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## Editorial-Social Justice and Deafness

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There has been a recent upsurge in social justice activity in the counseling and psychology fields. Social justice is practiced when counselors focus simultaneously on the promotion of individual needs and development as well as distributive justice for the common good (Crethar, 2009). Crethar identified four underpinnings of social justice as equity, access, participation, and harmony. Here is a brief case example:

Max, a clinical psychologist, has been in private practice for the past five years. He has a contract to provide testing and counseling services for his state department of family services. As a child of deaf parents, Max is fluent in American Sign Language (ASL) and sees a number of deaf clients in his practice. Some of his deaf clients have reported unfair experiences with the justice system. For example, one client explained that his caseworker visited him weekly but never brought an interpreter. Another client told him that he went to court and no interpreter was provided for the trial. A child client told Max she was in protective custody for nearly a year with no services. Being quite experienced in the field, Max contacted an area supervisor for family services and set up a formal meeting with the agency. Max invited a culturally Deaf advocate to help explain the experience and the legal rights of clients who are deaf. Prior to the meeting, Max collected journal articles and other materials that addressed equal access for deaf clients. Although he was angry about the injustice his clients faced, he wanted to go into the meeting with ideas and answers. He knew that making accusations might only make the problem worse.

In this case example, Max went beyond the boundaries of a therapist and took action with the goal of changing the system for all deaf clients who were involved with the state department's family services. We all see social injustice on a regular basis, and I expect that we frequently overlook social injustice in our daily lives. However, I believe that most JADARA readers are involved in the social justice movement, even if involvement is unintended. When we advocate for our clients, we engage in social justice activity. When we publish research that focuses on better outcomes for clients, we engage in social justice activity. When we educate others on the need for interpreters,

the need for video relay, or the need for culturally-affirmative services in the client's language, we are trying to level the playing field for all deaf people.

The American Counseling Association has a division focused on social justice, appropriately named Counselors for Social Justice (CSJ). The American Psychological Association has a similar division, Division 48 (Peace Psychology), which focuses on equity and justice in society. Both less than 20 years old, these organizations are relative newcomers to the social justice field. They share many members with Psychologists for Social Responsibility, a non-profit formed in 1982. Clearly, counselors and psychologists are engaged in and committed to equity and justice.

Probably the first organized group to advocate for social justice was social workers, as their activity to battle oppression dates back to the early 1900s (King, 2010). Although all three groups (counselors, psychologists, and social workers) have advocacy in their respective codes of ethics, only social workers have social justice as a part of their professional identity. Counselors and psychologists may choose to engage in advocacy activities, social workers are *expected* to engage in these endeavors.

An opinion article by King (2010) expressed concern that counselors engaged in significant social justice activity may be crossing professional boundaries. King stated, "I believe the social justice movement potentially blurs counselor professional identity" (p. 51). In recent listserv activity, I have seen a significant increase in social justice topics. I recently attended two national conferences for major organizations where social justice strands of training were front and center at both conferences. Truly, the momentum behind the social justice movement is powerful and continues to grow.

I took some time to digest King's (2010) article and think about how this applied to deaf people and JADARA readers. At a fundamental level, social justice as a movement can only better the psychology and deafness fields. When professionals are dedicated to access and equity for all, they are more likely to be open to meeting deaf clients' needs. Perhaps the time to take action on deaf-related issues is now, as the social justice movement is at the forefront of our field.

At another level, I wondered how we might become more active in the social justice movement. Membership in the organizations identified above may be helpful as their growth is an indicator of the direction of our

profession. However, social justice calls for more than just paying dues to an organization; social justice is a call to action. Essentially, ADARA is an organization dedicated to social equity. Readers may want to take a moment to view the ADARA mission statement at our website at [www.adara.org](http://www.adara.org). The statement is filled with language that endorses social justice activity. Your ADARA membership is the first step to social justice in the field of psychology and deafness. A strong organization with robust membership is an indicator of passion and concern for our field. However, like social justice in our primary organizations, the emphasis must be on organized activity. I challenge readers to take a moment and think how you are actively involved in promoting social justice in our field. Like Max in the case study above, we must find a way to appropriately take action if we are going to achieve barrier-free communication and equal access in society.

## References

- Crethar, H. (2009). Social justice in counseling. In American Counseling Association (Ed.), *The ACA Encyclopedia of Counseling* (pp. 504-505). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
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