

ACA Practice Briefs

01

Counselor Identity

DESCRIPTION OF COUNSELOR IDENTITY

The field of counseling originated in the early 20th century with the establishment of the National Vocational Guidance Association (NVGA) in 1913, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) in 1924, the Student Personnel Association for Teacher Education (SPATE) in 1931, and the National Association of Guidance and Counselor Trainers (NAGCT) in 1940 (Leong, 2008). These four organizations came together to form the American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA) in 1952, which later became the current-day American Counseling Association (ACA). The cornerstones of the counseling profession were derived from the four founding organizations' identities and philosophies, which include an emphasis on research-based practice, lifespan development, career development, and social justice.

In 2009, the American Counseling Association published a statement of principles entitled "A Vision for the Future of Counseling" that emphasized the need for common professional identity among counselors. This "vision" also led to the "20/20 Vision for the Future of Counseling" that delineates a core set of principles that can be used to unify and advance the counseling profession. The 20/20 working group of 31 participating organization delegates also created a consensus definition of

experiences and personal attributes are placed in the context of a professional community, as proposed through the work of the 20/20 working group, the counselor's identity is shaped. This professional identity process of integrating intrapersonal and interpersonal factors begins in early training experiences and continues throughout the career of the counselor (Gibson, Dollarhide, & Moss, 2010; Moss, Gibson, & Dollarhide, 2014). The counselor's identity includes specific transitional tasks throughout the career lifetime to solidify that identity as it evolves. These tasks are covered in the following sections.

Resources:

20/20 Consensus Definition of Counseling

<https://www.counseling.org/about-us/about-aca/20-20-a-vision-for-the-future-of-counseling/consensus-definition-of-counseling>

20/20 Statement of Principles

<https://www.counseling.org/news/updates/by-year/2009/2009/01/20-20-statement-of-principles-advances-the-profession>

IDENTIFICATION STRATEGIES OF COUNSELOR IDENTITY

There are many ways for professional counselors to identify their current stage of counselor identity development. For both those in training programs and those practicing, novice counselors have a strong reliance on external validation from others (i.e., professors, supervisors). This is tied to their sense of autonomy, and much of the focus in early training and practice is working on counseling skills. Successful

selection and implementation of counseling skills builds confidence that leads to more autonomy in practice and less reliance on external validation. However, there is a transition from external validation gained from supervisors to reinforcement gained through work with clients. "Across all levels and work

10. Learn from clients. We learn a lot from our clients if we keep our ears and eyes open, figuratively speaking. It is a privilege to be a counselor because we witness the human condition in the most vulnerable of circumstances. How do we apply what we learn from clients to our identities? If we don't know something, where can we learn or find resources? How do we know we are effective with clients? Learn how to evaluate it. What does advocating for my clients tell me about what I need to do for my profession?

Talk, serve, lead. In the journey of developing professional counseling identity, learn about the history of the profession, engage in the current trends, and anticipate the needs of the profession and its stakeholders as counseling continues to evolve. Counselor identity is an important concept that is unique to every professional; find what works for you in the larger context of our ever-evolving profession and pursue it with confidence and passion.

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