

Discussion Thread: Professional Advocacy

Too often in the training and practice in the counseling profession, "non-clinical" constructs such as advocacy can appear as an afterthought, an optional aspect of counseling. This may, in some measure reflect the limited view of advocacy. For example, there too often is little discussion about advocacy to the profession. If there were not counselors advocating for the profession, in spite of the fact that our training and licensure meets or exceeds those of other health care professionals, we would continue to be excluded from certain arenas of practice. Change only came about (and continues to do so) because there were counselors who were willing to educate policy-makers about the importance of including the unique and valuable services we bring to the table and advocated for inclusion. As counselor educators, it is our job to ensure that advocacy becomes as integral to the development of our students' professional identity as is ethics and multicultural competencies.

In this discussion, you are going to examine advocacy as an essential component of counselor identity. In Chapter 5, the authors propose that professional advocacy is a responsibility of all counselors. Furthermore, in Chapter 6 the author asserts that “professional advocacy and professional identity are interrelated and mutually enhancing constructs” (p 106).

You do not need to specifically answer each of the below questions. Rather, you will present a synthesis or end result of your processing of the questions as all of these are interrelated when discussing the topic. Consider the following:

- How do you see (or do not see) the two constructs interacting with one another?
- How important is knowing your professional identity in order to advocate for the profession?
- What are possible consequences of ignoring advocacy with respect to counselors and those who they serve?

I live in Alabama, and I took my first counseling class under, what I understood to be, an Alabama licensed counselor back in 1995. Licensure may have been an ongoing issue, and I am oblivious to it, but I do not think it has been the struggle here in Alabama that the authors indicate it has been in other places. However, it does seem to be a reasonable expectation that counselors as part of the profession of counseling should rally around areas where there are concerns to help advocate for counselors collectively and for our clients. Having an identity as an

individual first is a paramount need of all people. If you or I do not know who we are we can be led in places, we do not intend to go. I am reminded of Ephesians 4:14 (NET) “So we are no longer to be children, tossed back and forth by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching by the trickery of people who craftily carry out their deceitful schemes.” Knowing who I am will first allow me to be grounded and intentional. I then need to know about the groups I align with and ask are their standards in alignment with my foundational attributes. If so, great. If not, RUN! If not completely, I then need to assess are they in alignment enough that we can coexist and honor the foundational attributes of me the individual and the group as a whole?

After these are satisfied, then yes, I as an individual who is a part of the larger group (counselors) need to advocate to help the profession to have a balanced approach to existing in the world today. This may mean having discussions from within about ethical standards and laws or may be needing to fight for rights where other professional groups may be attempting to eliminate the competition. To simply ignore the issues that are affecting the counseling profession (even if not in my immediate area) would potentially lead to our not being able to be recognized as a profession and lead to consumers having fewer options of people to help them with life struggles that talk therapy has been proven to help improve.

Thanks Jeremy Gillentine

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1st Response

Hope Charles—Posted January 21, 2025, 11:10 pm

The more that I read about the professional identity of the counselor, the more I understand why professional advocacy is interwoven in the fabric of the profession. Our survival hinges on it. When I read of the licensure rulings in Michigan in 2019 (Chang & Barrio Minton, 2022), it becomes very apparent that other helping professions have and may continue to challenge our professional identity, validity, and merit. The fact that counselors were forced to defend their right to diagnose and practice speaks to the lack of empathy among other helping professions, and the lack of understanding of our expertise among legislators. If we do not train up the next generation of the importance of professional advocacy, while modeling the change needed, all of the hard work done on behalf of the profession could be in vain. We cannot advocate for our clients, if we are not around to first advocate for ourselves. It is not just about having a membership in a professional organization. What difference are we making within that organization? That's the real question.

Hope,

Thanks for the post. I agree and it has become more apparent to me as well that we need to be diligent regarding the state of our profession and the ways it may come under attack. I do think we should have the right to diagnose, but wonder if insurance reimbursement were not a consideration or were not trying to justify our billing, how many clients really need a diagnosis? This is to say that we need to advocate for the right to diagnose while also being sure we as a group are not over diagnosing. This is more of a client advocacy thought but an important need as well! That is a great question you raise as to what difference are we making rather than simply being a paid member of an organization.

Jeremy Gillentine

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2nd Response

Bryana Caviness—Posted January 22, 2025, 11:25 am

Professional advocacy and professional identity enhance each other. Advocacy demonstrates a counselor's dedication to the core values of their profession, while a strong professional identity serves as the basis for effective advocacy efforts. Counselors who comprehend their societal role are more inclined to promote policies and practices that benefit communities.

A well-defined professional identity is crucial for advocacy, as it clarifies core values and directs counselors in tackling systemic challenges. In its absence, counselors may feel disconnected from the profession's objectives, struggle to articulate its significance, and find it difficult to confront detrimental policies. I have found this personally true while being embedded in the educational world.

Overlooking advocacy can result in reduced acknowledgment and support for the counseling profession, increased burnout among counselors, and restricted access to essential services. Most critically, it can negatively impact students or clients by hindering counselors from addressing larger structural issues that affect social and emotional development and mental health.

In conclusion, professional identity and advocacy are mutually dependent. Neglecting one can lead to significant repercussions for counselors, the profession, and the individuals they aim to support.

Bryana

Thanks for the post. I agree with the concept of aligning with the core values of our profession and having a strong professional identity but worry that some may get caught up in the group's identity and lose their individual voice. There must be a balance of these two worlds. The authors used the cartoon character's remark, "we have met the enemy, and they are us!" (pg. 89). I know the comments were in jest, but we need to be people who fight hard for our desired outcomes and not see those we disagree with, our colleagues, as the enemy unless we intend to treat them as such. Advocating is often a balancing of various ideas and opinions whether discussing internal or external issues to the counseling profession. We absolutely need to come together as a profession that is bringing evidence-based help to people who are desiring talk therapy to help them experience a better life.

Chang, Catherine Y.; Barrio Minton, Casey A.. Professional Counseling Excellence through Leadership and Advocacy (p. 89). (Function). Kindle Edition.