

Discussion Board 1: Professional Identity

In Chapter 1, one of the activities asked you to imagine entering an occupation that had no accepted standards for preparation (accreditation), no state or national credentials (licensure), no ethical standards for practice (ACA / Division Codes of Ethics), no foundation for serving a pluralistic and culturally rich and diverse population, and as a consequence, no defined areas of competence or scope of practice. In reality, these areas describe the identity of a profession. Yet at the same time, these areas are shaped by this identity. If you look at the history of the counseling profession, perhaps the reason that counseling does not have the same stature in the mental health field as some of the other helping professions (e.g., Licensed Clinical Social Worker) is because what we were asked to imagine in the activity was, in some measure, the state of our profession in the not-so-ancient past. We lacked a cohesive counselor identity which impeded the development of these areas, which then impedes the changes needed to further develop a cohesive counselor identity. See the cycle?

One arena where we recently experienced this ongoing battle was during the CACREP-only discussions as a future requirement for licensure by some states. If you look at the arguments, it appears that much of this centers on the fact that we still struggle with developing a cohesive “counselor identity” in regards to these very areas. Because there has been a vaguely defined counselor identity, the licensed professionals and educators hold a wide range of academic experiences and professional identities. Thus, attempts to bring the same uniformity seen in LCSW etc. brings a firestorm of controversy as these identities have different perspectives and can feel threatened. This then hinders the development of a cohesive counselor identity in training requirements (i.e., accreditation) that we need to advance the field of counseling. Thus, in spite of the fact that our training is more extensive, we continue to lack parity in various professional settings with LCSW and others who do have common accreditation. As leaders in the field, you are the ones who are going to address how to break this cycle and move the profession of counseling forward in a cohesive manner.

In this discussion, you are going to discuss the impact of having or not having a cohesive counselor identity in the areas of accepted standards for preparation (accreditation), no state or national credentials (inconsistent licensure requirements), and ethical standards for practice as defined by a counseling-specific (ACA) professional affiliations. As you discuss this, think about the issues created by not having clearly defined counselor identity, and how we as leaders can break the cycle?

Please reflect on the following:

- What is our counselor identity?
- Does counselor identity even matter? If so, why? If not, why?
- How is counselor identity reflected in our training (accreditation) and licensure requirements, and/or code of ethics?
- Do we really need a principle professional organization (ACA)?
- Do we really need standardization of requirements in these arenas?

Please do not feel like you have to have a complete understanding in the initial post. Hopefully, your group members will spur you on to reflect and to then expand your views on these issues or see it from a different view point.

Counselor identity is the core of who we are within the counseling profession. It helps to distinguish counselors from other helping professions, such as school counselors, behavioral therapists, and social workers. This distinction provides a separation but a united front of helping professionals that work towards improving the overall health and quality of life of others. The identity of a counselor is founded on helping others achieve wellness through empowerment of their own resiliency factors. An ever-changing societal landscape requires the counseling profession to meet training standards that reflect the needs of specific populations while encouraging autonomy in professional identity development. This autonomy allows professional counselors to choose expertise that align with personal approaches and values while adhering to the standards of the profession.

There are aspects of helping professions that may include counseling techniques such as reflection, encouragement, linking to professional resources, and working to solve immediate problems such as found in humanistic and solution-focused techniques. However, there is a clear delineation between someone who is establishing rapport through reflection and encouragement and the concepts of unconditional positive regard and ability for growth found in person-centered theory. Creative problem solving in other professions may involve advice giving, whereas professional counselors should encourage the individual to create their own advice from past experiences or knowledge.

Organizations such as the ACA provide a sense of stability for the profession, to have a governing body working to establish ethical codes, competency trainings, and encouraging networking between professionals. As discussed in the text, an overarching organization can

provide a more united entity for enacting policy and change at the regional, state, or federal level. This also provides an entity which identifies and enforces standards for the profession, no matter the political changes that may occur. Stability benefits both the counselor and the client, as basic expectations such as the code of ethics are in place to reduce the risk of harm.

Accreditation entities such as CACREP provide clarity to other professions regarding the training received by counselors during an educational program, as well as the standard to which they were held during the program. Without standardization there could be no set expectation for behaviors and training in the profession, with an increased risk of harm to clients when professionals who are not trained to promote themselves as professional counselors.

References

Chang, C. & Minton, C. (2022). *Professional counseling excellence through leadership and advocacy* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Discussion Board 2: 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?

The intersection between counselor identity and advocacy provides a launching point for moving forward within our profession. Our identity speaks to the core of who we are as counselors, and our advocacy can arise from the passions founded in our identity. If our identity as a counselor includes faith-based counseling techniques, then it would be important to advocate for better understanding the differences between professional counseling and pastoral counseling. It is still important to consider identity and advocacy as two separate entities with unique connections to the profession. Our counseling identity distinguishes us from other helping professions such as social workers, school counselors, and behavioral therapists; however, our advocacy can help to link us to other professionals who are passionate in the same areas.

The importance of advocacy work can be seen in reference to the current interstate counseling compact. This provides additional access for individuals receiving services to choose a counselor based on approach, personality, and availability instead of having to find one in their area. This became particularly important during the early years of the COVID-19 pandemic when teletherapy became more of the norm. I think this is particularly true for the DC/Maryland/Virginia (DMV) region where there are individuals traveling across state lines for

work and other appointments. The counseling compact is distinct from the social work counseling compact, which further highlights the importance of maintaining distinctions between professional identities.

As I pursue further understanding of my identity as a counselor, I am encouraged by this class to reflect on how this can naturally link to advocacy within the profession. Understanding my identity as a professional counselor helps fuel my passion to pursue advocacy within the areas that link to my identity. But I do not think it should end at my own identity, I believe that is still important to remain an active advocate, when possible, to encourage understanding and acceptance of the counseling profession as a whole.

References

Chang, C. & Minton, C. (2022). *Professional counseling excellence through leadership and advocacy* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Discussion Board 3: Leadership in Counselor Education

As noted in Chapter 10 and 12 of your **Read** item, counselor educators are responsible to ensure that leadership and advocacy is promoted in Counselor Education programs. As a side note, one of the issues created by a non-cohesive professional identity (plus the lack of an undergraduate major) is a misunderstanding or confusion over the term: Counselor Education. Counselor Education is an academic discipline responsible for the professional training of counselors at the master's level in several program areas (CMHC, MAFC, School, Addiction, etc.) and doctoral level. It is not just specific to doctoral CES or master's CMHC. Therefore, while programs may have a variety of specializations, they all fall under Counselor Education. Therefore, leadership and advocacy must be integrated throughout all programs offered by your department

In this discussion, you will discuss creative ways that you as faculty can promote a culture of leadership among students. You will take the perspective that you faculty members in a program that is in the process of seeking CACREP accreditation. During a faculty meeting, the CACREP liaison noted that the program does not focus enough on the development of leadership and advocacy. Your group has been tasked with developing some creative ways that can be

implemented to help create a culture of leadership in the department. Your department has a master's (CMHC) and a doctoral (CES) program.

Please discuss the following:

- What are some potential creative ways to promote this?
- What are potential problems or barriers with these?
- What would be longer term and shorter term action items?

You do not have to present a comprehensive plan explaining every detail of the plan. Rather, you are bringing ideas to the table that you have considered in a thoughtful manner, providing enough detail so your group is aware of the basic aspects that would need to be considered in order to make an initial recommendation as to the viability of the idea. This is not evaluative as to whether you had a "good" initial idea. Rather, you are engaging in a process where you will benefit from the feedback and experiences from other.

Creating leadership opportunities within masters and doctoral programs could be as simple as providing mentorship opportunities between collegiate levels. For instance, master's students could be provided the opportunity to present in classes at the bachelor's level, or even help start a program for students who have an interest in entering the master's program post-graduation. A similar concept could exist for doctoral level students, particularly to provide supervision or run groups to practice for comprehensive or licensure exams. This could naturally link to advocacy work if there is a need for additional funding from the school or volunteer opportunities within the local chapter of a state board.

There are always challenges to address with any new project, and one obvious issue is that of staff support. If this was a volunteer opportunity, there should still be some monitoring of meetings and the accuracy of shared information. There must be guidelines developed for new programs, particularly to meet the standards that CACREP and other accrediting bodies. In addition there is the need for a funding source for necessarily supplies, which may not be immediately available without additional advocacy work for the program.

The first action item that comes to mind is an interest meeting; someone could be assigned each level and target courses that specialize in counseling or leadership. Recommendations could also be made by faculty members who identify students who they feel could be a good fit for the program. A long-term item action that would be important is a way to measure outcomes of this type of program in order to receive additional or future funding.

Discussion Board 4: Leadership in Supervision

Counseling uses a mentoring model in training, relying on the guidance of an experienced clinician to guide the development of new counselors. This is why we are not only required to receive supervision during the field experiences (practicum and internship) in our training program but also post graduate supervision for licensure. As noted in Chapter 11, one responsibility that we have in supervision is to train counselors to be effective leaders and advocates. Yet, given that leadership and advocacy has historically not been stressed in training programs, and given the wide range of professional identities held by those supervising counselors, it is easy to see how this is too often not a focus of supervision. This is where we can be the agents of change as we move forward. This is an area that could be a place for you to exercise leadership and advocacy. For this discussion:

- Reflect and discuss the role that supervisors have in training professional counselors.
- Does the present state OR your experiences of supervision actually develop leadership and advocacy skills?
- As a leader, how can you provide support and advocate for the integration of these skills in supervision?

Supervisors have an important responsibility to train and support counseling professionals at all levels based on their specific needs. This requires a lot of personal reflection and assessment of the counselor to tailor supervision and provide selective feedback and guidance on their performance. I think there has been less training in supervision that has focused on leadership and advocacy, and this has been my personal experience even during positive supervision dynamics. There have been times when I was working with leaders in the organization but little discussion of my own leadership opportunities. At the other extreme, one supervisor limited my

ability to engage in leadership and advocacy work within the agency because of their own desire to maintain full control.

I think supervision provides a natural place to foster leadership by identifying where the supervisee is already leading or has leadership qualities. Within the same clinical setting, supervisors can provide opportunities for strong supervisees to engage in leadership opportunities and foster personal strengths and confidence in this area. Even as a supervisor for someone off-site, I can make a point to acknowledge personal leadership skills and how this can be integrated into their current role. In addition, the importance of advocacy within our profession is critical and occurs at multiple levels. My current supervisee has participated in family meetings with DSS and has advocated for the needs of her clients and is open to identifying and helping meet the needs of the larger family system. Drawing attention to the areas of leadership and advocacy can be incorporated into supervision, and should regularly be done to foster the growth of the individual and the profession as a whole.

Discussion Board 5: Best Practices

As counselor educators, it is our responsibility (and a CACREP competency) to advance the knowledge base of the profession. Important aspects of this directly involves client care as well as the training of those who will be providing client care. As noted in Chapter 15 of your **Read** item, best practices for the counseling profession “involve the integration of research and practice with an ultimate goal of accountability to clients and the general public. Through intervention and programmatic research, professional counselors and counselor educators demonstrate an integration of advocacy and leadership as they identify effective and ineffective—or even harmful—interventions and dialogue with scholars to advance the knowledge base of the profession”.

To facilitate this, CACREP requires that those faculty designated as core faculty not only have the educational (doctoral degree in CES) and professional (licensure, certification) credentials needed to teach in a counselor educator program; they must demonstrate that they are scholars, leaders, and advocates to the profession. While educational and professional credentials are easy to document, often faculty at institutions that focus on teaching or clinical skills versus research skills can neglect the ongoing engagement in scholarship, leadership, and advocacy activities.

However, it is important to note that scholarship, leadership, and advocacy activities actively influence our ability to be effective educators and supervisors to our students. As such, if you are in a teaching institution, we need to find a middle ground between “publish or perish” and “teaching only” perspectives. Otherwise, we not only will grow stagnant professionally; we also will not be able to provide our students with the knowledge and skills needed in order for them to develop competencies that reflect the current best practices of the field.

Because these activities require proactive planning, it is easy to neglect this essential aspect of our roles as counselor educators. Therefore, it is important that you develop strategies to ensure that you are fulfilling this important responsibility to the profession. For this discussion, you should first reflect on the similarities and differences between best practices in counseling and best practices in research. Based on this exploration, identify three strategies for increasing your knowledge of research regarding best practices.

You will provide a synopsis of three well-thought-out strategies. Then interact with your group members to get and give feedback on these strategies. You do not need to specifically answer the reflection question. Rather, you will be drawing on it as you consider strategies that would reflect important aspects of best practices.

Best practices in counseling include remaining well-informed of societal changes and new techniques for the profession. The ACA code of ethics requires counselors to remain competent in the field and how to treat diverse needs and client populations. Similarly, best research practices include progressing the field through consistent analysis and application of theories, assessments, and techniques.

Regular completion of training and continuing education is essential to remaining informed of best practices in both research and counseling. As a counselor, individuals must remain up to date on changing policies and needs within the community and region, and complete training as appropriate in these areas.

Just as in counseling supervision, there is an important standard for promoting future research in budding scholars. Mentoring future researchers should be an expectation for counseling educators and standard practice when working with emerging counselors. The need

for more qualitative research in the counseling field is apparent, and this generation of counselors and researchers can continue the movement towards making this more of a reality.

A combination of these three practices can be achieved through regular review of literature and attendance at counseling conferences, as well as active engagement in community network for need identification. Promoting research in future generations of counseling professionals through advocacy and training on the importance of varying types of research. An option for this could also include mentoring students through research proposal and teaching them how to advocate for the future of the profession.