

Bridging the Gap: From Awareness to Action

Introduction to the Special Issue



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This special issue of *The Professional Counselor* (TPC) is in honor of the NBCC Foundation (NBCCF)'s 2023 Bridging the Gap Symposium: Eliminating Mental Health Disparities. The theme for the 2023 Symposium, *From Awareness to Action*, represented the importance of attendee reflection on current issues and the need for intentional engagement in meaningful work that empowers underserved and never-served clients and communities. The event was attended by over 500 counselors and counselors-in-training who connected with peers and had the opportunity to learn from presenters of 70 sessions. Unique to this year's Symposium was the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Minority Fellowship Program (MFP). Members of the inaugural cohort, affectionately known as the *Dream Team*, came together to share memories of receiving their awards and spent time engaging in discussions about their remarkable contributions to the counseling profession over the past decade.

In this special edition of *TPC*, guest editors from the first and second cohorts of the MFP reviewed submissions and selected articles for publication. Keeping the 2023 Symposium theme in mind, we worked hard to ensure that the articles in this issue reflect the purpose and vision of the event. Submissions covered a wide range of topics that provided perspectives about mental health disparities across diverse populations. Our hope is that this issue, like Symposium, will provoke thought and promote action.

We divided the articles in this issue into two sections: The first section is comprised of articles that align with the special issue theme but were not presented at Symposium. The second section is comprised of articles that were written by authors who presented at this year's Symposium and transformed their presented work into articles.

The three articles in the first section of this issue are those that align with the Symposium's theme. Although the authors of these articles did not present at Symposium, we think you will find what the authors share captures the Symposium's purpose beautifully. In "A Learning Curve': Counselors' Experiences Working With Sex Trafficking," the authors present findings from their qualitative study with clinicians who work with clients who have experienced sex trafficking to offer recommendations for working with this population. "Ableist Microaggressions, Disability Characteristics, and Nondominant Identities" reveals how ableist microaggressions manifest most frequently for people with a range of disabilities and sociocultural identities, and the authors suggest ways to better support clients with disabilities. In the third article of the issue, "Using the Cultural Formulation Interview with Afro Latinx Immigrants in Counseling: A Practical Application," the authors utilize a case study to demonstrate how to use this assessment tool with an Afro Latinx immigrant client from Mexico.

In the second section of the issue, "Diondre Also Has Bad Days: Cannabis Use and the Criminalization of Black Youth" and "Utilizing Collective Wisdom: Ceremony-Assisted Treatment for Native and Non-Native Clients" introduce readers to communities, concepts, and skills with which they may be less familiar. The authors convey clearly that counselors must develop these skills in order to serve populations who are in need of their identity-affirming, empathetic services. In "Diondre Also Has Bad Days," the author challenges readers to examine how they treat Black and

White youth and to overcome potentially biased approaches that have traditionally served one group more affirmatively than the other. “Ceremony-Assisted Treatment for Native and Non-Native Clients” presents readers with intervention options that integrate Indigenous practices, such as smudging and drumming.

The final three articles in the second section are “*Taking Action: Reflections on Forming and Facilitating a Peer-Led Social Justice Advocacy Group*,” “Comorbidity of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder in Youth Diagnosed With Oppositional Defiant Disorder,” and “Bridging the Gap Between Intentions and Impact: Understanding Disability Culture to Support Disability Justice.” In “Reflections on Forming and Facilitating a Peer-Led Social Justice Advocacy Group,” the authors provide their individual insights about their experiences as students who established a social justice advocacy group for peers in their counseling program. “Comorbidity of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder in Youth Diagnosed With Oppositional Defiant Disorder” gives readers insight into the complexity of distinguishing between OCD and ODD in youth and the potential for misdiagnosis, while “Bridging the Gap Between Intentions and Impact” offers counseling professionals strategies for competent care and allyship for disabled clients through a disability justice framework.

As you read the articles in this issue, we hope you will accept the opportunity to discover new ways to engage in the profession and to reflect on the *why* behind your commitment to your work. May this special issue serve as an inspiration for lifelong learning and lasting impact in the spaces where it is needed the most.



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