

Lesson Plan: Legal and Ethical Issues in Counseling  
Cultural Identities Role Play, and Advocacy Action Steps

**Review of Definitions** (Remley & Herlihy): *Social justice* is a philosophy that promotes access, empowers, and includes those who have been marginalized based on group membership and minority status. *Advocacy* puts this philosophy into action.

**2009 CACREP Standard addressed:** *G.I.i.*: Advocacy processes needed to address institutional and social barriers that impede access, equity, and success for clients.

**Objective:** Participants will...

- a. Develop awareness into complex systemic interplays among cultural identities during the counseling process,
- b. Understand the importance of client advocacy for addressing institutional and social barriers that impede access, equity, and success
- c. Identify appropriate advocacy action steps for client cases

**Activity:** Each participant will select and role play a different cultural identity, from the list below. This cultural identity is “in the room,” and comprises the counselor, client, and counselor-client characteristics. Participants have \_\_\_ minutes to meet with other cultural identities and discuss...

How do our cultural identities interact with each other *in this case*?

At the conclusion of the exercise, participants will write a reflection for the following question:

1. Regarding the cultural identity that you just acted out (e.g., age, race, gender, etc.), describe at least one “advocacy action step” that the counselor (Thom) could take to address institutional and social barriers that impede access, equity, and success for this client,

**Evaluation Criteria**

Does Not Meet Expectations (0)	Meets Expectations (1)	Exceeds Expectations (2)
Student does not understand the importance of client advocacy	Student understands the importance of client advocacy for addressing institutional and social barriers that impede access, equity, and success	Student understands the importance of client advocacy for addressing institutional and social barriers that impede access, equity, and success, <i>and</i> can identify appropriate advocacy action steps for client cases

**Cultural identities:**

Ability/Disability, age, ethnicity, nationality, gender, marital and family status, primary language, race, religion/spirituality, sexual/affective orientation, social class.

*The following vignette is loosely based on a case I had a few weeks ago. Identifying client information was significantly modified, to protect the confidentiality of the client.*

Setting: A private room in a child and adolescent inpatient psychiatric unit in a small Southeastern U.S. city, where 66% of the population is White and 30% African-American. The city is surrounded by rural counties. The city usually votes Republican. Last night, a young lady by the name of “Nadine” was admitted to the unit involuntarily, having been referred from an emergency department for an apparent overdose of multiple OTC pain medications. She lives over three hours away. Nadine is scheduled to have her “commitment” hearing tomorrow, regarding whether she will stay in the hospital involuntarily until a psychiatrist releases her, or leave on her own accord. A judge presides over these hearings, which take place on the unit and rarely last longer than five minutes. Thom is tasked with gathering information during a family therapy session from which to make recommendations to the attending judge about whether Nadine will be released or committed. An interpreter is present, to provide language assistance.

Thom is a licensed counselor in his 30s, who has worked at the setting for six years. A caucasian male, Thom is originally from England, having immigrated to the U.S. at 20 years old to marry his American fiancée. Thom has since lived in the U.S. for 9 years and is now a U.S. citizen. Since arriving in the U.S., Thom has noticed that he is treated with a certain degree of privilege because of his English accent. Thom does not speak Arabic. He considers himself somewhat of a non-conformist and more of a spiritual than religious person. Thom is also a vegan, and receives some (friendly) criticism from other staff members because of this. In short, Thom’s worldview is fairly liberal and he sometimes has to walk a fine line between standing up for important issues and keeping his opinions to himself for fear of reprisal and marginalization.

“Nadine” is a 17 year-old female client, who speaks fluent Arabic and does not speak any English. She was raised by her family in Syria, and moved to another Middle Eastern country at 13 to marry her current husband. This was an arranged marriage. Since then, she has given birth to three children. Less than a year ago, Nadine and her husband moved to the U.S. for unknown reasons. Their immigration status is unknown. They are currently staying with Nadine’s uncle-in-law, who is disabled. Nadine’s husband does some landscaping work and waits tables at a local restaurant. Nadine does not work. Her husband’s family is fairly traditional and follow the Islamic faith. Nadine chooses not to wear a hijab, despite this. She also takes an antidepressant medication, which her husband apparently does not support. When Nadine’s family came to visit her shortly before her family therapy session today, Nadine was observed to not interact with her young children but instead sit on her uncle-in-law’s lap. She has been asking for her cellphone several times a day, even when her children are on the unit (the unit does not allow clients to keep cellphones). The psychiatrist and nursing staff have met with Nadine, with assistance from an interpreter. Nadine denies that her suicide attempt was a genuine attempt at killing herself, stating that she had a “headache.” Her husband and family want her released during her commitment hearing, and want to take her home. A middle-aged caucasian female psychiatrist (born and raised in the U.S.) is concerned that Nadine’s overdose could have been fatal, and wants to keep her for a few more days for monitoring purposes.

**At the conclusion of the exercise, participants will write a reflection for the following:**

1. Regarding the cultural identity that you just acted out (e.g., age, race, gender, etc.), describe at least one “advocacy action step” that the counselor (Thom) could take to address institutional and social barriers that impede access, equity, and success for this client?