Integrating Advocacy into Every MFT Identity

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Background

- When and why do clinicians engage in social and political advocacy?
  - Integrated into training programs (Heinowitz et al., 2012; Teater, 2009)
  - MFTs express moderate interest but low participation in advocacy (Jordan & Seponski, 2017)

- Where do we stand with training in social and political advocacy skills?
  - Excellent training standards in social work
  - Lack of training for MFT and Counselor Ed

- MFTs are uniquely positioned to excel in enacting larger system change
Guiding Questions

- To what degree are family therapists involved in social and political advocacy?
- What are family therapists’ beliefs and barriers to engaging in political and policy processes?

(Jordan & Seponksi, 2018a, b)
Method

- 500 surveys mailed
  - Items included: 13 demos; 29 yes/no; 2 open-ended questions
  - Based on SW measure (Gray et al., 2002)

- Participants
  - National sample (N= 174; 34% response rate)
  - 38 states represented
  - Homogeneity representative of AAMFT membership
    - Woman identified (n =126)
    - White (n =151)
    - Mean age 50.74 (28-82)
    - Fully licensed (n = 166)
    - Masters degree (n=126)
    - Private practice (n =113)

(Jordan & Seponksi, 2018a, b)
Integration of Quant/Qual for depth and breadth

- Quantitative plan
  - Descriptive statistics, frequencies, and mean scores
  - SPSS v23

- Qualitative plan
  - 129 written responses
  - Braun and Clarke’s (2006) inductive thematic analysis
  - Code and analyze open-ended questions

(Jordan & Seponksi, 2018a, b)
Results

- Discrepancies between beliefs and actions
  - 83% held belief that FTs should be politically active
  - Rate of participation significantly decreased as the level of involvement required increased
  - 73% felt lack of policy/advocacy knowledge was major reason for lack of FT action

- Internal Barriers for engagement
  - Knowledge
  - Feeling ineffective
  - Lack of interest

(Jordan & Seponksi, 2018a, b)
Discussion

- Findings highlight a gap in training for FTs
  - Interested and agree that public participation is fundamental to professional identity
  - Yet- do not have the skills for advocacy
- Lack of participation leaves field exposed to threats specific to our work; keeping FTs from higher profile discussions of family policy issues
Implications

• Primary practice implication is to reinforce the belief that part of a family therapist’s identity is policy participation.

• An important first step would be to incorporate advocacy skills both into our MFT core competencies as well as educational training.

• There are realistic constraints to introducing this pedagogical shift, including space within curricula and a lack of experts in the family therapy field on this topic.
Pedagogical Approaches to Teaching Advocacy

Table 1. Pedagogical approaches to training family therapists on political advocacy. Each approach builds on the former with increasing levels of applied practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Pedagogical Approaches</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Preparation</td>
<td>Courses</td>
<td>Specific courses on advocacy, interdisciplinary courses with public health/policy, medicine, etc.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Scaffolding activities</td>
<td>Teaching students to write policy briefs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Decision-case method</td>
<td>Case presentation and defending one’s position</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mixed-media</td>
<td>Using documentaries, political blogs, and internet-based videos</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mentorship and Modeling</td>
<td>Mentorship</td>
<td>Pairing students with mentors who have advocacy experience</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td>Guest speakers, pairing students together as peers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applied Practice and Engagement</td>
<td>Legislative advocacy day</td>
<td>Application of advocacy skills with state legislators</td>
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<td>Advocacy Week</td>
<td>Week long events with mock legislative sessions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3P approach</td>
<td>Practicing policy, pursuing change, and promoting social justice</td>
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Goodman, Morgan, Hodgson, & Caldwell, 2018
Self-of-the-Advocate

• When people believe public participation is relevant personally, they also tend to believe the same professionally

• What is Self of the Advocate?
  • Cultivating awareness of one’s biases and beliefs
  • Examining one’s self-efficacy and political/advocacy identity
  • Leveraging a self-of-the-advocate awareness to make more conscious public participation choices
### Advocacy Continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activism – action taken to determine and let others know your position about a cause</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Establish political identity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Be open to and engage in reading and learning about the issues on all sides, not just yours</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Search out local and online groups that are working on similar issues or concerns and volunteer your time:</strong></td>
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<td><em>Hand out informational flyers</em></td>
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<td><em>Speak at community gathering places</em></td>
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<td><em>Initiate and/or attend events</em></td>
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<td><em>Post on an online forum</em></td>
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<td><em>Start a blog, share/initiate social media discussion on the issue</em></td>
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<td><em>Join organizations that are supporting your political and professional passions</em></td>
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<td><em>Engage in a verbal and/or written dialogue with someone about your professional and political passions</em></td>
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<td><strong>Write letters and make phone calls/speeches to local, state, national, and global leaders/groups</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Contribute funds to organizations that are working to advance your political and professional interests</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Identify an issue and join forces with others to bring awareness to it</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Write white papers or policy briefs to help disseminate accurate information</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Inside/direct lobbying:</strong> visit your state and national legislators and/or their staffers to share your thoughts and ideas</td>
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<td><strong>Outside lobbying:</strong> mobilizing citizens to pressure public officials to adopt, change, or vote down policies</td>
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<td><em>Hold meetings to educate people about policies and political agendas that could help or harm an interest group, or to notify others about opportunities to effect change around an issue or concern</em></td>
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<td><em>Publish articles where readers across all social locations can be educated about issues/policies of public interest</em></td>
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<td><strong>Typically used when all other previously attempted advocacy methods fail</strong></td>
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Goodman, Morgan, Hodgson, & Caldwell, 2018
Citations


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