

CSJ Position Statement on Promoting Human Dignity and Development by Ameliorating Racism

CSJ Position

Counselors for Social Justice (CSJ) emphasizes a commitment to implementing remedial and preventive interventions and action strategies to ameliorate racism in our society and profession.

The Rationale

As counselors we are bound by our ethical commitment to promote a greater level of social justice in our world. This ethical commitment necessitates understanding what factors contribute to mental health and psychological distress, assisting individuals in using their strengths to realize new dimensions of their health and well-being; and using their knowledge and skills to eradicate those environmental conditions that undermine clients' dignity and development.

The rapid cultural-racial transformation of the United States requires counselors to acquire new competencies that will enable them to promote the dignity and development of increasing numbers of persons from diverse cultural-ethnic-racial groups and backgrounds. Among the unique stressors persons from diverse cultural-racial groups routinely encounter in their lives includes the challenges they face when confronted with various forms of injustice and oppression as a result of their cultural-racial identity.

The growing understanding of the negative affects of racism in our community is leading an increasing number of counseling professionals to address this complex problem in their work. These efforts include but are not limited to the implementation of remedial interventions when working with individuals who exhibit personal problems in part as a result of being subjected to or perpetuating various forms of racism.

Additional organizational initiatives and resolutions have emerged in professional counseling organizations in recent years that focus on counselors' role in ameliorating the complex problem of racism in the United States. One example of an important organizational initiative that has been developed in this regard involves the formal endorsement of set of social justice and peace resolutions by the American Counseling Association's (ACA) Governing Council in September 2005. Among the resolutions passed by the ACA Governing Council are specific resolutions dealing with the complex problems of discrimination and racism as they continue to exist in our community.

Relevance to Counseling

The preceding section illuminates underscores the relevance of various forms of racism and gives direction to an active response from the counseling profession. These factors include:

1. recognition of the rapid cultural-racial transformation of the United States and a growing appreciation of the inter-generational transmission of trauma associated with such race-based phenomenon as slavery and the Native American genocide;

2. a growing body of knowledge that describes how the complex problem of racism is manifested in our contemporary society;
3. an increasing understanding of the adverse affect that this complex problem has on the lives of millions of people in the United States in general and many persons that counselors work with in particular; and
4. acknowledgement that counselors are well-positioned to help to ameliorate this problem in places where they live and work.

Recommended Actions

1. Counselors should take steps in ameliorating the effects of racism by educating themselves about the scope of intentional, unintentional and systemic forms of racism in ways that foster a greater understanding of their own embeddedness within the dynamics of this complex psycho-social dynamic.
2. Counseling professionals should make immediate gains in reducing racism by learning to recognize and eliminate all forms of racist micro-aggressions in their work with clients, supervisees and coworkers as well as in the design and implementation of researcher endeavors.
3. Counselor education departments should actively recruit support and promote People of Color into faculty and administrative positions as well as within the student body of counseling programs.
4. Counseling programs should assist graduate students to develop greater awareness of students' own racial biases and prejudices; gain new knowledge related to the counselor's ethical responsibility to address this complex problem in students' future work endeavors; and acquire the counseling, consulting, advocacy, and organizational development skills that are necessary to effectively address this problem in students' future work settings
5. School and community counselors should use their knowledge and skills regarding poverty and race to reduce the effects of the academic achievement gap between Children of Color and their White counterparts by advocating for culture-fair assessment, access to challenging curriculum and appropriate educational resources for all children and forwarding incentives for hiring fully licensed and appropriately endorsed school teachers.
6. In collaboration with state Counselor Licensure Boards, ongoing training in racial-cultural dynamics should be an ongoing requirement for continued counselor licensure.

Approved by the CSJ Board on 6/08.