Our society is increasing complex, diverse, and international. According to CACREP Standards (2016), counselors are committed to social justice and multiculturalism. To do this, we must become lifelong learners focused on increasing our understanding of multiculturalism. In addition to taking required multicultural courses, it is important to continue learning about and serving our communities in an intentional way.

Many clients (especially Asian, Hispanic, and African American clients) avoid counseling due to social stigma and cultural norms that perceive counseling as negative (Vogel, Wester, & Larson, 2007). Refugee and undocumented immigrant populations in the United States are especially vulnerable to stress and trauma due to anti-immigrant attitudes, social isolation, and the often life-threatening experience of migration (Goodman, Vesely, Letiecq, & Cleveland, 2017). In order to best serve these populations, it is important that we increase our research and volunteering focus on the specific needs of international, underserved, and diverse clients while encouraging members of these populations to join the counseling profession themselves. With increased understanding and service of the diversity of human need, plus an inclusive environment for counselors from underrepresented identities, we will both increase access to counseling and remain respectful of the voices of the communities we serve.

Beyond learning about multiculturalism and prioritizing the voices of the populations we serve, we must effect change in social policy. As a field, we have considerable power to advocate for the rights of the individuals we serve—especially when we consider the influence that our privileges afford us. Advocating for our clients’ rights in the political field reinforces our commitment to the holistic needs of our clients and contributes to the overall benefit of society.

In addition to maintaining standards of multicultural and social justice competencies, we must be aware of the increased needs of individuals who are marginalized in multiple domains—such as clients who experience an intersection of racism, classism, and sexism simultaneously. This approach, known as intersectionality, should be a focus in counseling because the number of marginalized identities a client experiences and the
frequency at which they experience discrimination accounts for 15% of the variance in post-traumatic stress symptoms and 13% in quality of life scores, providing a better model for determining need than considering structural inequality alone (Seng, Lopez, Sperlich, Hamama, & Meldrum, 2012). A focus on intersectionality in counseling is a shift towards a holistic understanding of counseling that considers clients’ complex identities and recognizes that some populations are more vulnerable than others.

I received experience in this concept as a case manager on a crisis unit. My job involved helping clients survive before they could thrive by assessing needs and providing referrals. Clients who are especially vulnerable, such as a low-income immigrants experiencing systemic discrimination, may need social services such as housing and medical care before they can fully benefit from talk therapy. As a counselor, I will strive to consider the needs of the whole person, taking into consideration each aspect of a client’s identity. As a student, I will continue learning about systems.

References


