

Cultural Humility and Sensitivity

By Mita M. Johnson, EdD, LAC, MAC, SAP, NAADAC Ethics Committee Chair

As the providers of co-occurring treatments and services to clients who struggle with both substance and behavioral addictions, we find ourselves living and working in a precarious time. The concept of “multicultural humility and sensitivity” has been attacked and put aside while one definition of “to discriminate” has been elevated in numerous regions of our country. Cultural affiliation represents and celebrates the beliefs, customs, practices, historical frames, experiences and ways of being that are unique and vital to a group’s identity. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, culture is the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations.

From an ethical multicultural point of view, to discriminate is to recognize, appreciate, and value difference. From a positive counseling point of view, to discriminate is to engage in dialogue and provide prevention, assessment, treatment planning, treatment, and recovery services that embraces and incorporates cultural diversity. Clinicians and other service providers intentionally recognize and incorporate areas of difference and need because that’s what we do to help our clients engage, participate, succeed, thrive, and grow. Communities and cultural groups across our nation are endorsing a negative definition of “discrimination” as a viable option for mental health/addiction service providers. These groups are allowing and rationalizing the unjust and prejudicial treatment of clients who are different based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identification, age, and socioeconomic status — by endorsing the attitude that counselors do not have to treat those who have beliefs, values, and behaviors to which they themselves do not adhere. This selection process cuts into the core of the ethic of helping people. As clinicians, we are called to higher standards ethically and professionally. Most clinicians enter our profession to help people. We understand and abide by the words “do no harm.” As professionals, we are called to separate ourselves from society; we cannot carry society’s prejudices and stigmas into our work with clients. Our clients have already been pushed



down and harmed by society’s definitions of addiction and addict. Addicts are “those” people; various communities now endorse not working with “those” people on professional and personal grounds. How did we get here?

As clinicians, we are taught in school to be respectful of all differences (i.e., ethnic and racial identity, developmental stage, trauma, family background, religion and spirituality, socioeconomic status, sexual identity, psychological maturity, unique physical characteristics, and geographical location). There are three stages to developing ethical multicultural skills: exploring, understanding, and acting. Ethically and holistically — with regard to the issues at hand — we take the time to learn about the client, understand what happened or is happening to him or her, and help him or her plan and act in a manner that is empowering and individualized. Clinicians and service providers appreciate and accommodate clients from

diverse cultural groups. We use our education, skills, training, and supervised experience to provide meaningful, respectful, realistic and culturally-relevant services. “It’s not about us.” We serve clients responsibly and ethically — “it’s about them.” As a profession we are being called to develop practical and relevant approaches that address and adapt counseling practices to meet the unique and diverse needs of the particular demographics we serve.

NAADAC and the Ethics Committee provide direction for clinicians and services providers who work with people, families, and communities struggling with abuse and addiction, who would normally be the target of discriminatory philosophies and practices. Specifically, these include:

- Addiction Professionals and service providers shall not practice, condone, facilitate, or collaborate with any form of discrimination against any client on the basis of race, ethnicity, color, religious or spiritual beliefs, age, gender identification, national origin, sexual orientation or expression, marital status, political affiliations, physical or mental handicap, health condition, housing status, military status,

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Last year's NMFP-AC Fellows have completed and attained their Master's Degrees in Addiction Counseling and will strengthen our workforce with their hard work, dedication to the field, and commitment to helping underserved populations, especially transition age youth. We are excited to see what comes next for them in their careers!

NMFP-AC Fellows already selected for this award year have recently started the Program by meeting NMFP-AC staff and each other and receiving a detailed overview of program requirements and the resources currently available. They are excited to begin their specialized education programs, develop relationships with their mentors, use their NAADAC membership resources, and finish their Masters' Degree programs with NMFP-AC funding and support.

The NMFP-AC currently has Fellows in 16 states plus the territory of Puerto Rico and hopes to have a Fellow in every state and U.S. territory by 2018.

Still Accepting Applications – Apply Today

Interested in applying for the NMFP-AC or know an eligible Master's student who should apply? You're in luck! **This year, NAADAC is accepting applications on a rolling basis** and we are still accepting applications from students who will graduate from their Master's programs by August 2017. However, as applications will be reviewed and approved on a first come, first served basis, students should apply as soon as possible before this year's grant funds run out.

To apply, students must submit an online application, along with three required references, an essay, a current resume or CV, and an official transcript from their academic institution. If applicable, students should also include their professional certification and/or license in addiction/substance use disorder counseling. For more information or to start the application process, please visit www.naadac.org/nmfp-ac-eligibility-application-process. If you have any questions, please contact NAADAC's Grants Manager, Ace Crawford, by phone at 703.741.7686 x107 or by email at acrawford@naadac.org.

Spread the Word!

Now is the time to increase access to addiction services in America! Help NAADAC spread the word about this invaluable fellowship program and help the addiction workforce! Help us help you!



Ace Crawford is the Grants Program Manager for NAADAC. He manages the day-to-day operations of various grant programs and is responsible for development and implementation of all program components. Crawford has more than 10 years of experience in creating and managing public health and nonprofit education programs ranging from kidney disease to pharmacy research and has received a BS degree in Health Management from Howard University. Prior to joining NAADAC, Crawford served as the Education Services Manager for the National Electrical Contractors Association, a nonprofit organization based in Bethesda, MD.

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or economic status.

- Professionals and service providers shall not engage in, endorse or condone discrimination against prospective or current clients and their families, students, employees, volunteers, supervisees, or research participants based on their race, ethnicity, age, disability, religion, spirituality, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital or partnership status, language preference, socioeconomic status, immigration status, active duty or veteran status, or any other basis.
- Addiction Professionals and service providers shall provide services that are nondiscriminatory and nonjudgmental. Providers shall not exploit others in their professional relationships. Providers shall maintain appropriate professional and personal boundaries.
- When Addiction Professionals become aware of inappropriate, illegal, discriminatory, and/or unethical policies, procedures and practices at their agency, organization, or practice, they shall alert their employers. When there is the potential for harm to clients or limitations on the effectiveness of services provided, providers shall seek supervision and/or consultation to determine appropriate next steps and further action. Providers and Supervisors shall not harass or terminate an employee or colleague who has acted in a responsible and ethical manner to expose inappropriate employer employee policies, procedures and/or practices.
- Addiction Professionals shall develop an understanding of their own personal, professional, and cultural values and beliefs. Providers shall recognize which personal and professional values may be in alignment with or conflict with the values and needs of the client. Providers shall not use cultural or values differences as a reason to engage in discrimination. Providers shall seek supervision and/or consultation to address areas of difference and to decrease bias, judgment, and microaggressions.

As ethical clinicians and service providers, we shall treat clients as we would want to be treated if we were in their shoes. We express genuine empathy and concern. We shall not endorse society's views on stereotyping and discrimination; as providers we do not view clients through a stigmatizing lens. Clients are not referred to other clinicians/agencies simply because they are different. We seek supervision and opportunities for professional growth and development. We seek to understand our client's views and core beliefs without transference and counter-transference. We treat clients — all clients — with respect and consideration. We provide quality services to all clients, regardless of their cultural affiliation or ability to pay. As professionals, we have an obligation to accept clients where they are at and ensure that they receive culturally-inclusive treatment and services. *We push ourselves to understand rather than "select out" those clients who do not fit our profile.*



Mita M. Johnson, EdD, LAC, MAC, SAP, has a doctorate in Counselor Education and Supervision, an MA in Counseling, and a BA in Biology. She is a licensed professional counselor, licensed marriage and family therapist, and licensed addiction counselor, along with earning the national Master Addiction Counselor (MAC) and Department of Transportation Substance Abuse Professional (SAP) certifications. Johnson has two supervisory credentials (ACS and AAMFT) and is an NCC. In addition to being a core faculty member at Walden University, she maintains a private practice where she sees clients and supervisees who are working on credentialing. Johnson is the Past-President of the Colorado Association of Addiction Professionals (CAAP) and is the Ethics Chair and Southwest Regional VP for NAADAC. She speaks and trains regionally and nationally on topics specific to counseling skills, ethics, supervision, and addiction-specific services. She has been appointed by the Governor of Colorado to two committees working on behavioral health integration and transformation, is a consultant to the state regulatory agency that regulates our professions, and is a consultant and committee member at the state Office of Behavioral Health.