
Social Justice and Counselling Psychology: Recommitment Through Action

Justice sociale et psychologie du counseling : engagement renouvelé dans l'action

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ABSTRACT

Historically, social justice has been one of the core values guiding the practice of counselling psychology. There are controversies surrounding the meaning of social justice and how it can be used to guide the roles and practices of counselling psychologists. The discussion here situates social justice as a primary value for professional identity. The article considers a definition of counselling psychology in Canada and whether or not it sufficiently supports a social justice orientation. The discussion focuses on the relationships between social and systemic influences on mental health. It also focuses on how counselling psychologists and counsellors could (a) expand their practices to address the conditions that have aversive effects, and (b) focus more on health promotion and well-being. The call for counselling psychologists and counsellors to position social justice centrally in their professional identity will require a fuller scope of practice to address social inequities and to help clients overcome barriers that persistently impact their mental health. Suggestions for recommitment to social justice are examined, with selected examples for practice, education, and research to illustrate how social justice can be strengthened through action.

RÉSUMÉ

Historiquement, la justice sociale a constitué l'une des valeurs de base servant de guide à la pratique de la psychologie du counseling. Or, tous ne s'entendent pas sur le sens à donner au concept de justice sociale ni sur la façon de l'utiliser pour guider les rôles et les pratiques des psychologues-conseillers. Dans cet article, la discussion définit la justice sociale comme une valeur primordiale de l'identité professionnelle. L'article propose une définition de la psychologie du counseling au Canada et pose la question de savoir si celle-ci soutient suffisamment l'orientation vers la justice sociale. L'analyse se centre sur les relations entre les influences sociales et systémiques sur la santé mentale. On s'intéresse également à la manière dont les psychologues-conseillers et les conseillers pourraient (a) élargir leurs pratiques pour aborder les conditions comportant des effets néfastes et (b) mettre davantage l'accent sur la promotion de la santé et le bien-être. L'appel lancé aux psychologues-conseillers et aux conseillers pour qu'ils intègrent la justice sociale au cœur de leur identité professionnelle exigera l'élargissement du champ d'exercice, afin de tenir compte des iniquités sociales et d'aider les clients à surmonter les obstacles qui se répercutent avec persistance sur leur santé mentale. On y examine des suggestions pour un engagement renouvelé à l'égard de la justice sociale, en présentant des exemples choisis de pratique, de formation, et de recherche destinés à illustrer la façon dont la justice sociale peut être renforcée par l'action.

Social justice has been central to the identity of counselling psychology since the inception of the profession (Palmer & Parish, 2008). The recent call for counselling psychologists to reconnect to social justice (Arthur & Collins, 2010, in press; Hunsaker, 2011; Sinacore, 2011) has not been without controversy and debate. Advocates on one side of the argument position social justice as the most important emerging ethical issue in counselling psychology to be addressed during the next 5 years (Herlihy & Dufrene, 2011), especially since researchers have increasingly emphasized the connections between systemic environmental factors and mental health problems (Jackson, 2011). Opponents on the other side of the argument have raised concerns about whether social justice should be a central aspect of the professional identity and practices of psychologists (Arredondo, Tovar-Blank, & Parham, 2008). There are few models of practice to guide what social justice work should look like (Arthur & Collins, in press), there is debate about which models of pedagogy should be used to prepare counsellors and counselling psychologists for social justice (Collins & Arthur, 2007; Sinacore & Enns, 2005), and little research exists to substantiate how the practice of social justice actually makes a difference in the lives of clients (Arthur & Collins, 2010).

A key issue underpins some of the debates and tensions surrounding social justice: Do counselling psychologists actually consider social justice to be the foundation for their professional identity and practices? The authors advocate for the position that all helping professions have a responsibility to consider how their professional education, research, and practice improves the lives of the people they serve. Thus, psychology as a discipline has this responsibility as well. Social justice cannot be assigned to just one single helping profession (e.g., social work), but instead needs to be located centrally as a core value for all helping professions. Counselling psychology, with its focus on domains such as health and wellness-promotion, psychoeducation, illness prevention, and remediation of client concerns, is in a strong position to lead psychology toward taking a stance on social justice. Recognizing that it is impossible to address all aspects of social justice in psychology within this article, the authors have aimed their discussion at introducing selected ideas and questions to encourage debate and conversation about the positioning of social justice within counselling psychology.

The purpose of this article is to outline and discuss the rationale for a recommitment to social justice as a central pillar of counselling psychology. First, a brief review of the conceptualization of social justice and its relevance for counselling psychology is provided. The discussion then turns to some of the implications that a stronger integration of social justice could have for counselling practice, education, and research. Finally, some key barriers to social justice practice are identified, along with potential strategies for addressing these barriers and promoting an embracement of social justice as a core foundation of professional practices. It should be noted that many counselling psychology and/or social justice journals are based in the United States and, as such, many Canadian and international authors end up publishing in American journals, making it difficult to discern which articles pertain specifically to a Canadian context. Given this intertwined

research literature, the authors have distinguished as thoroughly as possible between literature specific to Canadian counselling psychology and literature that combines counselling psychologists with other counselling professionals within a broader international context.

SOCIAL JUSTICE: MULTIPLE MEANINGS AND DIRECTIONS FOR PRACTICE

The term *social justice* has been increasingly used in the counselling psychology literature, in both Canada and the United States, although with multiple meanings and with reference to multiple practices. For example, contemporary views of social justice go beyond the idea of an equal distribution of material goods or social positions (Reisch, 2002). Issues of particular interest include decision-making power, division of labour, and culture that are maintained through marginalization, exploitation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence (Young, 1990). Recent discourse in the counselling psychology literature incorporates a broader macro-view on society's major social positions and how these positions are systematically interconnected in creating vulnerabilities to domination and deprivation of individuals and groups of people, resulting in serious impacts for their mental health (Chang, Crethar, & Ratts, 2010; Vera & Speight, 2003).

There is no unified definition of social justice; many authors use the term without articulating the conceptual roots and meaning (Arthur & Collins, 2010). Nonetheless, most social justice proponents within counselling psychology seem to generally agree that the goal of social justice action is to ensure that all individuals have equal opportunity to reach their personal, social, academic, and career potential, free from barriers in society (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007). The social justice perspective is grounded in the belief that every individual has the right to quality education, appropriate health care services, and equal employment opportunities, regardless of ethnicity, race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, economic status, and other individual characteristics (Lewis, Ratts, Paladino, & Toporek, 2011).

Counselling psychologists may find approaches to social justice that place emphasis on human development and growth (e.g., Young, 1990) to be particularly aligned with professional values. There is an aspirational standard in working with our clients to foster human potential, going beyond ensuring basic commodities in life (Arthur, 2014).

The overall aim of social justice practices is to minimize oppression and injustice in favour of equality, accessibility, and optimal developmental opportunities for all members of society. Social justice is about the elimination of any aspect of social structures or organizational practices that contributes to domination or oppression (Young, 1990); it follows that counselling psychologists have a professional responsibility to address systemic and social change. However, there are also strong developmental roots in social justice for fostering people's development and potential. The latter view is highly consistent with a foundation of counselling psychology to address health promotion, illness-prevention, and helping citizens to achieve positive mental health and well-being (Arthur & Collins, 2010).

Defining the Scope of Counselling Psychology in Canada

Historically, counselling psychology in Canada has distinguished itself from other professional specialty areas by focusing on activities that promote optimal development for individuals, groups, and systems (for a historical review of counselling psychology in Canada, see Young & Lalande, 2011). Our profession has also demonstrated a strong commitment to addressing major societal needs and the needs of those undergoing life transitions as a result of social changes (Sinacore, 2011). As highlighted in the special issue of the journal *Canadian Psychology* published in 2011, counselling psychology in Canada holds a particular value base that includes attention to diversity, social justice, and advocacy, in addition to a commitment to human development across the life span and an emphasis on wellness and prevention (Sinacore, 2011). Counselling psychology in Canada also includes a focus on how psychological concerns and challenges are situated in social contexts (Sinacore, 2011). Despite overlapping theoretical boundaries and broadening scopes of practice, a focus on (a) multiculturalism, social justice, and advocacy and (b) health, wellness, and prevention continue to be central to the counselling psychology specialization in Canada (Sinacore, 2011).

Counselling psychologists both in Canada and internationally have taken an active leadership role in the areas of multicultural issues and prevention. This has led to the emergence of a multicultural approach to counselling that is grounded in a social and cultural context, and it has also led to an emphasis on prevention, advocacy, and social change (e.g., Sue, 2001; Vera & Speight, 2003). Guidelines and models have been proposed for multicultural counselling (e.g., Arredondo et al., 1996; Collins & Arthur, 2010a, 2010b; Sue, 2001). However, the multiculturalism movement in counselling has been criticized for its lack of attention to issues of power, racism, sexism, homophobia, social injustice, and economic oppression (Moodley, 2007). In response, counselling psychologists have begun to embrace a social justice orientation to counselling, moving beyond the multicultural movement to ensure the voices and needs of historically marginalized groups are attended to in the research literature, within therapeutic practice, and in society at large (Arthur & Collins, in press; Moodley, 2009).

This historical preference for strengths-based approaches and commitment to optimal human functioning through personal growth, mental wellness, and life-span development were essential to the establishment of a common definition of counselling psychology in Canada (Beatch et al., 2009). The definition aims to be inclusive of our emphasis on diversity, broad systemic perspectives, wellness, person-environment fit, psychoeducation, addressing practical problems, navigating developmental life transitions, individual strengths, brief interventions, applied research, and a conceptualization of concerns in a context of growth and development (Bedi et al., 2011). Although Beatch et al. (2009) recognized the importance of social justice in Canadian counselling psychology, referring explicitly to advocacy and the need to attend to the social and cultural contexts of counselling and clients' lives, they omitted the term social justice from their

official Canadian definition of counselling psychology. Unfortunately, most professionals will read only the summary definition generated, rather than reviewing the larger report on the subject, and are thus left to conclude that social justice is not a central value or defining feature of counselling psychology in Canada. It is always challenging to synthesize and create definitions of this kind; however, the exclusion of social justice from the official definition endorsed by the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) reflects a further “pushing aside” or “forgetting” of social justice within our profession. This is concerning, given that social justice is prevalent in Canadian counselling psychology discourse (Arthur, Collins, McMahon, & Marshall, 2009; Sinacore, 2011; Young & Lalande, 2011), and has been recognized as an important characteristic of counselling psychology in Canada since its inception (Bedi et al., 2011).

Fueling the Social Justice Movement

Mounting support for the social justice movement in counselling psychology has been provided by professional counselling associations (e.g., in Canada, the Social Justice Chapter of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association; in the United States, the American Counseling Association, Counselors for Social Justice), prominent scholarly journals, and key leaders in the field (Hunsaker, 2011). Professional competencies have been proposed, special issues of counselling journals have been dedicated, and numerous presentations and formal keynote addresses have emphasized the importance of social justice within counselling psychology (Hunsaker, 2011). Counselling psychologists have been encouraged to “value a social justice orientation and integrate it into every aspect of training, research, and practice” (Sinacore, 2011, p. 246). This recent emphasis on social justice challenges counselling psychologists of all theoretical orientations to reconsider how the profession is viewed and practiced (Ratts, 2009).

Counselling psychologists have been strongly encouraged to consider the role that the profession plays within the dominant culture (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2003), to reconcile the role of helper with that of social-change agent (Vera & Speight, 2003), and to advocate for macro-level, pro-social systemic change on behalf of clients and those suffering oppression and marginalization (Herlihy & Dufrene, 2011; Moe, Perera-Diltz, & Sepulveda, 2010). Furthermore, social justice has been repeatedly proposed as the overarching umbrella that should define counselling psychology’s professional identity and guide future developments in the profession (Sue & Sue, 2008; Young & Lalande, 2011).

SOCIAL JUSTICE: FOR CLIENTS, THE PUBLIC, AND COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

As noted in the preceding discussion, counselling psychology has historically been committed to prevention, multiculturalism, and social justice, with many counselling psychologists still embracing these attitudes and values (Sinacore, 2011; Vera & Speight, 2003). Social justice is well aligned with the multiculturalism movement that has made great strides in the counselling psychology profes-

sion, as it takes a clear position on society's injustices related to aspects of people's cultural identities such as ethnicity, social class, sexual/affectional orientation (Alderson, 2013), gender, (dis)ability, religion, and their intersections (Arthur & Collins, in press; D'Andrea & Heckman, 2008; Vera & Speight, 2003). Multiculturally competent counselling psychologists are often more aware that those with less power in society experience a greater quantity of life's difficulties and, therefore, may be more predisposed to mental health concerns than those from dominant groups in our society whose cultural identities are deemed as "more" acceptable (Eriksen & Kress, 2006). This awareness extends to realizing that those from nondominant cultural groups have access to fewer of society's resources, often leading to delays in acquiring help or help that is considered to be credible.

Contextual Influences on Mental Health

Issues of social justice are integral to counselling psychology because people's health and well-being, including their mental health, are strongly influenced by social systems and societal beliefs. Our clients do not exist as individuals independent of society, culture, and context (Crethar & Ratts, 2008). There is growing awareness of the connections between experiences of oppression and mental health (Chang et al., 2010). Several large-scale studies have documented the connection between psychological disorders and environmental stressors such as unemployment, poverty, poor living conditions, and minority status (e.g., Jackson, 2011; Poteat, Mereish, DiGiovanni, & Koenig, 2011). Researchers have also highlighted the way relational disconnections—often experienced by marginalized groups due to power differentials, gender role socialization, racism, cultural oppression, health disparities, and heterosexism—can lead to a sense of shame, isolation, and humiliation (Hartling, Rosen, Walker, & Jordan, 2000; Miller & Stiver, 1997). Notably, these ongoing experiences of isolation can lead not only to the disempowerment of many members of oppressed groups, but also to a higher risk of physical, emotional, and psychological difficulties (Comstock et al., 2008).

Numerous empirical neurological, biological, and psychological studies have found that (a) the pain of exclusion follows the same neural pathways created by physical injuries (e.g., Eisenberger & Lieberman, 2004; MacDonald & Leary, 2005); (b) the lack of connection and social support results in brain dysfunctions (e.g., Baldwin & Taylor, 2010); and (c) growth-fostering supportive relationships can help heal destructive neural patterns (Jordan, 2010) and diminish the psychological effects of both social and physical pain (Riva, Wirth, & Williams, 2011). Experiences of isolation, shame, humiliation, oppression, marginalization, and aggression are forms of relational violations that appear to be at the core of human suffering (Birrell & Freyd, 2006; Hartling et al., 2000). Various forms of cultural oppression, social exclusion, and other social injustices underlie the pain and trauma that individuals from marginalized groups routinely experience in their everyday lives (Birrell & Freyd, 2006; Jordan, 2010). Counselling psychologists need to understand the ways these political, social, and economic forces contribute to serious mental health issues.

The increasingly individualistic view on social issues such as poverty, drug addiction, abuse, and homelessness (Young, 2011) blames individuals for not taking personal responsibility for their own lives and for choosing instead to engage in deviant or self-destructive behaviour. These kinds of arguments are incompatible with support for public services such as health promotion and illness prevention; they place causation solely on individual choices, assume background contextual conditions are fair, and that only those struggling have a responsibility for ameliorating their own conditions (Young, 2011). Unfortunately, this is a narrow view of social reality, as both personal choices and structural factors contribute to social problems, contextual background conditions are not fair, and all citizens (even those who are not currently struggling with social issues) have a level of personal responsibility to (at minimum) consider the effect of their actions on others (Young, 2011). Systemic policies, sociocultural shifts, and a focus on economics have led to an “inequality of conditions, of wealth, and of opportunity” (Reich, 2007, p. 163). Consumer and investor voices often compel our governments to serve the interests of corporations rather than those of citizens, leading to choices made for a competitive edge versus the health and well-being of the public (Reich, 2007). Although individuals make up social structures, citizens (including counselling psychologists) have a shared responsibility for monitoring political institutions and ensuring structural injustices are prevented and ameliorated (Young, 2011). In other words, citizens have a collective responsibility to ensure justice, as social issues (including mental health problems) are a function of complex institutional factors that leave many people behind.

Examining Roles and Practices

Counselling psychologists have important roles to play in offering responsive interventions within mental health systems that take into consideration contextual influences on people's lives. However, there is a danger that the primary role of counselling psychologists, due to funding mandates, will further drift to remedial interventions (Arthur & Collins, 2010; Vera & Speight, 2003). A key question designed to stimulate debate and discussion is this: What are the responsibilities of counselling psychologists to address the social and structural conditions that lead individuals and groups to disproportionately experience mental health concerns? In the following discussion, the authors highlight examples of the links between social justice and the helping relationship, addressing the sources that contribute to mental health issues, cultural competence, and community engagement.

Recommitting to social justice foundations and integrating them into counselling psychology's professional identity and practices first of all means openly acknowledging how issues of power, privilege, and oppression impact people's mental health (Fouad, Gerstein, & Toporek, 2006). However, more is needed than awareness and acknowledgement; social injustices are addressed through active practices. This is an important point to make because, although the concept of social justice may be appealing, it is important to translate the commitment to social justice into action (Arthur & Collins, in press). In order for the work of

counselling psychologists to be fully effective, they must address the sources of psychological distress at the cultural and institutional levels (Baluch, Pieterse, & Bolden, 2004). It has been emphasized repeatedly in the literature that the work of counselling psychologists “will be an endless and losing venture unless the true sources of the problem (unequal access to resources, stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, and oppression) are changed” (Sue, 1995, p. 476).

Services that are designed to focus exclusively on the individual internal self often ignore systemic, institutional, and cultural patterns and influences. Counselling psychology needs to recommit to addressing the needs of people who are more vulnerable to mental health concerns and go beyond helping them to adapt to aversive social and structural conditions. In turn, counselling psychologists are being urged to view both individuals and social systems as clients, and to reconceptualize offices to include clients’ homes, schools, neighbourhoods, and larger communities (Ratts, 2009).

Counselling psychologists may need to consider the ways in which they have unintentionally perpetuated negative experiences of people seeking treatment for mental health concerns. Unfortunately, traditional mental health systems have not always adequately addressed the effects of debilitating social and emotional distress within diverse populations (Hage, 2003). Oppression and injustices are often institutionalized at societal levels, but they are necessarily enacted in the context of interpersonal relationships (Birrell & Freyd, 2006), including professional practice relationships. Thus, counselling relationships that are not guided by social justice ideology have the potential to further perpetuate the silencing and oppression that clients experience in their everyday lives (Comstock et al., 2008).

The sense of disconnection, isolation, and disempowerment many clients experience can be exacerbated when counselling psychologists fail to acknowledge the contextual and social factors that contribute to clients’ problems (Hartling et al., 2000). Social justice activists emphasize that counselling from any perspective that places all responsibility for change on the individual is “relatively culturally impositional” (Chang et al., 2010, p. 83), since it functions from the presumption that change occurs within the individual regardless of environment. As such, helping approaches focused entirely on individuals without regard for environmental factors may not be acting in the best interests of the clients served (Chang et al., 2010; Prilleltensky, 1989).

Some clients find themselves dealing with marginalization within the structures of therapy, given traditional conventions about how and when therapy is offered, and the potentially negative stigmatization of formal diagnoses (Strong, Gaete, Sametband, French, & Eeson, 2012). Notably, some populations find themselves fitting outside of the traditional therapy structures, expectations, and language (e.g., Moodley, 2009). Counselling approaches can inadvertently further pathologize diverse cultures or groups of clients through differentiating the needs of “those clients” as beyond the reach of traditional counselling psychology practices. For example, the roles of counselling psychologists for addressing the intersections of mental health and poverty illustrate attitudinal and structural barriers for service provision (Pope & Arthur, 2009).

Adopting a social justice value in counselling practice implies a commitment to cultural competence and a broad systemic conceptualization of clients (Chung, Bemak, Ortiz, & Sandoval-Perez, 2008; Comstock et al., 2008; D'Andrea & Heckman, 2008). The emphasis on cultural competence is substantiated by the experiences of nondominant groups of people in Canadian society who continue to experience sociopolitical and systemic oppression (Arthur & Collins, 2010). It has been suggested that counselling psychologists should work from a culturally responsive or multicultural framework that is grounded in a multisystemic perspective of client problems, including not only individual concerns but also the needs of groups or communities (Greenleaf & Williams, 2009; Speight & Vera, 2004). More specifically, professionals would need to be active in addressing social injustices, inequalities, and oppression, taking action toward social change and attending to the needs of groups of people who experience oppression (Moe et al., 2010; Toporek, Lewis, & Crethar, 2009). This would also include advocating with or on behalf of clients, communities, and change programs, and empowering others to engage in self-advocacy, resist oppression, and make social change (Greenleaf & Williams, 2009; Toporek et al., 2009).

Furthermore, counselling psychologists adopting a social justice approach would need to educate clients, colleagues, decision-makers, and the public about the effects of oppression and injustices on mental health (Constantine, Hage, Kindaichl, & Bryant, 2007; Crethar, Rivera, & Nash, 2008). Counselling psychologists should work to raise awareness of systems of oppression and injustices, teaching others to be aware of systemic forces of oppression (Chang et al., 2010; Roysircar, 2009). Through engaging in consciousness-raising, counselling psychologists would be supporting ways of seeing beyond individual blame for mental health issues to better understand the impact of social systems in creating aversive conditions that lead to mental health concerns.

Although consciousness-raising may be an intervention, additional steps may be necessary to help clients overcome barriers. Counselling psychologists are encouraged to expand the scope of their practices and the settings where they work (Brown, Payne, Dressner, & Green, 2010). For example, counselling psychologists might consider the conventions of their practice and how alternative helping roles and out-of-office interventions might be more directly connected to addressing the needs of people who experience marginalization in our society (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2007). Psychological intervention strategies would consequently extend beyond the therapy office in order to serve people who may experience barriers for accessing mental health services; they could incorporate community-based approaches to service delivery in public arenas such as community centres, churches, schools, and legislative bodies (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001; Pope & Arthur, 2009). Complex client needs may be approached through interprofessional practice, through which counselling psychologists work collaboratively with their clients and with other professionals to design comprehensive approaches to mental health services and to resource allocation.

Counselling psychologists have skills for helping clients to address their personal concerns, but services should not end with helping individuals cope or adapt

to aversive conditions in society (Vera & Speight, 2003). Rather, counselling psychologists also have skills for enacting systemic and social change. Counselling psychologists can take leadership roles through engaging in collaboration, partnership, and cooperation with clients, community members, professionals from other disciplines, levels of government, and global action organizations in an effort to promote systemic and social change (Constantine et al., 2007; Marsella, 2006). Counselling psychologists are continuously addressing some of the most complex social issues that can exacerbate concerns such as school dropout, poverty, discrimination, substance abuse, and political violence. A narrow context of psychological practice focused on remedial interventions is insufficient to address these complex concerns, and no single profession can effectively address all these issues in isolation.

CRITIQUES OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT

Although strong arguments have been made to support social justice as a foundation for counselling psychology, many professionals in the field hesitate. Scholars have argued that the movement is in need of in-depth examination, as little critical feedback has been provided to inform the adoption of social justice within counselling psychology (Smith, Reynolds, & Rovnak, 2009). The currently available criticisms of social justice are worth highlighting as they raise important points for the future professional identity and practices of counselling psychologists.

Political Implications of Social Justice

One of the major criticisms of the social justice movement in counselling psychology is that it appears to align primarily with the political left (socialist, democratic, and liberal ideals), with professionals positioned centre-leftist on the political spectrum often credited with “shoulder[ing] the lion’s share of social justice work” (Shullman, Celeste, & Strickland, 2006, p. 508). Critics have pointed out that issues and values associated with the left end of politics can conflict with the values of counselling psychologists who have other conservative political or religious affiliations (Hunsaker, 2011). As such, these critics assert that engaging in activism based on identity politics would be incompatible for many counselling psychologists.

Furthermore, adoption of a social justice agenda might confine all counselling psychologists into efforts for affiliation-specific public policy change, independent of their political orientation (Hunsaker, 2011). For example, advocating for increased funding to support homeless individuals may not fit with psychologists’ conservative political positions. Further, advocating for marriage equality for all members of society may not be compatible with some psychologists’ religious beliefs about sexual/affectual orientation. Thus, questions have been raised about whether counselling psychologists should instead be left to engage in social action in whatever ways are compatible with their own politics and values.

Finally, the social justice movement has been criticized for being more focused on using psychology for political purposes than on enhancing psychological

practice (Hunsaker, 2011). The question that arises from this debate is how do political actions enter the arena of professional practice? The authors advocate that professional practice is not neutral. The key debate appears to be about how counselling psychologists might infuse social justice directly into their conceptualization and approaches with clients, while exercising responsibilities in their professional roles and collective power to address the conditions that compromise people's mental health.

Lack of Empirical and Applied Support

Some scholars claim that there is little research evidence for the claims that a culture and social justice infused counselling approach is in the best interest of clients (Hunsaker, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). Moreover, a focus on social conditions rather than on individuals places entire nondominant populations as the central concern of counselling psychology (Hunsaker, 2011). This criticism challenges counselling psychologists to consider the intersections between individual and social circumstances.

Whose Views Are Given Priority?

Critics have claimed that adoption of a political social justice agenda in counselling psychology constitutes a degradation of liberal education and professional freedom (Hunsaker, 2011). Advocates of the social justice movement in counselling psychology have been accused of lacking sufficient moderation in attempts to promote certain agendas (Smith et al., 2009). Academics often play a disproportionate role within the social justice movement, relative to the role of counselling psychologists involved in therapeutic practice (Hunsaker, 2011), further contributing to the claim that the social justice movement is aligned primarily with the liberal political leftists of academia whose sentiments may not be shared across the profession. This point raises a serious question about the ways that counselling psychologists who work in applied practice settings can incorporate social justice into their professional work.

These contrasting points of view offer acknowledgement of the "critical, controversial, [and] political" (Speight & Vera, 2004, p. 110) nature of the call for strengthening social justice in counselling psychology. Essentially, it is timely to consider if the field is ready to embrace social justice as a foundation of professional identity or if counselling psychology will fall prey to the adage: Social justice is an important concept but it is too (politically) hard to practice.

SOCIAL JUSTICE: A ROAD WORTH TRAVELLING

A commitment to social justice pushes counselling psychologists to be more explicit about their values and political ideologies (Young & Lalande, 2011). A social justice orientation directs counselling psychologists to reflect upon their own prejudices and biases, advocate for clients, and work toward social change (Sinacore et al., 2011). However, taking this "road less travelled by" (Hage, 2003, p. 556)

would require the difficult tasks of (a) confronting pressures from larger social systems in order to challenge the status quo, (b) facing the enormous complexity surrounding issues of oppression and discrimination, and (c) tailoring counselling psychology intervention strategies to diverse issues and sociocultural contexts.

Terms that have traditionally been used to describe counselling professionals such as “therapist,” “psychologist,” or “counsellor” are now being expanded to include terms such as “social change agent,” “activist,” or “social advocate” with increased frequency in both the U.S. and Canadian literature (Ratts, 2009). However, it is debatable whether counselling psychologists see themselves as social change agents or activists, or whether they feel equipped to practice in those roles (Arthur & Collins, 2010). These new descriptors of counselling psychologists imply a growing social justice mindset, leading counselling psychologists to reflect on whether the profession in its current state aligns with their values and beliefs (Ratts, 2009).

As has been strongly encouraged in the United States (Sue & Sue, 2008), Canadian professionals need to further consider what it means to be social-justice-oriented psychologists, to explore their commitment to social justice, and to re-examine the directions of their interventions. Given that counselling psychologists are generally well equipped to understand individuals in the context of the oppressive systemic structures in which they live (Sinacore et al., 2011), it has been suggested that the roles of counselling psychologists should be expanded to include (a) advocacy, (b) outreach, (c) prevention, (d) consultation, and (e) political action (Palmer & Parish, 2008). Fortunately, counselling psychologists have begun to clarify and advance a social justice agenda by articulating ways in which training, practice, and research can be transformed through the lens of social justice (Goodman et al., 2004; Hage et al., 2007). The previous sections have heavily emphasized roles and responsibilities for practice. The field of counselling psychology would benefit from more examples of what practice from various social justice models and principles could look like. It appears timely to translate concepts related to social justice to examples that would be instructive for people entering the profession and encourage dialogue about best practices. The authors turn now to summarize a few key directions from which they hope to encourage further debate and discussion about the ways that counselling psychologists can recommit to social justice through the domains of professional education and research.

Directions for Professional Education

The previous discussion leads to two key questions: (a) What should or should not be taught as part of the professional education curriculum in counselling psychology? and (b) Which teaching and learning methods are most effective for translating ideas about social justice into practical skills? Although closely connected to the multicultural movement in counselling psychology, the social justice counselling pedagogy is set apart by its emphasis on community engagement (Brubaker, Puig, Reese, & Young, 2010; Constantine et al., 2007). Therefore, leaders in the field have proposed models for incorporating social justice interventions into

graduate training (e.g., McWhirter & McWhirter, 2007; Talleyrand, Chung, & Bemak, 2005). These proposed models for infusing social justice into professional education all emphasize (a) self-evaluation by programs, faculty, and students; (b) promoting critical consciousness; (c) adding or enhancing coursework; (d) generating opportunities for community engagement and sharing power; and (e) fostering student empowerment (Beer, Spanierman, Greene, & Todd, 2012).

Graduate training should expose students to broad conceptualizations of multiculturalism, cultural competence, and socioeconomic inequity (Odegard & Vereen, 2010; Pack-Brown, Thomas, & Seymour, 2008). A starting point for counselling psychologists to explore social justice involves a focus on self-awareness. In order to successfully engage in social justice within counselling roles, it is recommended that professionals examine their own assumptions and values, including the roles of privilege in their own lives and possible influences on professional practices (Brubaker et al., 2010; Parra-Cardona, Holtrop, & Cordova, 2005). Learning experiences should be designed to connect individuals' experiences to social issues, raise awareness of oppression and personal biases, and empower others to also be aware of social injustices (Burnes & Manese, 2008; Pieterse, Evans, Risner-Butner, Collins, & Mason, 2009). Rather than just learning about the conceptualization of social justice, professional education sets the stage for more active approaches to addressing social injustices (Collins, Arthur, Brown, & Kennedy, 2013).

Moreover, training in social justice and advocacy roles needs to include hands-on field experience that connects academic learning to real-world contexts, such as involving students in social or public policy and community projects, and including practica, internships, or service-learning courses that offer students opportunities to engage in applied social justice work (Collins et al., 2013; Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011; Nilsson & Schmidt, 2005). It is critical to infuse an awareness of social justice throughout counselling psychology graduate programs, including academic curriculum, skills training, student research, practica/internships, and supervision/mentoring (Constantine et al., 2007; Palmer & Parish, 2008; Zalaquett, Foley, Tillotson, Dinsmore, & Hof, 2008). The infusion of social justice into counsellor education is necessary to ensure students graduate with the requisite knowledge and skills for effectively working with a range of client populations within different counselling roles (Sinacore et al., 2011).

Perhaps counselling psychology could learn from and share with other disciplines (e.g., social work, career development) about how professionals engage through curriculum content, instructional methodology, and practicum experiences to maximize their learning. Beyond professional education contexts, counselling psychologists work in organizational contexts that are bounded by funding mandates, formal policies, and informal practices. While enacting roles to address social injustices, even the best prepared helping professionals may face numerous barriers in their work environment, such as time, resources, and support from colleagues and managers (Arthur et al., 2009). Exposure to experiential learning of social justice work during graduate training would better prepare counselling psychologists for these varied work environments. It is important to prepare stu-

dents for some of the realities found in practice settings, and to help them develop effective strategies to address such barriers. Beyond individual efforts, professional organizations may have more collective power to address the conditions under which counselling psychologists work and are supported to legitimately address the complex needs of clients.

Directions for Research

The implications of embracing social justice as a foundation for counselling psychology extends to the nature of research conducted, the topics investigated, the methodologies selected, and the dissemination of research findings (Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011; Palmer, 2004). Counselling psychology researchers could more frequently choose to explore the impact of social justice issues on various populations; investigate the nature, incidence, experiences, and prevention of social injustices; or study constructs such as advocacy, peace, justice, resiliency, and nonviolence from a counselling psychology perspective (Dworkin & Yi, 2003). Social justice researchers could also be encouraged to incorporate a wide range of research methodologies (e.g., quantitative and qualitative approaches) that serve to empower students, research participants, and communities through their involvement in research projects that can influence public policy and community systems (Brown & Perry, 2011; Palmer & Parish, 2008). Researchers need to consider what approaches they are using, the potential impact of those approaches, and how research might be used to positively impact the people engaged to participate in research.

A key point to consider is how to increase the foundation of knowledge that informs social justice in counselling psychology while also amplifying the voices and increasing the engagement of people who have been marginalized in Canadian society. Furthermore, counselling psychology researchers adopting a social justice lens would be encouraged to incorporate advocacy, systemic activism, and education or consciousness-raising into the process of conducting and disseminating research. Demonstrations of the value of psychology research that incorporates a social justice lens would, ideally, invite greater organizational, financial, and social support for social justice initiatives and research projects. Researchers are challenged to consider an ethical value of research for enhancing the lives of participants, and to consider the return to community (Pettifor, 2010).

CONCLUSION: GAINING MOMENTUM FOR RECOMMITMENT AND ACTION

With growing awareness of the systemic, organizational, and sociocultural influences on people's mental health and well-being, there has been a call for counselling psychologists to strengthen their commitment to social justice in professional education, research, and practice. The points offered in this discussion have introduced ideas about what it would mean for counselling psychologists to incorporate social justice into their professional identity and to expand their professional roles as advocates for social change. It is important for the growth

of the profession of counselling psychology to identify and address barriers that continue to perpetuate the discrepancy between social justice rhetoric and a strong recommitment to practice.

First, there appears to be resistance to addressing social privilege as an issue relevant to the profession of counselling psychology (Arredondo et al., 2008; Hunsaker, 2011). However, social privilege is not an issue reserved for any one profession. Rather, it is time to revisit and envision the unique ways in which counselling psychology can address the impact of social oppression on people's mental health. Counselling psychology in Canada needs to find the conceptual and methodological grounding for the principles that underlie social justice (Young & Lalande, 2011).

Another challenge is finding ways to incorporate social justice curriculum in meaningful ways within professional education. Allocating time to social justice action and skill-building—which often fall outside of traditional tenure-track and promotion-based activities—and finding colleagues willing to move beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries to align themselves with social justice goals have proven difficult (Beer et al., 2012; Goodman et al., 2004). However, the field is beginning to see examples of how curriculum in counselling psychology can support students to expand their skills for addressing social justice in professional practice (Collins et al., 2013; Sinacore & Kassan, 2011). On an encouraging note, researchers have found that students graduating from counselling psychology programs, along with practicing professionals in the field, are increasingly realizing that counselling and social justice are vitally linked (Beer et al., 2012; Chang et al., 2010). However, recommitting to social justice should not be left only to new graduates. New members of a profession bring fresh ideas and often question the status quo, but they are also often the individuals who hold the least amount of power for making change within professional organizations and in larger society. The recent focus on social justice is a matter of concern for all counselling psychologists, regardless of years of experience.

It would seem that although the concept of social justice is one of the foundational values for counselling psychologists, there is an uneasy relationship about how far to go in recommitting to a professional identity that could guide the practices of counselling psychologists in new directions. It may be challenging for counselling psychologists to fully embrace a professional identity that incorporates social justice, since few practical models for implementing this orientation into counselling practice have been developed (Mellin, Hunt, & Nichols, 2011). The practices of counselling psychologists might include advocacy with or on behalf of clients, collaboration with community groups to better understand their mental health needs and culturally relevant interventions, empowerment of people to seek appropriate resources, and activism for social change. The bottom line is that more examples are needed of how to do social justice work in our roles as professional helpers. The points raised in this article are intended to prompt discussion and stimulate debate about the ways that counselling psychologists can become more actively involved with social justice in their professional practice roles.

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