

Client Advocacy Paper: Case of Esperanza Mesa

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## ADVOCACY PAPER

Client advocacy is an important part of the therapeutic alliance. It is crucial that clients feel supported, empowered, and accepted as they vulnerably share their truths and struggles within the counseling sessions. With each client, the counselor must be able to recognize cultural factors that impact the client's struggles and mental health and be able to creatively and effectively advocate for the them.

With the case of Esperanza, recognizing and identifying all the different parts of her cultural background is of great importance. Not only does she struggle as a minority immigrant in this country, she is struggling with coming to terms with her sexual orientation as well as her fear of judgment from her Catholic community. She is a young, new mother feeling trapped in her marriage and it is important as the counselor to be a pillar of support during a time where she feels she has none from her loved ones.

On the microlevel, the counselor can work with Esperanza during in-person counseling sessions. She may be feeling isolated, misunderstood, helpless, and perhaps desperate. Recognize her strength in being able to seek help through counseling. It is possible that she feels guilty for wanting to go against her family tradition and culturally accepted norms and for wanting to divorce her husband. The counselor should process through these feelings with her and help her to acknowledge that advocating for herself and wanting to accept truths about herself does not make her a bad daughter or mother. It may be helpful to process through cultural norms or racial discrimination from others that she may have internalized and allowed to affect how she views herself as a minority or as a lesbian woman.

As Esperanza progresses through individual counseling sessions, seeking a form of group counseling or support groups may be beneficial for her. She feels that nobody else in her community relates to her struggles, and a large part of the reason she does not feel safe sharing

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her sexual orientation with her loved ones and church family is because she fears rejection from them. It is important that Esperanza understands that despite standing alone within her immediate community, there are others out there that are struggling through similar things. To be able to connect with other marginalized people groups, other LGBTQ+ people, or other young mothers will help her to feel empowered in her circumstances. Through others' testimonies, she can learn that though the journey is difficult, the end result will be worth the pain of the process. If there are not many advocacy groups relating to Esperanza's struggles, the counselor and client could possibly a support group catering to specific people groups to offer to the community.

Throughout the journey of counseling with Esperanza, undoubtedly, there will be many times that the counselor and Esperanza both recognize the flaws of the system. As the issues encompassing Esperanza's struggles are unpacked together with the counselor, both will recognize that problems that are seemingly personal are often deeply rooted and perpetuated within systems, throughout history, and culture. How can Esperanza and the counselor use their experiences, their testimonies, and their identities to advocate to change on a grander scale? How can they utilize what they have learned through their individual sessions and community collaboration to bring about greater change? At this point there are so many ways to advocate for change that involve partnering with different people and organizations, doing research, engaging in political activities, but how exactly advocacy is approached on the macrolevel is dependent on the different strengths and passions of the client and counselor.

Each counselor must be willing to advocate for his or her client on the micro to macro levels. Just because the client-counselor relationship is over does not mean that advocacy needs to stop. While we begin by helping the client learn to advocate for his or herself, the ultimate goal is to be able to leave the session and be advocates for others as well.