

Ethics in Action: Courage, Advocacy, and Justice in a Multicultural World

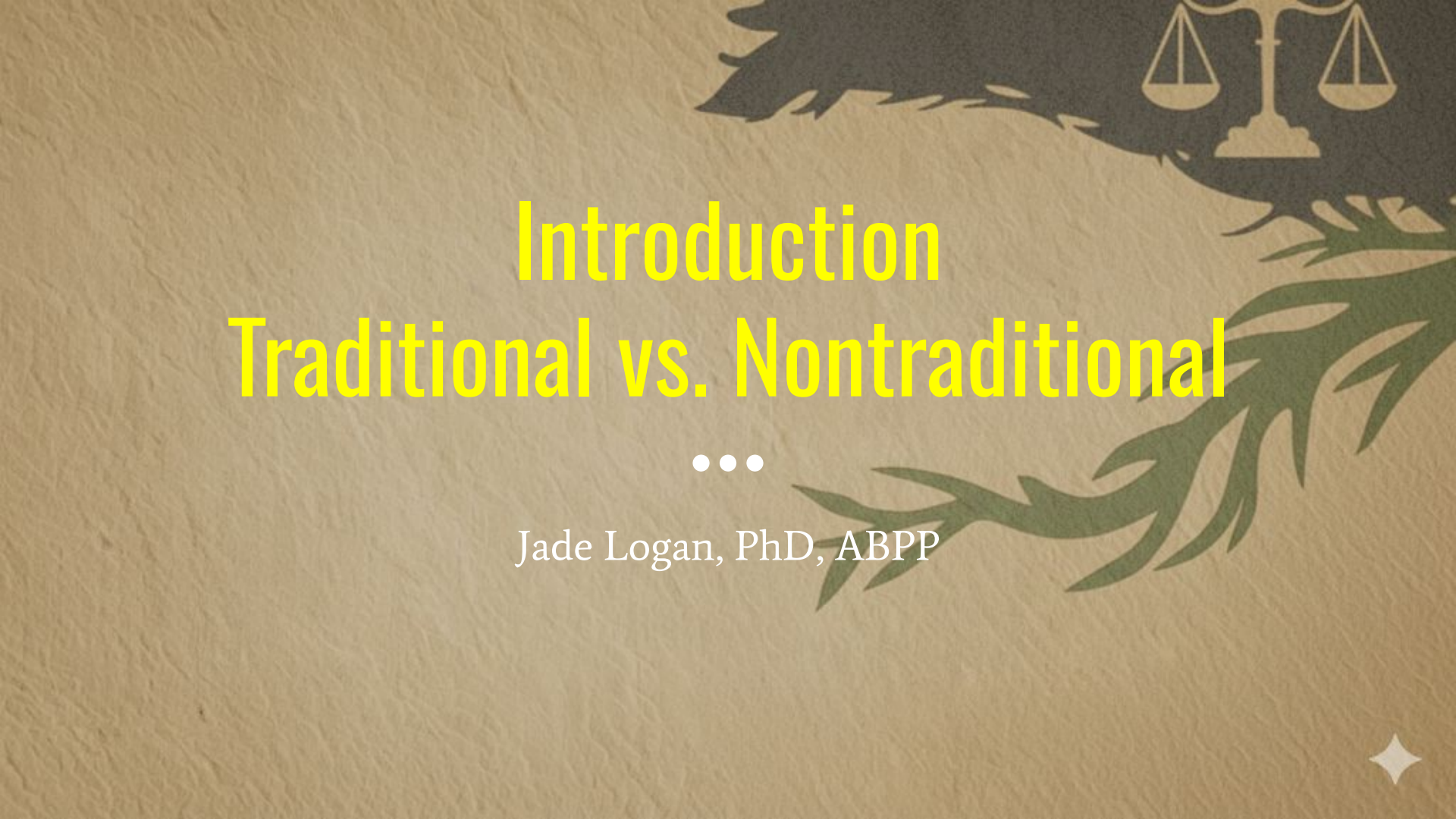
...

Jade Logan, PhD, ABPP
John Gavazzi, PsyD, ABPP
Deborah Kossmann, PsyD
Valerie Lemmon, PhD
Jeanne Slattery, PhD



Moral Courage in Clinical Practice, Teaching, and Community Action



The background features a textured, light brown surface. In the upper right corner, there is a dark silhouette of a tree. A pair of golden scales of justice is positioned within the branches of the tree. The main title is centered in a bold, yellow, sans-serif font.

Introduction Traditional vs. Nontraditional

...

Jade Logan, PhD, ABPP



Theme of Advocacy

“Regardless of the particular setting in which they work, each counselor is confronted again and again with issues that cannot be resolved simply through change within the individual. All too often, negative aspects of the environment impinge on a client’s well-being, intensifying personal problems or creating obstacles to growth. When such situations arise, effective counselors speak up! We think of advocacy as the act of speaking up or taking action to make environmental changes on behalf of our clients.”

~Bradley & Lewis (2000) American Counseling Association



Advocacy Counseling Defined (Lee, 1998)

→ Advocacy is a form of social action

- Advocate to do work in the social contexts in which clients problems occur
- Advocate to take action to eliminate or reduce social problems, such as poverty, unequal access to opportunity, and various forms of prejudice which adversely affects clients

→ Require therapists to leave their offices to do work in the community

→ Direct service is complemented by indirect forms of help that involve influencing systems that affect client's mental health



Advocacy & Principle D (Justice)

→ Provide all people with fair, equitable, and appropriate access to treatment and to the benefits of scientific knowledge

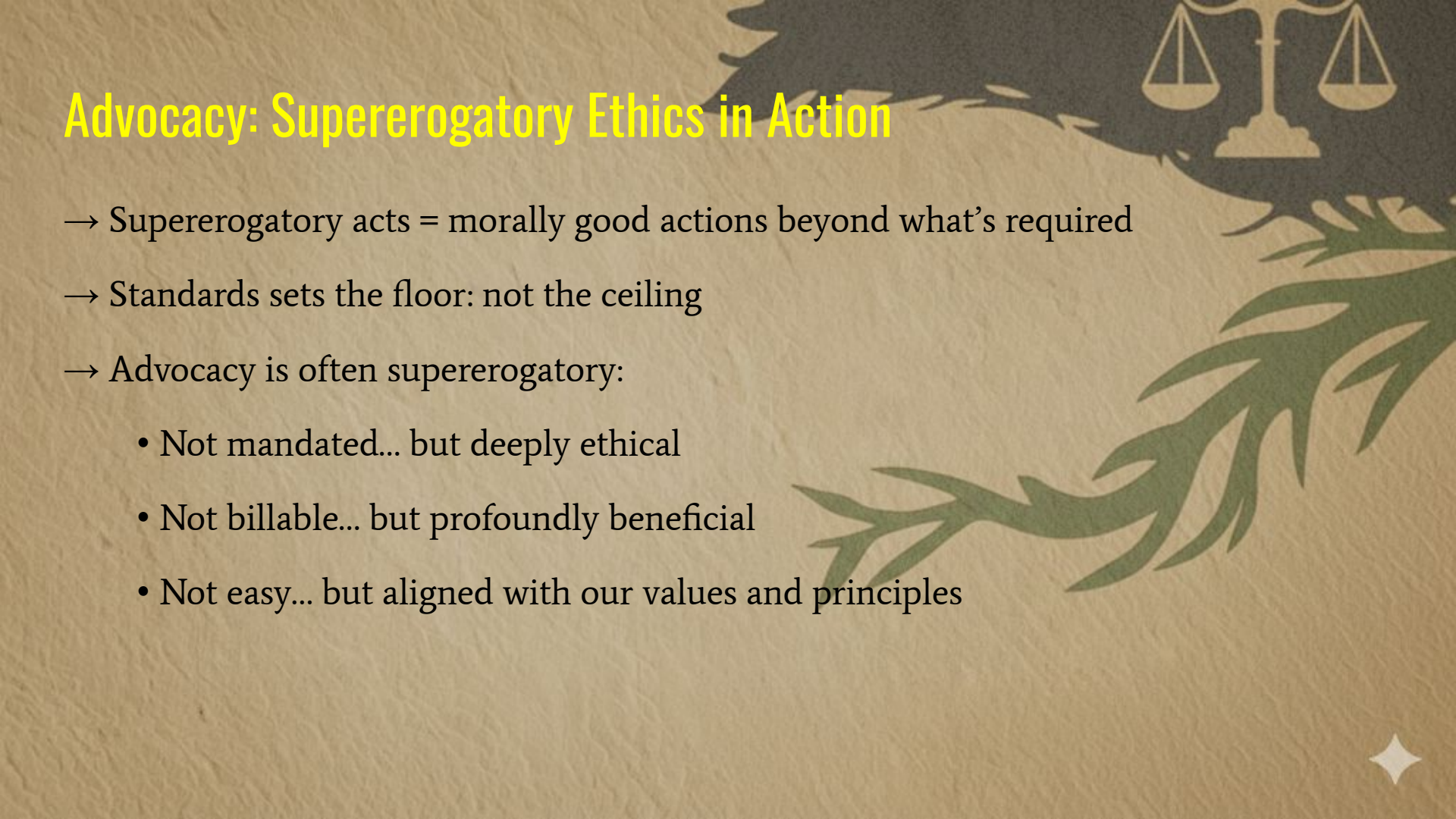
→ 3 Domains of Justice

- Distributive Justice (i.e., 3.01, 3.02, 3.03)
- Procedural Justice
- Interactional Justice (i.e., 3.05, 3.08, 6.05, 8.04)

→ Do we advocate for clients if they are not receiving justice? Why or why not? How?



Advocacy: Supererogatory Ethics in Action

A background illustration featuring a large, dark green tree with a complex root system. The canopy of the tree is replaced by a golden scale of justice, symbolizing the connection between nature, ethics, and law.

- Supererogatory acts = morally good actions beyond what's required
- Standards sets the floor: not the ceiling
- Advocacy is often supererogatory:
 - Not mandated... but deeply ethical
 - Not billable... but profoundly beneficial
 - Not easy... but aligned with our values and principles



Why “Non-Traditional” Advocacy Matters

A background illustration featuring a large, dark silhouette of a tree with thick, spreading roots. In the upper right corner, a golden scale of justice is visible, symbolizing balance and equity. The overall aesthetic is textured and earthy, with a light brown background.

Most psychologists don't participate in traditional advocacy — but they CAN:

- Challenge biased language during psychotherapy
- Teach students to question diagnostic disparities and social determinants of mental health
- Speak up at IEP meetings, faculty meetings, community forums

Advocacy = daily ethical action in your sphere of influence.



Advocacy Takes Place on a Continuum

...

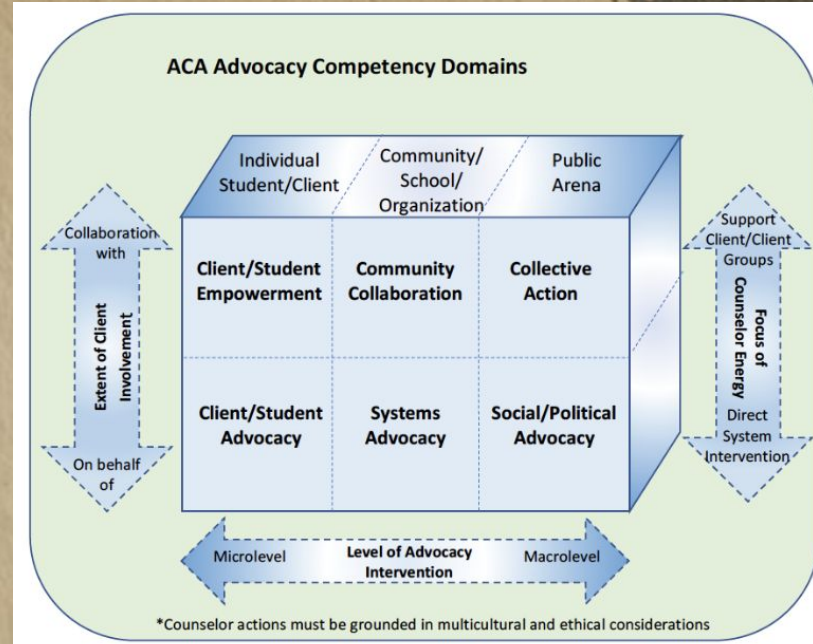
Jeanne Slattery, Ph.D.



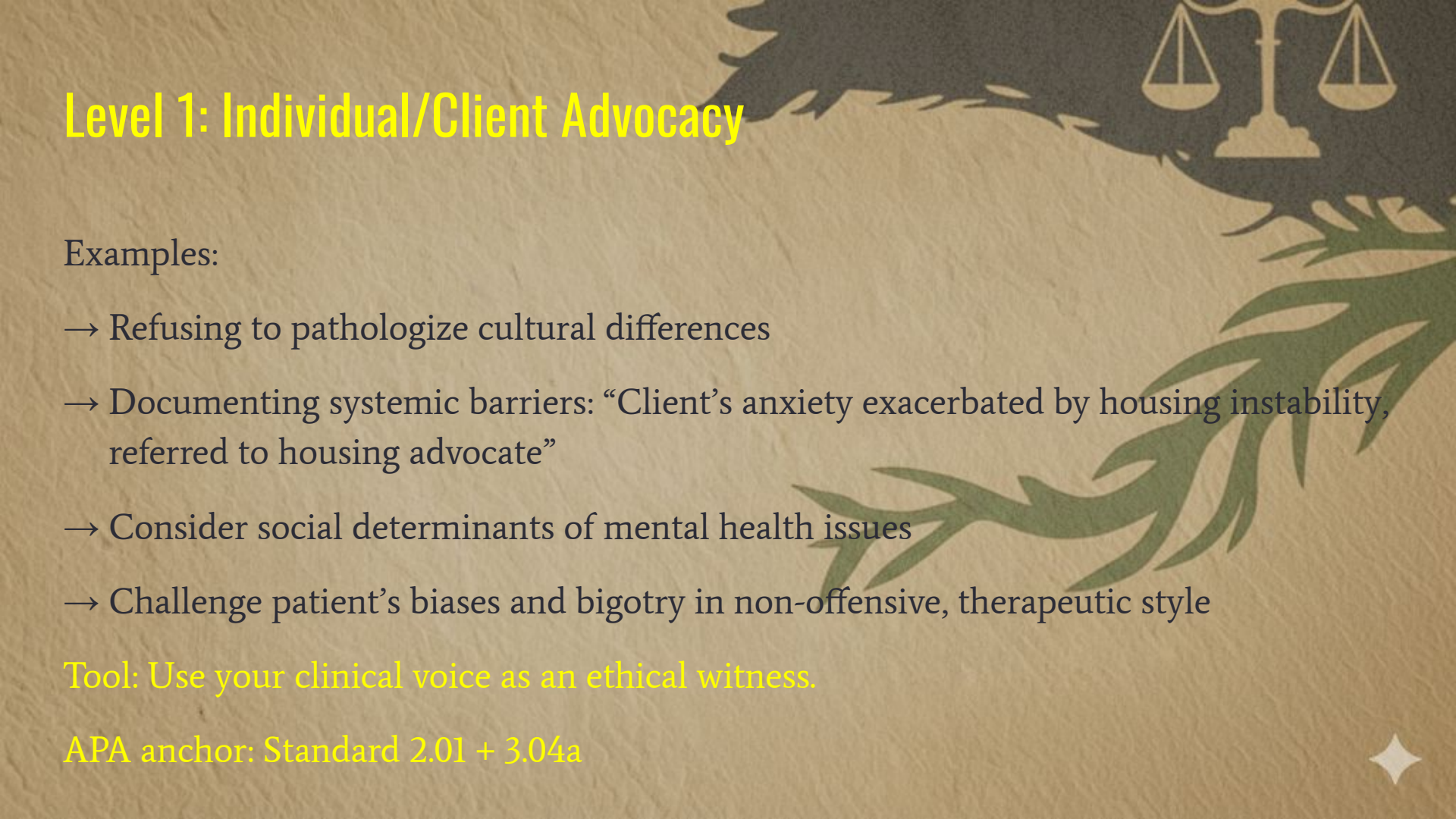
Three Levels of Everyday Advocacy

- Individual/Client
- Grassroots/Community
- State Association/
Government/System

You do not need permission to start! Start where you are!



Level 1: Individual/Client Advocacy

A background illustration featuring a large, dark tree with intricate roots and branches. In the upper right corner, a golden scale of justice is visible, symbolizing balance and equity. The overall aesthetic is that of a textured, parchment-like surface.

Examples:

- Refusing to pathologize cultural differences
- Documenting systemic barriers: “Client’s anxiety exacerbated by housing instability, referred to housing advocate”
- Consider social determinants of mental health issues
- Challenge patient’s biases and bigotry in non-offensive, therapeutic style

Tool: Use your clinical voice as an ethical witness.

APA anchor: Standard 2.01 + 3.04a

A small, white, four-pointed star icon located in the bottom right corner of the slide.

Level 2: Grassroots/Community Advocacy

Examples:

- Host a fundraiser at your home for a local candidate or participate in support of democracy (work the polls, volunteer in community organizations)
- Train school staff on trauma-informed responses
- Attend local groups and offer support and education to members

Tool: “Translate, don’t preach” — meet people where they are.

APA anchor: Standard 5.04 — Public Statements



Level 3: State Association/System Advocacy

Examples:

- Serve on APA, PPA, committees re: access to care, rural healthcare, etc.
- Attend PPA and APA advocacy days
- Meet YOUR legislators at public events or fundraisers: Build relationships

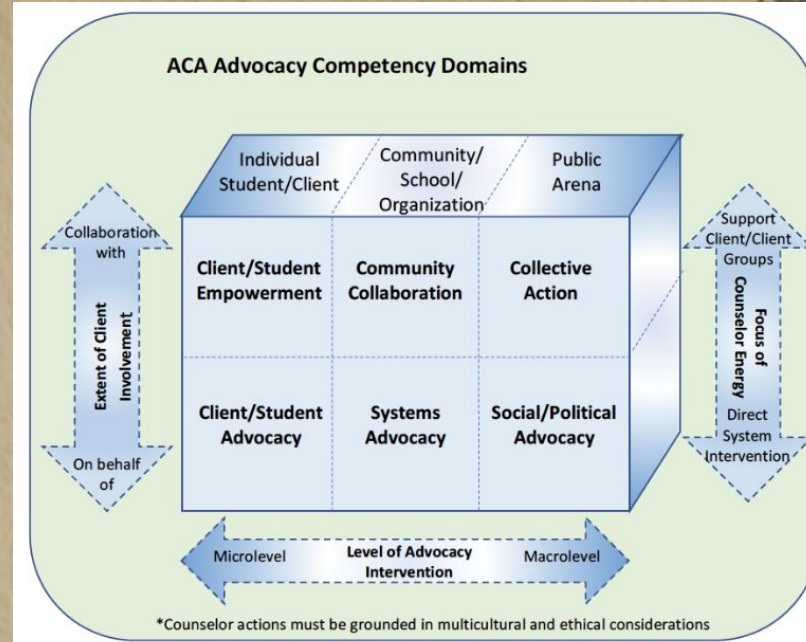
Tool: “Be the person who volunteers — then change the agenda.”

APA anchor: Principle E — Respect for People’s Rights and Dignity



Two types of advocacy

- Empowerment
- Advocacy



APA anchor: Principle E — Respect for People's Rights and Dignity

American Counseling Association. (2020). *American Counseling Association advocacy competencies*.
<https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/competencies/aca-advocacy-competencies-may-2020.pdf>



Walter McMillian & Bryan Stevenson

When such situations arise, effective counselors speak up! We think of advocacy as the act of speaking up or taking action to make environmental changes on behalf of our clients.”
~ Bradley & Lewis (2000)

A decorative background featuring a pair of scales of justice in the upper right corner and a stylized tree branch with leaves extending from the right side across the top and middle of the slide.

Moral Courage, Clinical Issues, And Building Success

...

John Gavazzi, PsyD, ABPP



What Is “Moral Courage” in Advocacy?

Acting ethically despite risk — social, professional, or institutional — to uphold patient/student/community welfare.

APA Ethical Principles:

→ Principle A: Beneficence & Nonmaleficence

→ Principle D: Justice

It's not always protests or contacting your legislator: sometimes it's saying the hard thing in a team meeting and challenging a patient in psychotherapy.



General Ethical Guidelines

- Ethics is seldom about the “right decision”
- We need to focus on the “right process”
- We need to keep in mind patient dignity, safety, and self-determination
- Patient empowerment (not rescuing or pushing our agendas)



Several Examples

- Accompanying a patient to the police station to make a report (Level 1)
- Assisting clients in navigating complex systems (such as Medicaid, educational access, public benefits, etc.) by offering guidance and advocacy letters (Level 1)
- Challenging a discriminatory workplace policy (Level 2)
- Writing an Op Ed or making social media posts about an insurance company's failure to comply with mental health parity (Level 3)



More Examples

- Offering home-based counselling or creating flexible therapy models to overcome barriers related to childcare, transportation, or financial hardship, going beyond standard office-based practice. (L1)
- Organizing a support group for a marginalized community (L2)
- Challenging biased comments of another healthcare provider (L2)
- Calling an insurance company about mental health parity issues (L 3)



Positionality: Psychologist Variables (with Level 1 Advocacy)

Cultural Background	Countertransference
Gender	Vulnerabilities (needs, desires)
Professional History	Power Differential
Privileges	Relationship to Authority
Setting (private, hospital, community)	

Lived Experience: Patient Variables (with Level 1 Advocacy)

Cultural Background	Transference
Gender	Complexity
Socioeconomic Status	Length of time in treatment
Expectations of Psychotherapy	Level of Safety
Patient position in system	Relationship to Authority

Moral Courage ≠ Heroism — It's Practice

Moral courage is a muscle:

- You can start at any level: Correct a microaggression in supervision
- Move to a Level 2 event: Present at community events
- Level 2 or 3: Practice meeting with community leaders and legislators

Courage is contagious — your action gives others permission.



How do we normalize Moral Courage and Advocacy in PPA? (Level 2 and 3)

- Establish and strengthen social and moral norms around psychology's value system and ethics code
- Help others overcome fear and uncertainty about advocacy in all three levels
- Encourage student participation to normalize and to role model
- Volunteer and invite others to events
- Practice, practice, practice



Specific Questions for the Group

1. Describe a time you exercised moral courage in context of advocacy with a patient or student — what helped you act?
2. What's a “non-traditional” advocacy act you've seen a colleague do that inspired you?



Break Time



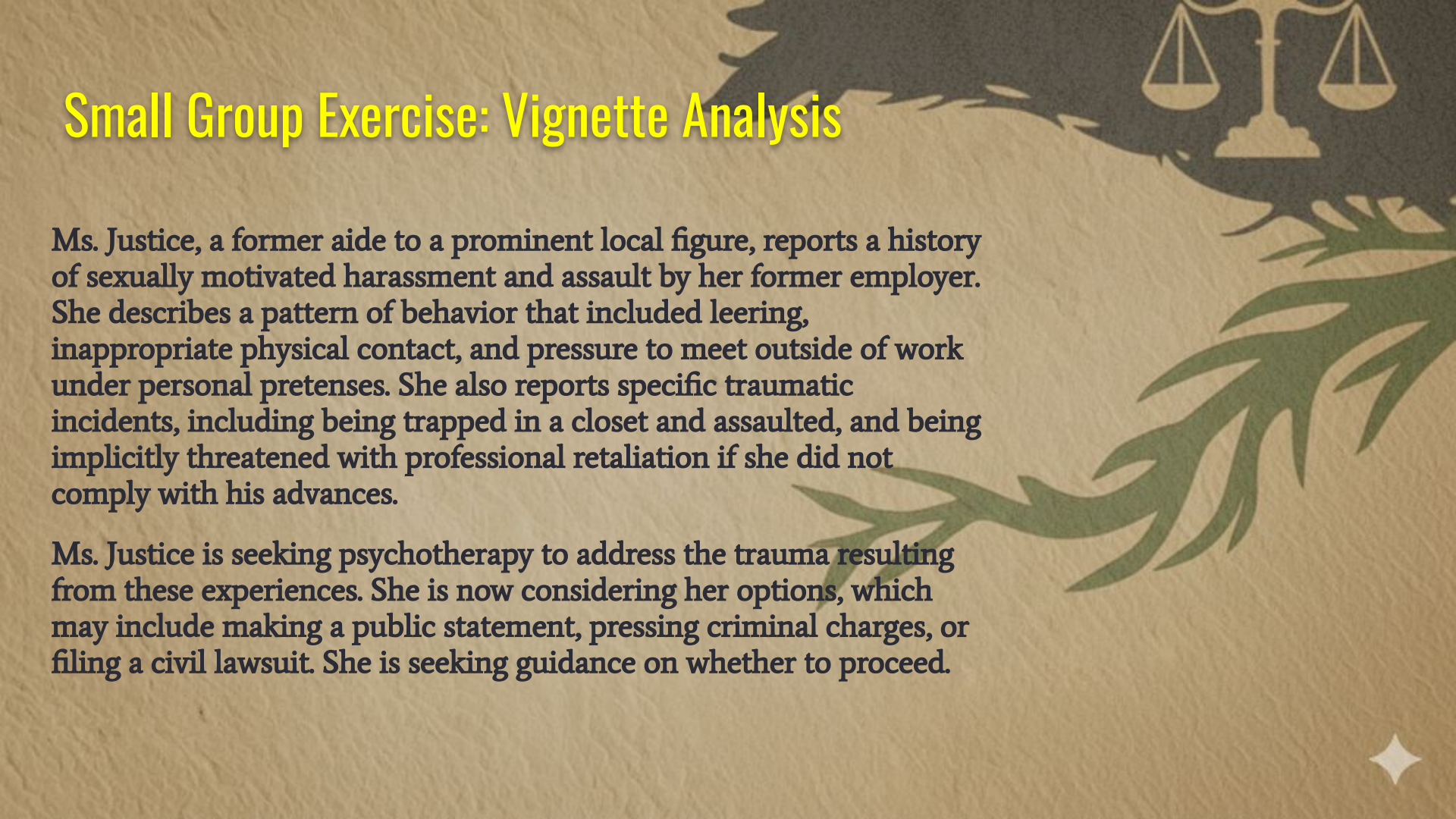
Vignette Analysis

...

Deborah Derrickson Kossmann, Psy.D.



Small Group Exercise: Vignette Analysis

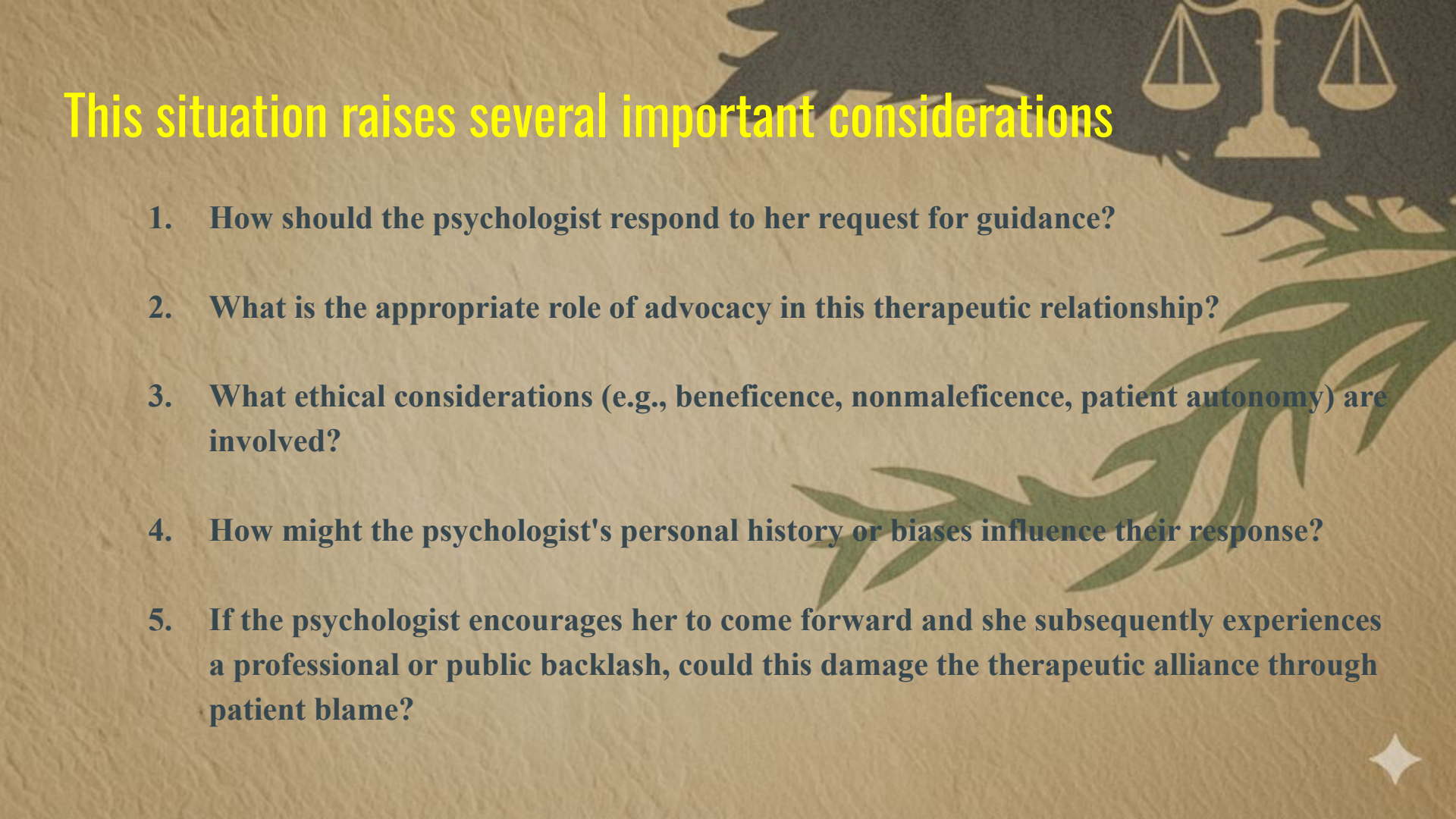
A background illustration featuring a large, dark green tree with intricate roots and branches on the right side. In the upper right corner, a golden scale of justice is visible. The entire background has a textured, parchment-like appearance in shades of tan and brown.

Ms. Justice, a former aide to a prominent local figure, reports a history of sexually motivated harassment and assault by her former employer. She describes a pattern of behavior that included leering, inappropriate physical contact, and pressure to meet outside of work under personal pretenses. She also reports specific traumatic incidents, including being trapped in a closet and assaulted, and being implicitly threatened with professional retaliation if she did not comply with his advances.

Ms. Justice is seeking psychotherapy to address the trauma resulting from these experiences. She is now considering her options, which may include making a public statement, pressing criminal charges, or filing a civil lawsuit. She is seeking guidance on whether to proceed.

A small, white, four-pointed star icon located in the bottom right corner of the slide.

This situation raises several important considerations



- 1. How should the psychologist respond to her request for guidance?**
 - 2. What is the appropriate role of advocacy in this therapeutic relationship?**
 - 3. What ethical considerations (e.g., beneficence, nonmaleficence, patient autonomy) are involved?**
 - 4. How might the psychologist's personal history or biases influence their response?**
 - 5. If the psychologist encourages her to come forward and she subsequently experiences a professional or public backlash, could this damage the therapeutic alliance through patient blame?**
- 

Randomly Assign to Groups

Please see your handout

We have provided some options to consider when analyzing this vignette

We have dedicated 40 minutes for vignette analysis

We will come back as larger group to discuss your most salient or important insights in the last 20 minutes



Report Back To Larger Group

...

Deborah Derrickson Kossmann, Psy.D.



A decorative background featuring a pair of golden scales of justice and a dark green tree branch with leaves, set against a textured, light brown paper-like background.

We will be recording themes

...

Presenters



Wrapping It Up

...

Valerie Lemmon, PsyD



Wrapping It Up

...

Valerie Lemmon, PsyD





...



Wrapping Up

- Primary takeaways regarding moral courage and processes of advocacy
- Next steps for ourselves:
 - Design a “micro-advocacy” challenge for yourself for the upcoming week — what will it be?
 - Design a “micro-advocacy” challenge(s) for the people you teach/supervise for the upcoming month to engage in advocacy – what might these be?
 - How might you maintain these challenges for yourself and others?



Some Resources

APA Advocacy Services <https://www.apaservices.org/advocacy>

Burgess, C., & Batchelder, A. (2020). Improving clinical research to inform advocacy initiatives with underserved individuals. *The Behavior Therapist*, 43(7), 235–241.

Caplan, B., & Mitchell-Williams, J. (2024). How to respond to racist patients: Recommendations from a literature review. *The Cooper Rowan Medical Journal*, 67–84.
https://doi.org/10.31986/issn.2578.3343_vol5iss1.9

Ford, C. B. (2025). *One way back: A memoir*. St. Martin's Griffin.

Forestieri, K. J., Barnett, J. E., Mantella, N. M., & Ellis, A. E. (2024). Psychology trainees' and professionals' perceived importance of and engagement in advocacy for marginalized groups. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 55(3), 197–208. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pro0000543>

Resources

- Kiselica, M., & Robinson, M. (2001). Bringing advocacy counseling to life: The history, issues, and human dramas of social justice work in counseling. *Journal of Counseling & Development, Vol. 9*, 387-397.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2001.tb01985>
- Mbroh, H., Najjab, A., Knapp, S., & Gottlieb, M. C. (2020). Prejudiced patients: Ethical considerations for addressing patients' prejudicial comments in psychotherapy. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 51*(3), 284–290. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pro0000280>
- Salla, A., Newbigging, K., Joseph, D., & Eneje, E. (2023). A conceptual framework for culturally appropriate advocacy with racialised groups. *Frontiers in psychiatry, 14*, 1173591.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2023.1173591>



Reserve Questions

1. If you gave a 20-minute talk to a local PTA or Rotary Club, what psychology topic would you choose — and why?
2. What fear holds you back from advocating at the grassroots or state level? What would make it feel safer?
3. How could you incorporate advocacy skill-building into your supervision or teaching?
4. If you notice one policy or practice in your workplace or university that contradicts APA Ethics — and how might you address it? How would you feel? How likely would you actually do it?
5. Who in your network (non-psychologist) could be an advocacy ally? How could you collaborate?
6. What's one thing your state psychological association could do better to support member advocacy?
7. Design a “micro-advocacy” challenge for yourself next week — what will it be?

