts from multiculturally competent and conscientious professionals. As counselors, we have personal, professional, ethical, and social responsibilities to integrate social justice into our provision of services with the goal of empowering culturally diverse clients and promoting their health and well-being.

Taking Personal Responsibility: Social Justice Competency Development

The personal work for counselors starts with the recognition of the fact that we live in a world where social inequality and injustice are part of the social structure and its norms. Socially responsible individuals will allow themselves to feel the emotions and develop passion associated with the belief that the status quo is not acceptable and has to change.

Those who are not members of oppressed groups have the power to influence change. Their attitude and behavior toward social inequality make them either contributors to or

change agents against social injustice. In discussing the obvious and negative impact of social inequality on African American youth, President Obama noted that “the worst part is we’ve become numb to these statistics. We’re not surprised by them. We take them as the norm. We just assume this is an inevitable part of American life, instead of the outrage that it is” (White House, 2014). Any ignorance, apathy, or denial about the existence of social injustice needs to be challenged. We need to allow ourselves to see that there are children who are hungry, who are not receiving proper education, who are not feeling safe in their neighborhoods. There are adults who are denied basic rights to love, to work, or to have basic survival needs met, and there are those who are wrongfully accused, persecuted, or punished just because of who they are. In this context, we either become part of the solution or remain part of the problem. We may deliberately develop competency in advocating for social justice or inadvertently contribute to maintaining the status quo—namely, perpetuation of an unjust system and social context for the disenfranchised.

Starting a Personal Journey

At a personal level, becoming an ally is one way that individuals can nurture and exercise a multicultural consciousness in effort to become “part of the solution.” On her website, Anne Bishop, an activist and the author of *Becoming an Ally*, stated, “Allies are people who recognize the unearned privilege they receive from society’s patterns of injustice and take responsibility for changing these patterns” (n.d., para. 1). A person from a dominant group can be an ally for those in a subordinate group, such as a person from a more privileged social class being a class ally. A class ally shows attitudes and behaviors that are anticlassist, is committed to increasing his or her own understanding of the issues related to classism, and works actively toward eliminating classism on many levels. Similarly, people can become allies of LGBTQ communities, racial minorities, immigrants, people with disabilities, women, the elderly, and so on.

In terms of how to act and live as an ally, Paul Kivel, a social justice educator, activist, and writer, provides a list of tactics that a White person can use to be an ally for people of color.

1. **Assume racism is everywhere, every day.** Just as economics influences everything we do, just as gender and gender politics influence everything we do, assume that racism is affecting your daily life. We assume this because it’s true, and because a privilege of being white is the freedom to not deal with racism all the time. We have to learn to see the effect that racism has. Notice who speaks, what is said, how things are done and described. Notice who isn’t present when racist talk occurs. Notice code words for race and the implications of the policies, patterns, and comments that are being expressed. You already notice the skin color of everyone you meet—now notice what difference it makes.
2. **Notice who is the center of attention and who is the center of power.** Racism works by directing violence and blame toward people of color and consolidating power and privilege for white people.
3. **Notice how racism is denied, minimized, and justified.**

4. **Understand and learn from the history of whiteness and racism.** Notice how racism has changed over time and how it has subverted or resisted challenges. Study the tactics that have worked effectively against it.
5. **Understand the connections between racism, economic issues, sexism, and other forms of injustice.**
6. **Take a stand against injustice.** Take risks. It is scary, difficult, and may bring up feelings of inadequacy, lack of self-confidence, indecision, or fear of making mistakes, but ultimately it is the only healthy and moral human thing to do. Intervene in situations where racism is being passed on.
7. **Be strategic.** Decide what is important to challenge and what's not. Think about strategy in particular situations. Attack the source of power.
8. **Don't confuse a battle with the war.** Behind particular incidents and interactions are larger patterns. Racism is flexible and adaptable. There will be gains and losses in the struggle for justice and equality.
9. **Don't call names or be personally abusive.** Since *power* is often defined as power over others—the ability to abuse or control people—it is easy to become abusive ourselves. However, we usually end up abusing people who have less power than we do because it is less dangerous. Attacking people doesn't address the systemic nature of racism and inequality.
10. **Support the leadership of people of color.** Do this consistently, but not uncritically.
11. **Learn something about the history of white people who have worked for racial justice.** There is a long history of white people who have fought for racial justice. Their stories can inspire and sustain you.
12. **Don't do it alone.** You will not end racism by yourself. We can do it if we work together. Build support, establish networks, and work with already established groups.
13. **Talk with your children and other young people about racism.** (pp. 1–3)

Kivel, P., Creighton, A. "Making the Peace." Hunter House (2002). Used by permission of Paul Kivel.

Becoming an ally is a personal journey. It will take courage and devotion from mental health counselors in the 21st century to view promotion of social justice as a personal responsibility. This personal effort will enhance counseling professionals' effectiveness in the provision of services to clients and communities. To become an ally, counselors need to be aware of their own multicultural identity (recognizing social oppression they may experience and privileges they enjoy), exercise their multicultural consciousness to unlearn various isms and develop social justice beliefs and attitudes, respect the leadership among the oppressed social groups for which they are seeking to be an ally, and stay connected with their own groups to show support and help each other in understanding oppression.

Reflection by a Counselor-in-Training

How I See My Middle-Class Privilege

Growing up, I never had to worry about when I would eat next. I could choose between private or public schooling. I could walk around my neighborhood without fear of crime or violence. If I was sick, I could go right to my family physician and receive help. More profoundly, I had the privilege of believing that my experience was the norm. After learning about the deeper structure of how social class can pervasively affect a person, I feel obligated to reevaluate my identity into a bigger cultural context. If I was not in the middle class, I would be a different person. Institutional and socioemotional barriers to succeed educationally, financially, and occupationally would have been a cloud over my head as soon as I woke up in the morning. However, acquiring a deeper understanding of how social class can affect someone should not be the end goal. I am obligated to give a concrete response—I need to not only recognize how my middle social class oppresses lower classes but also find a way to remove it from my life. I want to contribute to the hope that the trapping and draining of a person's potential that occurs due to low social class can be remediated by acts of charity and sacrifice. Being a mental health counselor, I will fulfill my responsibility and obligation to be part of positive social changes by being active politically and in the community as well as conducting multiculturally meaningful counseling services.

—Ryan L., a White, cisgender, heterosexual, male,
middle-class graduate student with a Catholic faith in his mid-20s

Becoming an Ally for Social Justice

There have been warnings that sometimes supportive individuals—aspiring allies with good intentions—may not be effective in helping or may even be harmful through their efforts in the course of promoting social justice. That is because good-willed actions can perpetuate social oppression if the actors are not aware of their own multicultural identity and their unearned privileges and engage in actions for goals other than social justice. For instance, the following are all statements that reflect genuinely good intentions but will, to various degrees, perpetuate the unjust social system and negative perceptions of the recipients' diversity (being poor, a racial minority, or nonheterosexual):

I really want to help that poor kid to succeed, so I bought him school supplies and told him that he should work hard and I would be watching him.

By giving up a small portion of their assets, rich people can make life easier for many poor people.

I want to help my clients of color feel as confident as their White peers.

White counselors should teach low-income clients of color what to expect from counseling.

I told Jill that even if she is gay I still love her.

Straight people should try to talk to LGBT people without using language that disapproves of their sexual identity.

Seeing our own dominant group membership as superior (or as helpers) in itself is a perpetration on the members of the subdominant groups. This attitude not only furthers the “othering” of diverse group members (Duan & Smith, in press) but also keeps them down as recipients of dominant groups’ charity, which may harm individuals as well as reinforce the oppressive social systems in the area of cultural diversity.

Now you probably want to ask the question, “How do we go about developing ourselves and becoming allies?” The answers to this question are similar to those we discussed in Chapter 6: In order to become a multiculturally competent counselor, we have to develop a non- and anti-ism multicultural identity along with a multicultural consciousness. To the specific goal of becoming an effective ally to promote social justice, individuals need to develop an ally identity. Although there are specific awareness, knowledge, skills, and actions required for allies for specific populations, the conceptual identity development model for aspiring social justice allies by Edwards (2006) may serve as a general guide for our discussion (see Table 14.1).

Table 14.1 Aspiring Ally Identity Development

	Aspiring Ally for Self-Interest	Aspiring Ally for Altruism	Ally for Social Justice
Motivation	Selfish—for the people I know and care about	Other—I do this for them	Combined selfishness—I do this for us
Ally to . . .	Ally to a person	Ally to target group	Ally to an issue
Relationship with Members of Oppressed Groups	Working <i>over</i> members of the target group	Working <i>for</i> members of the target group	Working <i>with</i> members of the target group
Victims of Oppression	Individuals with personal connection are or could be victims—my daughter, my sister, my friend	They are victims	All of us are victims—although victimized in different ways and unequally
Focus of Problem	Individuals—overt perpetrators	Others from the agent group	System

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Table 14.1 (Continued)

	Aspiring Ally for Self-Interest	Aspiring Ally for Altruism	Ally for Social Justice
View of Justice	These incidents of hate are exceptions to the system of justice	We need justice for them	We need justice for all
Spiritual or Moral Foundation	I may be simply following doctrine or seeking spiritual self-preservation	I believe helping others is the right thing to do	I seek to connect and liberate us all on spiritual and moral grounds
Power	I'm powerful	I empower them—they need my help	Empower us all
Source of Ongoing Motivation	Motivator (my daughter, my sister, my friend) must be present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependent on acceptance/praise from the other • Easily derailed by critiques by others • Often leads to burnout 	Sustainable passion—for them, for me, for us, for the future
Mistakes	I don't make mistakes—I'm a good person, and perpetrators are just bad people	Has difficulty admitting mistakes to self or other[s]—struggles with critique or exploring own issues—highly defensive when confronted with own behavior	Seeks critiques as gifts and admits mistakes as part of doing the work and a step towards one's own liberation—has accepted own <i>isms</i> and seeks help in uncovering them
Relationship to the System	Not interested in the system—just stopping the bad people	Aims to be an exception from the system, yet ultimately perpetuates the system	Seeks to escape, impede, amend, redefine, and destroy the system
Focus of the Work	Perpetrators	Other members of the dominant group	My people—doesn't separate self from other agents
Privilege	Doesn't see privilege—wants to maintain status quo	Feels guilty about privilege and tries to distance self from privilege	Sees illumination of privilege as liberating and consciously uses unearned privilege against itself

Source: Edwards, K. E. (2006). Aspiring social justice ally identity development: A conceptual model. *NASPA Journal*, 43(4), 39–60. Table 1, p. 47. Reprinted by permission of Taylor & Francis LLC (<http://www.tandfonline.com>)

Conceptually, individuals may serve as allies for self-interest, for altruistic purposes, or for social justice. Those who become allies for self-interest “are primarily motivated to protect those they care about from being hurt” (Edwards, 2006, p. 46). They generally see the world as a fair and just place, feel powerful or self-actualized themselves, and focus their charity on helping suffering or mistreated individuals. Clearly, while their actions may be seen as charitable and commendable, they actually perpetuate the systems of oppression. Those who become allies for altruism begin to recognize the systemic nature of privilege and oppression (mainly intellectually) and seek “to engage in ally behavior as a means of dealing with the guilt” (p. 49) as members of a privileged group. The need to take on the role of “rescuer” is high, and the “we help them” mentality is strong. This motivation by guilt can be helpful for a while, but “when confronted with their own oppressive behaviors, they may become highly defensive . . . an attempt to maintain their status as exceptional members of the dominant group” (p. 49). Such “paternalistic nature of this altruism may lead to positive gains in the short term, but ultimately perpetuates the system of oppression by placing aspiring allies in the role of exceptional helper to the victims of oppression” (p. 49).

Being an *ally for social justice* means “to work with those from the oppressed group in collaboration and partnership to end the system of oppression” (Edwards, 2006, p. 51). Those allies are motivated by the mission and goal of social justice and recognize that in a different way members of the dominant groups are victims of social injustice as well. Allies who take actions toward social justice aim at not only freeing the oppressed but also at liberating themselves to “reconnect to their own full humanity” (p. 51). Allies for social justice have a clear sense of their own multicultural and ally identities, understand the deep structures of social oppression, commit themselves to fighting against various isms, and take responsibility in working with their own dominant groups as well as subordinate groups.

GUIDED SMALL-GROUP CLASS EXERCISE 14.1

Who Can Be My Ally? For Whom Can I Be an Ally?

Get into small groups of three to four people. Each person draws a circle, writes his or her name at the center, and fills the circle with all his or her identities to make it look as if many satellites (identities) surround the name in the center. Then each person picks one identity he or she feels most proud of and one that is associated with the most pain and shares one experience/story for each of them with the group.

After finishing that activity, reflect and share your answers to the following questions in the same small groups:

1. Would I appreciate having an ally among the group or in society? Who would be the most powerful allies for me? In what ways?

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2. Do I want to be an ally to anyone in the group or in society? Why? What makes me powerful in being an ally for that person or that group?
3. In what ways do I believe or not believe it my personal responsibility to be an ally?
4. What are some of my past efforts at being an ally?
5. In what ways am I ready to develop my ally identity?
6. What are the paths, tasks, and challenges I have in developing a social justice ally identity?

Taking Professional Responsibility: A Social Justice Counseling Paradigm

Knowing that individuals' experiences and behaviors can only be understood accurately in context, we have the professional responsibility not to ignore clients' social and cultural contexts when working with them. It is also our responsibility to address these contexts directly or indirectly when they are the reasons or causes for the unfair and unjust social treatment that our clients have to face. It has been conceptualized that a psychologist or counselor has the professional responsibility to promote social justice both *via* and *in* their work (Kelman, 2010). In another words, our counseling service can be a vehicle for bringing about positive social changes, and it is the responsibility of the counselor to make it happen.

With a multicultural consciousness, counselors integrate social justice into services they provide, adopting a counseling paradigm that "uses social advocacy and activism as a means to address inequitable social, political, and economic conditions that impede the academic, career, and personal/social development of individuals, families, and communities" (Ratts, 2009, p. 160). This paradigm translates into counselors' awareness and knowledge that it is harmful and unethical to only assess client experiences and symptoms and then intervene to require changes exclusively from the client while the large social context is clearly a negative factor in or the cause of their symptoms. Counselors have to "view client problems more contextually and use advocacy to remove oppressive environmental barriers" (Lewis, Ratts, Paladino, & Toporek, 2011, p. 7).

Using a social justice counseling paradigm, counselors adopt a worldview that allows them to further appreciate our definition of multicultural counseling (see Chapter 6). Being able to see various obstacles and barriers our clients face in the context where we all play a role (as oppressors or victims) may motivate our social justice counseling effort and help us understand our clients and "the debilitating impact oppression has on clients' ability to reach their potential" (Lewis et al., 2011, p. 7). It is clearly articulated that "achieving social justice is both a goal and a process" through which social justice counseling practice would "ensure that every individual has the

opportunity to reach her or his academic, career, and personal/social potential free from unnecessary barriers” (p. 7). Accordingly, our interventions and other services must be conducted with this goal in mind.

Social Justice-Informed Counseling Strategies

To avoid conducting remedial interventions that have been complicit in maintaining the status quo of an unjust social order, multiculturally competent counselors must reexamine counseling systems and strategies and focus on correcting negative effects of social injustice in the lives of those who have been oppressed due to their cultural diversity. In the field of counseling, we have the tradition of using several strategies that lend themselves well toward social justice-centered counseling. More work is needed to refine, enrich, and improve these strategies, and all of us are in a good position to contribute to this effort through research and practice.

Strength-Based Approach

Strength-based counseling challenges the medical model in mental health care, which often blames the victims for their victimization by focusing on what is wrong with them and their symptoms. The diagnosis, according to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM)*, requires that clinicians match client symptoms with listed criteria. There is little room for considering individuals' contexts or differentiating similar symptoms caused by different contributing factors. For the socially oppressed, this diagnosis process pays little attention to how individuals have dealt with social injustice imposed upon their group or in what ways they have shown strength in surviving unfair social treatment and living with undue disadvantages (the opposite of social privilege) as a result of their social positions. For instance, it is most likely that Alicia's symptoms “qualify” her for major depressive or anxiety disorder. Such labeling implies that something is wrong with her, rather than with the discriminative and unjust social treatment she receives.

The emergence of strength-based counseling was initiated by cross-cultural scholars who questioned the assumptions of traditional counseling theories and practice in the context of minority cultures and contexts (Smith, 2006). Thus, the strength-based theory is rooted in the belief that culture has a significant role in shaping individuals and their psychological experiences. Smith stated, “All strengths are culturally based . . . cross-cultural counseling should focus on clients' cultural and individual strengths rather than on the victimization effects of racial or ethnic discrimination” (p. 17). In terms of achieving positive psychological changes and growth, individuals' motivation and positive emotions are important factors that could “trigger upward spirals toward emotional well-being” (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002, p. 172). Therefore, strength-based interventions not only provide a sense of being valued or capable for the culturally marginalized but also encourage positive changes and actions for them to reach higher psychological well-being.

It should be noted that strength-based counseling does not mean to ignore symptoms and only focus on what is going well in our clients' lives. Rather, this approach recognizes and validates symptoms and views the symptoms from a strength-based

perspective (vs. a pathology-focused perspective). Let's examine this example of a White female counselor in session with a young Vietnamese American nurse aide and single mother of 3-year-old twin daughters:

Counselor: You said you felt more depressed recently; tell me more about it.

Client: Recently, I have been having more and more difficulty concentrating, I can't sleep well at night, and sometimes I just want to cry. I am afraid that I will make some huge mistakes at work and hurt someone. I am really scared.

Counselor: Tell me what has happened in your life recently that might have led to these difficulties.

Client: I am not sure and don't know if that matters. I just want to be able to control myself. I want you to help me. If I could stop crying so much. . . . The other day when my mother called to tell me that my daughter fell off a chair, I lost it and yelled at her. I felt terrible afterwards. I cried and cried and cried. Please help me stop all this. I feel helpless.

We may speculate how counselors with different orientations would proceed and the types of possible interventions they may employ at this point. Some conventional approaches may lead to efforts to help the client eliminate depressive symptoms by using corrective strategies, such as focusing on insight by digging at the root of her depression, using relaxation exercises to help with sleep, doing various mental exercises to help with concentration, identifying and disputing maladaptive thoughts that may underlie her depression, and so on.

Instead, in using a strength-based approach, a counselor may focus on client awareness of her inner strengths and her strengths in coping with challenging external stressors, thus helping her to feel empowered to make changes. Some possible inner strengths the client presented in this short dialogue include her awareness of her need for change (she sought counseling), her care for her patients and/or coworkers (she was afraid of making mistakes to hurt them), her desire to be better (she wanted to control her symptoms), her willingness to take responsibility for her actions (she felt terrible after yelling at her mother), and so forth. The counselor also needs to listen for possible external stressors (her experienced cultural climate at work, her experienced prejudice due to being a single mother, possible economic hardship she might have, etc.) and identify her strengths in coping with such stressors. It is probably safe to say that it is her strength that has helped her succeed up to this point (in the face of social inequality), and it will be her strength again that helps her succeed in overcoming her current difficulties. Counselors need to be aware that conventional interventions aimed at fixing her symptoms may convey an implicit message that her deficits are the problem, ignoring the aversive impact of social inequality.

Preventive Focus of Counseling

Although prevention has always been viewed as one of the major tasks of mental health counselors, counselor training programs have not adequately attended to the role of prevention in preparing counselors to work with diverse clientele, nor have our

counseling research agendas given prevention the attention it deserves. Although one-on-one counseling is one way of providing services to disenfranchised clients, it is limiting in that it does not promote social change. Similarly, our current training models are based primarily on a medical model, which can be problematic and potentially harmful for oppressed clients because a medical model of treatment conveys victim blaming and, like one-on-one counseling, it fails to account for the real cause of/solutions to the psychological problems that many clients experience. An accurate and complete understanding of the experiences of oppressed clients can only be achieved through validating their experiences in the larger social context in which they live. Moreover, our ability to promote positive systemic change will require that we embrace a social justice counseling perspective which emphasizes prevention and encourages the expansion of our professional activities beyond the counseling setting.

By definition, *prevention* means (a) stopping a problem behavior from ever occurring; (b) delaying the onset of a problem behavior; (c) reducing the impact of a problem behavior; (d) strengthening knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that promote emotional and physical well-being; and (e) promoting institutional, community, and government policies that further physical, social, and emotional well-being (Romano & Hage, 2000). A number of current social realities, such as attitudes and beliefs (e.g., stigma about receiving mental health service), access (e.g., low remedial mental health service use and options for minorities and the poor), the increased problem of poverty (e.g., growing numbers of children, youth, and families in poverty), and increased risk factors such as violence, substance abuse, bullying, assault, and so on, make it clear that preventive service is necessary, critical, and significant.

From the perspective that aversive and unjust social, political, and cultural conditions play a role in individuals' mental health, it should be viewed as a professional mandate that we focus on preventive work. Symptom-driven interventions often connote victim-blaming messages, and preventive actions may provide the oppressed corrective experiences within the social and cultural environment. Prevention may include advocating for policies that are protective of the rights of those who have low social power, promoting public education to reduce prejudice and discrimination toward the culturally disenfranchised, and alleviating stigma associated with psychological reactions to negative social treatment, as well as reinforcing protective factors for and enhancing positive functioning of the individuals. One example of preventive care would be offering emotional and tangible safety support to those who may be negatively impacted by a hate crime against members of their minority group that is being broadcast in the news. Another example would be providing psychoeducational services to educate the public about how the experience of racism, heterosexism, or any other ism may cause psychological distress, symptoms, and reactions.

Empowerment: Validation and Education

Although empowerment may implicitly underlie many counseling interventions, social justice-oriented counseling focuses on it as a central component of counseling. In the literature of various helping professions, empowerment has been viewed both as a process and as an outcome of helping. For social work, Pinderhughes (1983) defined

it as “the capacity to influence the forces which affect one’s life space for one’s own benefit” (p. 332) and as “the ability and capacity to cope constructively with the forces that undermine and hinder coping, the achievement of some reasonable control over [one’s] destiny” (p. 334). By definition, *empowerment* involves a sense of gaining power for those who have felt powerless or who have had low power, or it involves a change of power balance. In her work with African American communities, Solomon (1976) described empowerment as making sure those “who belong to a stigmatized social category throughout their lives can be assisted to develop and increase skills in the exercise of interpersonal influence and the performance of valued social roles” (p. 6). When counseling the socially and culturally disenfranchised populations, counselors need to recognize the way in which power operates in society and “how individuals and communities are affected by the way power is used” (McWhirter, 1991, p. 70).

Counselors who recognize the role of social justice in the healing of the oppressed will validate client experiences and/or symptoms in the context of the unjust social reality in which the “powerless” minority groups live. Most clients do not come to counseling to discuss their suffering from racism or other isms; rather, they may come to ask for help with their symptoms, which may be viewed and evaluated as intrapersonal issues by conventional counseling approaches. It is counselors’ responsibility to do them justice by conceptualizing their symptoms in context and offering interventions accordingly.

One intervention may be educating clients about the role of person-environment interaction in individuals’ psychological experiences. In discussing counseling practice with clients of color, Courtland Lee (1991) articulated the following:

People from ethnic groups of color, by and large, have experienced considerable frustration in their person-environment transactions with American society. The historic challenges inherent in the restricted and often extreme conditions confronting these groups in this country have undermined self-esteem, disrupted social relationships, caused frustration, and contributed to high levels of stress. Such challenges have often led to the development of maladaptive behavior patterns. The psychological effects of such maladaptive behavior have often been devastating, many times leading to a sense of intra- and interpersonal powerlessness. (p. 69)

This recognition mandates that counseling interventions focus on helping clients in “developing their ability to use resources to effectively combat the debilitating effects of negative environmental forces . . . [and] functional environmental mastery behaviors that lead to personal adjustment and optimal mental health” (Lee, 1991, p. 69). Helping clients understand contributing external factors to their experiences, engaging in positive activities to buffer the effect, and learning to use resources is important. Focusing on correcting their symptoms can only reinforce the sense of being the problem and being powerless. Again, conceptualizing client experience in social context is an antecedent of culturally effective interventions.

Empowerment: Outreach and Community Services

With the recognition that an unjust or hostile social environment contributes to the poor psychological health of those who are oppressed in society, counseling services

need to extend beyond the counseling room and reach communities in an effort to change negative aspects of the environment. Professional counseling service needs to help break down institutional and social barriers and challenge long-standing traditions and notions that obstruct health and development for the culturally diverse (McWhirter, 1991). Counselors of the 21st century need to be advocates for positive social and community changes and “form proactive coalition with clients” (Lee, 1991, p. 69). Such efforts will result in the culturally diverse empowering themselves to “eradicate aspects of negative environmental press that impede upon development” (p. 69).

Outreach and community services can take different forms. Education, community organization, and consultation and collaboration are a few examples. A form of diversity education is providing communities (e.g., schools, churches, neighborhoods) with accurate information about how various isms have contributed to the psychological experience and behavior of the culturally diverse and how those who hold majority membership can help reduce inequality for the disenfranchised. For instance, many young African American males exhibited fear, anger, and even destructive behavior via community protests regarding the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014. Diversity education in communities such as Ferguson may help reduce negative reactions, increase empathy, and prevent marginalized youth from being further victimized. In addition, community organization may help to convey support and respect and encourage them to heal and grow.

Consultation is another cornerstone activity for professional counselors; it is most effective when paired with collaboration. Consultation and collaboration may help mobilize other professionals to assist with efforts in helping the culturally diverse. Such helping activity at a macro level may address both individual and contextual issues related to the targeted clients. For example, to help a child in poverty succeed in school, the consultation process would allow the consultant to focus on the child, the parents, the classroom, the school, the neighborhood, and the education system with full consideration of the environmental influences. Such services may avoid the pitfalls of a medical model of helping and emphasize a social justice perspective of the helping process.

Social Advocacy Practice

As we increase our understanding of the negative impact of social oppression on the socially marginalized, it is becoming more and more obvious that social advocacy is a necessary component of professional helping. We promote positive changes through counseling, but that is not enough. By focusing on interventions toward changing the individual exclusively, we are not only failing to eliminate the causes or contributing factors for the suffering of our culturally diverse clients but also joining “the forces that perpetuate social injustice” (Albee, 2000, p. 248). For instance, if we conceptualize Alicia’s depression and anxiety as completely resultant of her personal issues (e.g., inability to stand up for herself with her supervisors, difficulty in adjusting to a new environment, relationship issues with her parents), we are reinforcing the idea that her difficulties are her own fault and leaving the negative impact of gender identity discrimination out of our consciousness. This practice will contribute to maintaining

the status quo of social injustice. To help Alicia and many individuals like her, eliminating the biggest stressor, gender identity discrimination, is probably one of the most important elements of the helping/healing process. Therefore, counselors in the 21st century need to engage in social advocacy as part of their professional responsibility.

To inspire mental health counselors to engage in social justice practice, Charles Sheperis, a leader, educator, professional counselor, and social advocacy activist, offered the following encouraging and motivational remarks (quoted in Shallcross, 2010, pp. 29–30):

The biggest misconception is that the effort of working toward social justice has to be a Herculean effort. The reason many individual counselors enter the profession is because they love being in the service of others. Simply looking for opportunities to address inequalities even on a smaller scale is a great act in the name of social justice.

Taking a few small steps toward living the philosophy of social change can go a long way. By recognizing an injustice and taking a step to address it, counselors begin to live the philosophy.

We shouldn't be on the bandwagon; we should lead the charge. . . . We (counselors) have a dedication to social justice interwoven throughout all aspects of our work. Social justice is inherent in our ethical code, our standards for accreditation, and throughout our work. Social justice is an overarching theme for what counselors do.

Pay attention to the world around you and see where there is an opportunity to take an action. . . . If counselors pay attention to the world clients live in, they will see small places where they can take action.

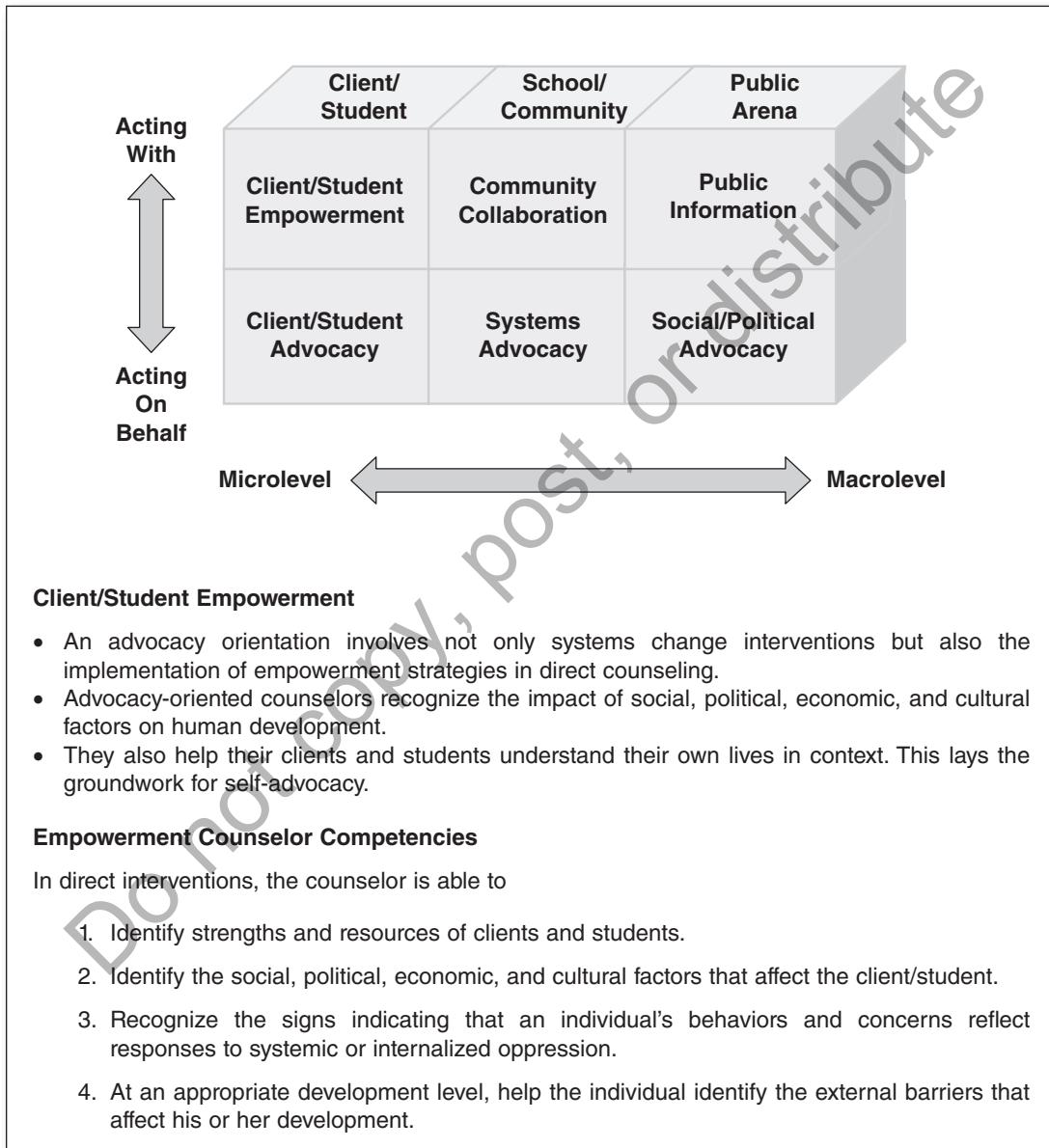
Training for Social Justice Competencies

More and more, our counseling profession, scholars, and practitioners embrace a philosophy of social justice. However, implementing a social justice training agenda can be challenging for training programs, most of which still train counselors in a traditional way and focus on one-on-one counseling using classical theories. Ali, Liu, Mahmood, and Arguello (2008) discussed the pedagogy of social justice training, promoting “(a) holistic learning based in conscientization and consciousness raising; (b) a reliance on egalitarian methods such as participatory learning, dialogue, and self-reflection; and (c) an effort to equalize power inequities in the teacher-student relationship and classroom dynamics” (p. 3).

Being aware of the larger academic infrastructure of training, we have proposed two practical ways of including social justice into curriculum—namely, *service learning* and *creating unique practicum experiences*. Service learning, a deliberate, adaptable, and interdisciplinary practice based on civic education, would help counseling trainees connect academic coursework to community needs and concerns. Unique practicum experiences, such as those in a homeless shelter, would provide trainees opportunities to work with underserved populations and learn to be involved in public policy initiatives and other justice-promoting activities.

In 2003, the American Counseling Association (ACA) took leadership and endorsed an advocacy competencies model (see Figure 14.1).

Figure 14.1 Advocacy Competencies



(Continued)

Figure 14.1 (Continued)

5. Train students and clients in self-advocacy skills.
6. Help students and clients develop self-advocacy action plans.
7. Assist students and clients in carrying out action plans.

Client/Student Advocacy

- When counselors become aware of external factors that act as barriers to an individual's development, they may choose to respond through advocacy.
- The client/student advocate role is especially significant when individuals or vulnerable groups lack access to needed services.

Client/Student Advocacy Counselor Competencies

In environmental interventions on behalf of clients and students, the counselor is able to

8. Negotiate relevant services and education systems on behalf of clients and students.
9. Help clients and students gain access to needed resources.
10. Identify barriers to the well-being of individuals and vulnerable groups.
11. Develop an initial plan of action for confronting these barriers.
12. Identify potential allies for confronting the barriers.
13. Carry out the plan of action.

Community Collaboration

- Their ongoing work with people gives counselors a unique awareness of recurring themes. Counselors are often among the first to become aware of specific difficulties in the environment.
- Advocacy-oriented counselors often choose to respond to such challenges by alerting existing organizations that are already working for change and that might have an interest in the issue at hand.
- In these situations, the counselor's primary role is as an ally. Counselors can also be helpful to organizations by making available to them our particular skills: interpersonal relations, communications, training, and research.

Community Collaboration Counselor Competencies

Regarding community collaboration, counselors will be able to

14. Identify environmental factors that impinge upon students' and clients' development.
15. Alert community or school groups with common concerns related to the issue.

16. Develop alliances with groups working for change.
17. Use effective listening skills to gain understanding of the group's goals.
18. Identify the strengths and resources that the group members bring to the process of systemic change.
19. Communicate recognition of and respect for these strengths and resources.
20. Identify and offer the skills that the counselor can bring to the collaboration.
21. Assess the effect of interaction with the community.

Systems Advocacy

- When counselors identify systemic factors that act as barriers to their students' or clients' development, they often wish that they could change the environment and prevent some of the problems that they see every day.
- Regardless of the specific target of change, the processes for altering the status quo have common qualities. Change is a process that requires vision, persistence, leadership, collaboration, systems analysis, and strong data. In many situations, a counselor is the right person to take leadership.

Systems Advocacy Counselor Competencies

In exerting systems-change leadership at the school or community level, the advocacy-oriented counselor is able to

22. Identify environmental factors impinging on students' or clients' development.
23. Provide and interpret data to show the urgency for change.
24. In collaboration with other stakeholders, develop a vision to guide change.
25. Analyze the sources of political power and social influence within the system.
26. Develop a step-by-step plan for implementing the change process.
27. Develop a plan for dealing with probable responses to change.
28. Recognize and deal with resistance.
29. Assess the effect of advocacy efforts on the system and constituents.

Public Information

- Across settings, specialties, and theoretical perspectives, professional counselors share knowledge of human development and expertise in communication.
- These qualities make it possible for advocacy-oriented counselors to awaken the general public to macro-systemic issues regarding human dignity.

(Continued)

Figure 14.1 (Continued)

Public Information Counselor Competencies

In informing the public about the role of environmental factors in human development, the advocacy-oriented counselor is able to

30. Recognize the impact of oppression and other barriers to healthy development.
31. Identify environmental factors that are protective of healthy development.
32. Prepare written and multimedia materials that provide clear explanations of the role of specific environmental factors in human development.
33. Communicate information in ways that are ethical and appropriate for the target population.
34. Disseminate information through a variety of media.
35. Identify and collaborate with other professionals who are involved in disseminating public information.
36. Assess the influence of public information efforts undertaken by the counselor.

Social/Political Advocacy

- Counselors regularly act as change agents in the systems that affect their own students and clients most directly. This experience often leads toward the recognition that some of the concerns they have addressed affected people in a much larger arena.
- When this happens, counselors use their skills to carry out social/political advocacy.

Social/Political Advocacy Counselor Competencies

In influencing public policy in a large, public arena, the advocacy-oriented counselor is able to

37. Distinguish those problems that can best be resolved through social/political action.
38. Identify the appropriate mechanisms and avenues for addressing these problems.
39. Seek out and join with potential allies.
40. Support existing alliances for change.
41. With allies, prepare convincing data and rationales for change.
42. With allies, lobby legislators and other policy makers.
43. Maintain open dialogue with communities and clients to ensure that the social/political advocacy is consistent with the initial goals.

Source: ACA Advocacy Competencies Model. (Web) The American Counseling Association. Reprinted with permission. No further reproduction authorized without written permission from the American Counseling Association.

While social advocacy has gradually become more and more expected in the work and competence of counselors, the need for professional advocacy is also recognized. The recognition and representation of our profession in the public eye requires professional advocacy. Based on the available literature, Hof, Dinsmore, Barber, Suhr, and Scofield (2009) summarized a set of professional advocacy competencies, including (a) promoting professional identity, (b) increasing the public image of counseling, (c) developing interprofessional and intraprofessional collaboration, and (d) promoting legislative policy initiatives.

Hof et al. (2009) proposed the T.R.A.I.N.E.R. model that “engages counselors in social advocacy and professional advocacy concurrently, facilitates counselor connection and collaboration with diverse communities, and raises the awareness of the counseling profession in the general marketplace” (p. 15). Counselors’ social advocacy and professional advocacy are viewed as complementary and necessary. The T.R.A.I.N.E.R. model refers to the following processes (p. 18):

- *Target* advocacy needs of underrepresented client groups and their associated professional advocacy requirements
- *Respond* to the targeted needs by determining which social and/or professional advocacy competencies should be implemented to address those needs
- *Articulate* a plan to accomplish both social and professional advocacy
- *Implement* the plan
- *Network* for advocacy during the training
- *Evaluate* the training
- *Retarget* to address unmet social and/or professional advocacy needs

SMALL-GROUP CLASS ACTIVITY 14.2

In small groups of three or four students, brainstorm how to best conceptualize Alicia’s presenting concerns and how to best assist her by addressing the following questions:

1. How would you conceptualize and assess Alicia’s clinical symptoms (e.g., depression, anxiety)?
2. What potential hypotheses would you start with in understanding her symptoms?
3. How would you position yourself in establishing the therapeutic relationship with Alicia?
4. What types of “changes” in her would you pursue through counseling and why?
5. How could you help Alicia feel empowered?

Taking Social Responsibility: Community Advocacy for Social Justice

Albert Einstein once wrote, “The world is too dangerous to live in—not because of the people who do evil, but because of the people who sit and let it happen” (Sue, 2003, p. 14). To make the world a more fair and supportive place, every one of its residents has certain social responsibilities, especially mental health workers who are to assist people in reaching psychological wellness. We contend that multiculturally competent counselors will feel a sense of responsibility for eradicating the obvious wrongdoings and injustices that potentially victimize and compromise the mental and physical well-being of those who are disenfranchised. Ideologically, social inequality is generally condemned and social justice is desired in society today, but actions to eliminate the inequality are yet to be strengthened. It will take everyone’s willingness and efforts to engage in social advocacy. Bottom-up advocacy efforts are necessary to lead to top-down law and policy changes, which are necessary for social justice. In fact, laws and policies that reduce inequality would promote psychological strength and well-being for all people.

In discussing the rewards and challenges of social advocacy for counselors, Zalaquett, Foley, Tillotson, Dinsmore, and Hof (2008) reminded our profession that we are overdue for concerted efforts in “fostering the types of multicultural/social justice initiatives that are necessary to forge major changes” (p. 327). They also pointed out that ultimately members of the dominant group in any of the diversity areas (e.g., White people in the area of race, cisgender straight persons in the area of gender and sexual identity) are the ones who have the power to change unfair and unjust systems. Therefore, culturally competent counselors are encouraged to pursue understanding of the part they play in contributing to their clients’ cultural context. Moreover, they must take an active role in providing the cultural sensitivity, understanding, and advocacy actions both within and outside of counseling sessions that will help their diverse clients heal.

Using the context of supporting and working with lesbian/gay/bisexual (LGB) youth, Gustavsson and MacEachron (1998) outlined specific actions that counselors (or other helping professionals) may take to contribute to the course of social justice and the help that LGB youth deserve—namely, the following:

1. Make contact with service organizations that provide LGB-specific services.
2. Formalize the connections between your agency and these services to improve mutual referrals and to strengthen the credibility, support, and resources available to the organizations, if none exist.
3. Develop a program in your agency.
4. Start with a support group.
5. Have LGB-affirmative books, magazines, posters, community announcements, and other symbols of support in offices and waiting areas.

6. Advertise the service, specifically mentioning lesbian and gay youth.
7. Act as a liaison between the LGB community as a whole and your organization.
8. Be knowledgeable about HIV and AIDS and prepared to counter myths about LBG people.
9. Document by age, gender, and sexual orientation any services you provided and services that are needed but unfulfilled.
10. Bring the met and unmet needs to the attention of your agency's administrators.
11. Provide public education via speaking engagements that address lesbian and gay issues.
12. Help develop peer counseling and support telephone lines.
13. Help sensitize staff at youth shelters, foster care and adoption services, and residential and other programs to the needs of lesbian and gay youth and the special risks they face. (pp. 41–50)

Good, Ethical Practice in a Multicultural World

Becoming competent in social justice counseling and advocacy is a necessary dimension of the ethical practice of counseling. Good, ethical practice requires that counselors work effectively with cultural diversity in the therapeutic process by providing professional services that demonstrate respect for varied cultural worldviews (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2011) and no longer minimizing or ignoring the negative impact of social injustice inflicted upon diverse clients. Vera and Speight (2003) differentiated mandatory and aspirational ethics by pointing out that *mandatory ethics* involve the minimum of following the “rule” by attending to, being aware of, and developing sensitivity to issues of power, bias, discrimination, and oppression in counseling. To effectively serve oppressed populations, counselors need to strive toward fulfilling *aspirational ethics* by conducting social justice counseling and advocating for social justice inside and outside counseling rooms. That is, counselors should take actions toward “attaining the highest possible standard . . . advocate for the elimination of systems of oppression, inequality, or exploitation” (pp. 257–258).

Students often ask if they should refer clients who have cultural backgrounds they are unfamiliar with in order to not be accused of practicing unethically. Although referral is sometimes an appropriate course of action, it should not be considered the solution to counselors whose cultural backgrounds are less diverse than the clients they serve. Counselors should not be selecting clients based on their own views or values but should become multiculturally competent themselves, which demands a shift in thinking and attitudes. Certainly, we cannot know everything about every cultural group, and we do not believe that all counselors can work effectively with all clients, but we do expect that counseling professionals refrain from using their own value system as the basis and criteria for how clients should think and behave. Also, because clients belong to multiple cultures and because the salience of membership in any one

cultural group changes by situation, counselors must operate from a multicultural identity and a multicultural consciousness. Too much focus on cultural group membership may result in stereotypical thinking (i.e., being too color conscious or attributing all problems to a client's cultural background); however, too narrow of a focus on the individual runs the risk of overlooking the impact of the cultural environment on the client's presenting issues (Haynes, Corey, & Moulton, 2003). We like the suggestion provided by Corey et al. (2011) as to how students can glean the most from their training and prepare to practice in a culturally ethical manner:

You will not become more effective in multicultural counseling by expecting that you must be completely knowledgeable about the cultural backgrounds of all your clients, by thinking that you should have a complete repertoire of skills, or by demanding perfection. Rather than feeling that you must understand all the subtle nuances of cultural differences when you are with a client, we suggest that you develop a sense of interest, curiosity, and respect when faced with client differences and behaviors that are new to you. Recognize and appreciate your efforts toward becoming a more effective person and counselor, and remember that becoming a multiculturally competent counselor is an ongoing process. In this process there are no small steps; every step you take is creating a new direction for you in your work with diverse client populations. (p. 152)

CASE ILLUSTRATION 14.2

The Case of Juan

Juan is a 31-year-old Puerto Rican man who was recently released from prison following a 2-year sentence due to possession of an illicit drug (heroin). As a requirement of his parole, he must complete court-mandated counseling and find employment, which he has successfully done at a construction company. Juan moved from Puerto Rico to the United States at the age of 10 with his mother and siblings; his father remained in Puerto Rico. He is the father of three young children and is bilingual in English and Spanish. He identified as Catholic, has several tattoos, and wore a large metal cross around his neck during the counseling sessions. Juan admits to being a recovering heroin addict who has not used since being sentenced to prison.

Juan was seen for weekly counseling by Lorraine for approximately two months. During their sessions, Juan expressed his objections to the mandate and claimed he did not understand why he had to see a counselor. Moreover, Juan commented on the physical differences between Lorraine and himself, spoke a number of phrases in Spanish, and also mentioned several times that Lorraine must have grown up very sheltered, which she believed was Juan's way of pointing to reasons why a Caucasian 24-year-old female could never understand his experiences as a poor and uneducated male Puerto Rican. Juan was initially unaware that Lorraine spoke Spanish and thus was able to understand what he was saying. She remembered initially feeling very uncomfortable with their vast cultural differences. Not only was Juan opposed to seeking counseling, but it seemed to Lorraine that he had come to the conclusion that she would never be able to understand him.

Following their second session, she reflected on the dynamics of their therapeutic relationship and discussed with Juan their differences in culture and social contexts. She also disclosed that she understood Spanish. During subsequent sessions, Juan stopped complaining about having to come to counseling and discussed what he called the most important things in his life: family and faith. He loved spending time with his children and frequently talked about changing his ways for their benefit. Such discussion gave Lorraine the opportunity to validate the fact that part of him had to make wrong decisions (dealing heroin) to support his family and that he had to endure a lot of hardship to “succeed.” They also discussed his past drug addiction and successes with remaining drug free; he accepted that he had made errors in his past, which he wanted to overcome.

Juan’s strong faith and how he used it to overcome his past problems became a focus of counseling (instead of his sentence and probation). Lorraine believed focusing on Juan’s cultural background and accompanying values strengthened their rapport as counseling progressed. Lorraine soon began to feel more comfortable in sessions with Juan, and he appeared more trusting of the therapeutic relationship and willing to share about his life experiences. Lorraine reflected on her counseling experience with Juan:

Juan was my first experience during my training that involved vast cultural differences. When working with him, I always tried to do so through a cultural lens. I made sure to reflect on our cultural differences, acknowledge how our differences positioned us for privileges and disadvantages unfairly, and show Juan how interested I was in learning about his background and life experiences. In addition, appropriate self-disclosure (i.e., disclosing my familiarity with the Spanish language as well as my own sense of faith) turned out to be very helpful when working with Juan. We completed several successful sessions before having to terminate when I completed my academic program.

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1. What skills did Lorraine employ that would demonstrate being a culturally competent counselor? What else could she have done to provide culturally responsive care, particularly if she were afforded additional counseling sessions?
2. What do you think about Lorraine’s approach to counseling Juan?
3. Should Lorraine have referred Juan to a counselor trainee with a more similar cultural background? Why or why not?
4. Was it ethically appropriate for Lorraine to self-disclose about her faith and ability to speak Spanish? Why or why not?
5. How would you assess Lorraine’s repertoire of multiculturally appropriate skills?

It is desirable that counseling practitioners develop a repertoire of culturally appropriate skills and intervention strategies, as serving in roles other than the traditional

counselor (e.g., advocate, consultant, social change agent, liaison) also becomes necessary. Culturally responsive skills must be based on three basic premises: (a) diversity is real and should not be dismissed; (b) differences are simply differences and not deficiencies or pathology indicators; and (c) stereotypical and monolithic thinking must be avoided (Lee, 2001). In the case example of Juan, his counselor Lorraine acknowledged the role of diversity in her therapeutic relationship with him. In doing so, she embraced Juan's cultural beliefs, values, behaviors, and communication styles and appeared interested and open to continuing to learn. She did not avoid the issue of cultural differences or social contexts by claiming to be color-blind, thereby assuming that Juan was just like all of her other clients. Finally, she refrained from stereotypical thinking and instead seemed to look for a balance between Juan's cultural group membership and his individual uniqueness. She listened and understood that his religious faith was an important source of strength for him, and it does not appear that she pathologized his past and current behaviors.

When we look at Juan's situation, it becomes clear that not pathologizing but respecting client experience and focusing on cultural strength is important. A social justice orientation and an understanding of external/environmental factors underlying individual experiences help counselors to validate client experiences, and feeling validated may help clients feel freer to recognize their mistakes and their ability to overcome the mistakes. Multiculturally competent counselors will aim at eliminating the negative impact of social injustice on their diverse clients via ethical practice both in and out of the counseling setting, which is an important standard for doing no harm.

Summary

This chapter discusses the important role of social justice in our delivery of effective psychological services to the oppressed in our society, including the personal, professional, and social responsibilities that counselors in the 21st century will need to demonstrate in order to combat social inequality. Becoming a personal ally for social justice, using strength-based counseling with clients, engaging in outreach services, and taking action to advocate for positive social change are paths through which counselors may help culturally diverse clients. Based on the understanding that social context is an important determinant of individual behaviors, our counseling professional organizations have become more oriented toward social justice counseling than in years past. Inside and outside counseling rooms, counselors can serve as social advocates and must assume a vibrant role in the promotion of social justice for oppressed members of society.

Takeaway Messages

1. Development of a multicultural identity involves recognizing the influence of social oppression, injustice, and privileges and understanding individual behaviors and experiences in social context.
2. Becoming an ally for social justice is a personal journey that is consistent with the development of multiculturally competent counselors.

3. Social justice-oriented counselors challenge the medical model of conventional counseling practice, including diagnosis and treatment that perpetuates social injustice.
4. Strength-based counseling and social advocacy practice are effective ways to help clients from oppressed groups and to support positive social change for all people.
5. Without a social justice orientation, helping professionals may unintentionally do harm to those clients who have suffered from social injustice.

Recommended Resources

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