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How Wearing a Social Justice Lens Can Support You, Your Clients, and the Larger Community: An Intersectionality Workshop With a Twist
À quel point le fait d'adopter un point de vue de justice sociale peut vous venir en aide, ainsi qu'à vos clients et à l'ensemble de la collectivité : un atelier original sur l'intersectionnalité

Melissa Jay
Athabasca University
Jason Brown
Western University

ABSTRACT
Counsellors may not comprehend fully the impact of their blind spots as a result of unconscious cultural encapsulation. The authors propose a self-reflective method by which counsellors can self-examine their assumptions about diversity and intersectionality. They invite readers to engage with the contents of this article to identify their blind spots, biases, and assumptions through self-reflective exercises. This article summarizes an intersectionality workshop with a twist that was offered by Melissa Jay, Jason Brown, and Rebecca Ward at the 2019 conference of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association. The intention of the workshop was (a) to raise consciousness about systemic oppression, (b) to explore Collins's (2018c) culturally responsive and socially just case conceptualization as the framework for the workshop, (c) to bring client intersectionality to life using four vignettes they created, (d) to reflect on client intersectionality and cultural identity, and (e) to propose a method by which counsellors can self-examine their assumptions about diversity and intersectionality, leading to more culturally competent counselling.

RÉSUMÉ
Il arrive que les conseillères et les conseillers ne saisissent pas complètement l'incidence de leurs angles morts associés à une encapsulation culturelle inconsciente. Les auteurs proposent une méthode d'autoréflexion permettant aux conseillères et aux conseillers d'examiner par introspection leurs idées préconçues à propos de la diversité et de l'intersectionnalité. Ils invitent les lecteurs à s'imprégner de cet article pour cerner leurs angles morts, leurs préjugés, et leurs idées préconçues grâce à des exercices d'introspection. L'article présente le résumé d'un atelier original sur l'intersectionnalité

offert par Melissa Jay, Jason Brown, et Rebecca Ward lors du congrès 2019 de l'Association canadienne de counseling et de psychothérapie. L'atelier avait pour objet (a) de sensibiliser à la question de l'oppression systémique, (b) d'explorer la conceptualisation des cas adaptée sur le plan culturel et socialement juste que propose Collins (2018c) en tant que cadre de l'atelier, (c) de mettre l'accent sur l'intersectionnalité du client en ayant recours à quatre vignettes que les auteurs ont créées, (d) de réfléchir à l'intersectionnalité du client et à son identité culturelle, et (e) de proposer une méthode qui permette aux conseillères et aux conseillers d'auto-examiner leurs idées reçues au sujet de la diversité et de l'intersectionnalité, ce qui devrait favoriser un counseling plus compétent sur le plan culturel.

When counselling practitioners conceptualize a client through a single lens rather than consider intersecting cultural identities, they do not develop a contextualized understanding of a client's lived experience, which leads to cultural blind spots. Counselling practitioners may not be aware of the impact of their blind spots as a result of unconscious cultural encapsulation. It is with the intention of readers becoming aware of their cultural blind spots that we invite them to engage in this article as a self-reflective exercise. We are proposing a self-reflective method by which counselling practitioners can examine their assumptions about diversity and intersectionality, for themselves and for their clients, while practising *cultural humility*. Cultural humility refers to our ability to remain open to the identities most important to someone else (Hook et al., 2013).

Inspired by Black feminism, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in 1989 and defined it as the interlocking and inseparable relationship between various aspects of our cultural identities that intersect with one another and that lead to intersecting forms of discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989; Cho et al., 2013; Collins, 2018b; Crenshaw, 2019; Shin et al., 2017). Intersectionality supports us in contextualizing how interlocking systems of oppression and privilege are experienced by groups and individuals (Shin et al., 2017). While Crenshaw's work originated in exploring intersectional identities faced by Black women, the term has shifted since then to explore a variety of cultural identities and how their intersection enhances oppression or privilege (Cho et al., 2013). Cultural identities include and are certainly not limited to race, sexual orientation, ability, disability, class, religion/spirituality, sex, gender, gender identity, age, language, Indigeneity, and ethnicity (McNair, 2017; Sinacore et al., 2011). Such aspects of our cultural identities emerge to form our multiple identities (Mizock & Page, 2016). Our awareness of intersectionality can help us view ourselves and others from an individual, cultural, environmental, and systemic lens (Crenshaw, 1991). This can support counsellors in shifting from viewing individuals through a single-axis lens to viewing them more globally, a lens through which we see theory and practice merge (Cho et al., 2013).

Intersectionality is a primary component in the therapeutic relationship, given that each dyad brings together two unique individuals with intersecting identities. Authentic therapeutic relationships are established through the recognition that we are all a product of complex, interacting, and evolving identities. By attending to the intersectionality of an individual's multiple identities, we invite ourselves and others to deepen our self-awareness and social positioning, including in terms of privilege and marginalization (Collins, 2018b). By deepening our self-awareness of intersectionality, we honour an individual's multiple identities as unique, fluid, and contextual (Collins, 2018b). We can then invite our clients to deepen their awareness of intersectionality and offer them space, with curiosity and support, where they can express and integrate all parts of themselves (Ratts et al., 2016). Integration in the therapeutic working alliance is made possible when collaborating on exploring intersectionality, leading to richer lived experiences and positive health outcomes (McNair, 2017).

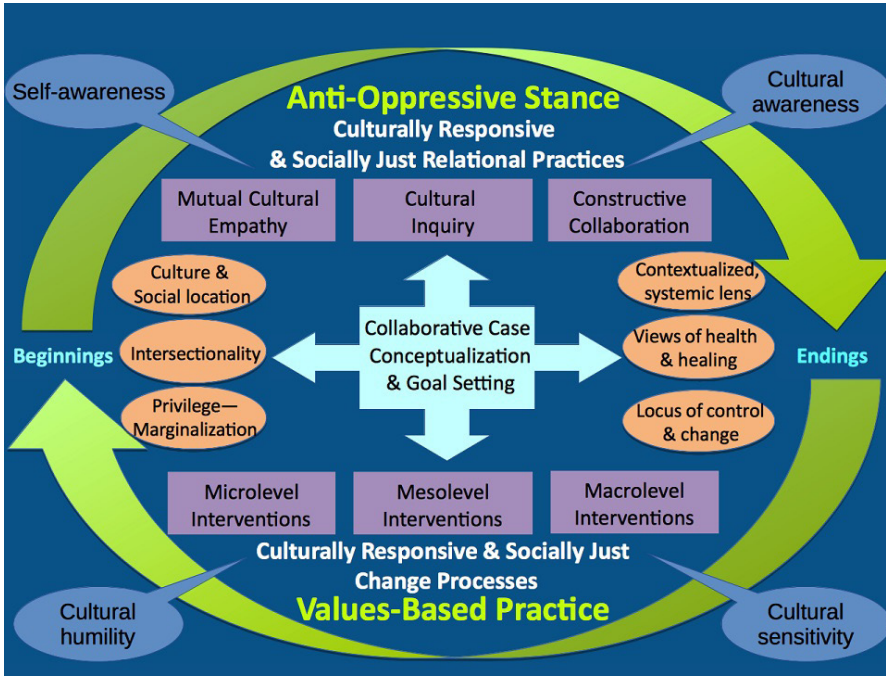
It is essential that we as counselling practitioners attend to intersectionality and to how our own identities intersect with our clients' identities within the working alliance (Collins, 2018c). The intersectionality of our identities and of our clients' identities is a conduit through which we create social justice in action (Mizock & Page, 2016). Collins's (2018a) Culturally Responsive and Socially Just (CRSJ) case conceptualization framework offers counselling practitioners a values-based and anti-oppressive stance for CRSJ case conceptualization and goal setting (see Figure 1) in our client work.

By focusing our client work around three core questions, we can create opportunities for collaboration within the working alliance, leading us to consider "what specific goals and processes support the client to attain their preferred outcomes" (Collins, 2018a, p. 581). These three core questions consist of the following:

- What is/are the client's presenting concern(s)?
- How do the client and the counsellor make meaning of the "problem" and the context(s) in which it arises?
- How would the client like their lived experience(s) to be different? (Collins, 2018a, p. 581).

This article summarizes an intersectionality workshop with a twist, offered by Melissa Jay, Jason Brown, and Rebecca Ward at the 2019 conference of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association. The intention of the workshop was (a) to raise consciousness about systemic oppression, (b) to explore Collins's (2018c) culturally responsive and socially just case conceptualization as the framework for the workshop, which we facilitated through the application of vignettes as well as the twist, (c) to bring client intersectionality to life using four vignettes we created, (d) to reflect on client intersectionality and cultural identity, and (e) to propose a method by which counsellors can self-examine their assumptions about diversity and intersectionality, leading to more culturally competent counselling.

Figure 1
A Conceptual Framework for Culturally Responsive and Socially Just Counselling Practice

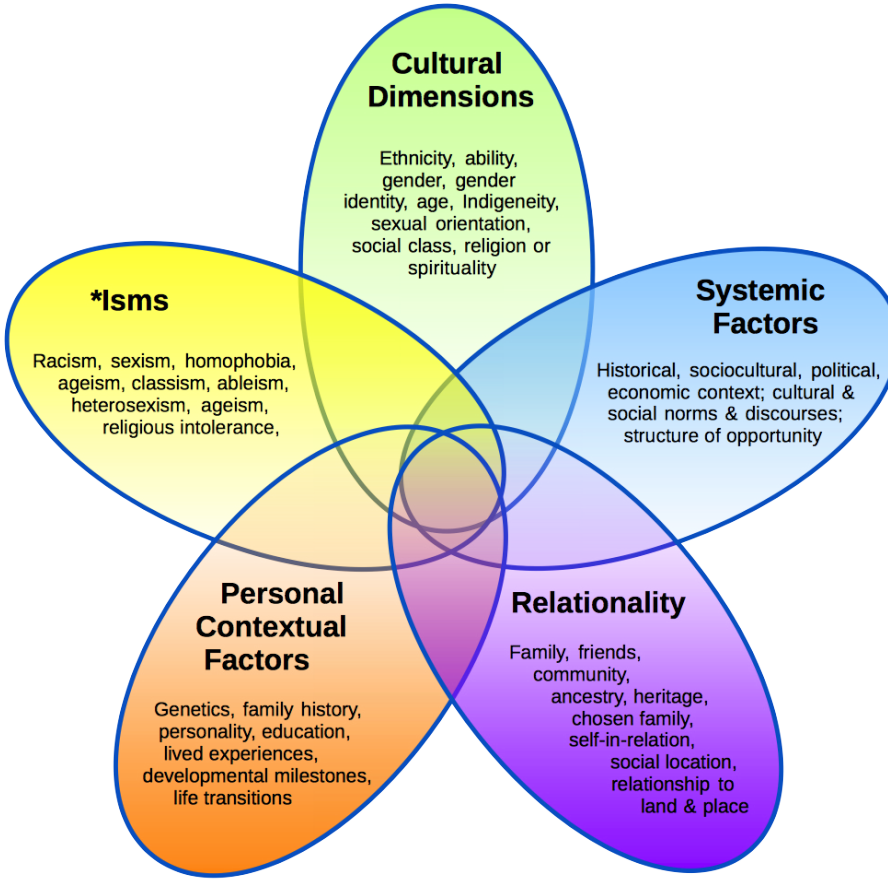


Note. From *Embracing Cultural Responsivity and Social Justice: Re-Shaping Professional Identity in Counselling Psychology* (p. 13), by S. Collins, 2018, Counselling Concepts. Copyright 2018 by S. Collins. Reprinted with permission.

Intersectionality in the Counselling Literature

Intersectionality has become a more recognized term over the years, and yet, in their content analysis, Shin et al. (2017) assessed counselling psychology's engagement with an intersectional perspective and found that only 40 out of 6,715 articles focused specifically on intersectionality. Culturally competent counselling is made possible when a counselling practitioner is honouring intersectionality by way of co-constructing meaning and understanding a client's personal cultural identities (Ali & Courtland, 2019). From a socially just standpoint, we know that everyone's cultural identities and group connections are diverse and based on age, ethnicity, Indigeneity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, ability, religion/spirituality, language, and other elements not included here (Sinacore et al., 2011). Each of these elements represents dominant or non-dominant

Figure 2
Factors Influencing Cultural Identity



Note. From *Embracing Cultural Responsivity and Social Justice: Re-Shaping Professional Identity in Counselling Psychology* (p. 58), by S. Collins, 2018, Counselling Concepts. Copyright 2018 by S. Collins. Reprinted with permission.

groups/identities or a combination of these, depending on a person's social location at any given time (Paré, 2014). Some of these aspects are more significant over time, often overlapping, and multi-faceted factors influencing multiple cultural identities across contexts (Collins, 2018b; see Figure 2).

The complexity of cultural identities is exemplified in the work of Cor and Chan (2017), who shared that there are multiple identities unrepresented within the highly recognized and limiting LGBTQ acronym. By identifying and acknowledging cultural identities that are under-represented, according to

forms of binary thinking, counselling practitioners can uplift those who represent systemically marginalized identities (McNair, 2017). Counselling practitioners can explore multiple identities, including gender and/or sexual orientation, by expanding their own competence and by acknowledging the full and evolving acronym 2SLGBTQIA+ to ensure that clients do not have to become teachers for counsellors in response to a counsellor's blind spots. Blind spots can lead to unintentional oppression within the working alliance, resulting in the client hiding certain aspects of self in ways that lead to fragmented cultural identities (McNair, 2017). Fragmented cultural identities can impact the deterioration of health and well-being due to the restrictive nature of hiding various aspects of self in an attempt to avoid oppression.

Systemic oppression is defined as the mistreatment of peoples within a social identity group that is established, supported, and enforced by society and its institutions (Portland Community College, n.d.) based on the belief in an inherent system of superiority or inferiority. Systemic oppression can lead to viewing client concerns as specific to the client, part of the client's imagination, and/or misaligned from broader societal norms (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). Systemic oppression is often exposed by way of *isms*. For our workshop, we used the term *ism* to encompass socio-cultural ideologies that further cultural marginalization and cultural oppression, including but not limited to racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, heterosexism, classism, spiritualism and all other forms of intolerance. For counsellors working from a social justice lens, it is important to attend to a client's lived experiences related to *isms* and to remain mindful of how they intersect and overlap with each other (McNair, 2017; Mizock & Page, 2016). Counselling practitioners who explore socio-cultural components with clients are engaging in social justice by way of empowering the individual (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). Through remaining open to understanding multiple identities and the intersecting aspects of ourselves and our clients, we invite ourselves to shift from individual concerns to systemic concerns and to begin to identify how systemic oppression is imposed.

Understanding intersectionality can support counselling practitioners in shifting from centring the client's presenting concerns on the micro level to incorporating and co-collaborating in dismantling and confronting systemic oppression as the origin of difficulty for marginalized groups and for individuals within those groups (Shin et al., 2017). Counselling practitioners play a role in supporting clients in identifying and acknowledging how intersectionality challenges systemic oppression. This speaks to the importance of building awareness of intersectionality as an essential aspect of overall wellness, beginning with counselling practitioners and including the creation of opportunities to offer continued competence to educators, policy-makers, and researchers in the field (McNair, 2017).

Recognizing intersectionality aligns with social justice since it requires counselling practitioners to engage in identifying and dismantling social structures

that lead to overlapping forms of oppression and social inequity (Cho et al., 2013) through *justice-doing*. Reynolds (2011) coined the term justice-doing as a dedicated and mindful way of being in our personal and professional lives. Social justice is action-based; it demands that counselling practitioners answer the call to be agents of change and to define themselves as such (Arthur & Collins, 2014). The social construction of identities and societal norms positions some groups of people as having less power than others, as being more socially stigmatized, and as being faced with barriers to education, employment, and personal development. To engage in socially just counselling, counselling practitioners are called to use positions of privilege to dismantle systemic oppression through advocacy and decolonization and, as Reynolds noted, by resisting neutrality within social constructs of oppression. Counselling practitioners must be willing to refrain from maintaining a neutral stance and instead to confront social injustices and inequities (Arthur & Collins, 2014). They must also understand oppression and inequity from the client's point of view and, when possible, be willing to take action (Reynolds, 2011).

The Culturally Responsive and Socially Just (CRSJ) case conceptualization framework invites practitioners to engage in a process and to move toward an outcome (Collins, 2018c). As a process, this framework invites practitioners to explore contextual aspects related to a client's presenting concerns and to walk alongside them and co-construct meaning around the context in which the concerns emerged and the context that is necessary for their preferred future (Paré, 2014). To engage fully in the CRSJ framework, practitioners must be willing to attend to their own cultural identities, intersectionality, and therapeutic orientation, as well as to the client's world view and intersectionality, through self-awareness and to remain open to continued competence (Collins, 2018b). Creative and experiential applications of intersectionality in counsellor development can support practitioners in exploring their own cultural identities while at the same time learning to develop conceptualization skills for clients (Ali & Courtland, 2019). These authors proposed that creative interventions can support counselling practitioners in identifying held blind spots through reflection and developing forms of experiential learning as a way to consider all components of identity, context, and lived experience within the therapeutic working alliance.

The Workshop: Client Connection Through Vignettes

Now we invite you, our reader, to shift from reading to engaging with and applying these ideas using the social justice activity we explored in our intersectionality workshop at the 2019 conference of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association. Below are four vignettes that we invite you to engage with independently or, preferably, with those you work with, such as colleagues, students, and supervisors.

Imagine that you are preparing to connect with a new client. Read each vignette and notice your initial responses in terms of mind, body, spirit, and heart.

Vignette 1

Your client is an Indigenous person. It is their first year of general arts studies, and their parents live in a northern fly-in community. Your client lives with their aunt and uncle in the city. They worry constantly and are having trouble sleeping. Their studies have suffered, their grades are falling, and they are questioning their decision to attend university.

Self-reflections:

- What might you be mindful of while working with this client?
- Where could there be biases or assumptions?
- What information may be outside your knowledge?
- How could you broaden your lens to support this client better?

Vignette 2

You have been informed that your client will be cut off from funding if they do not attend appointments with you or if they do not make progress toward a part-time job. You learn that your client's partner has been laid off as a landscaper due to chronic pain, and the family has borrowed all they can from friends and family to make ends meet.

Self-reflections:

- What might you be mindful of while working with this client?
- Where could there be biases or assumptions?
- What information may be outside your knowledge?
- How could you broaden your lens to support this client better?

Vignette 3

During a session, you learn that your client Christine prefers to go by Chris and has experienced difficulty connecting with counsellors in the past because Chris is part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Chris has been experiencing mood swings for the past year. Midway through the session, Chris shares that they use they/them pronouns.

Self-reflections:

- What might you be mindful of while working with this client?
- Where could there be biases or assumptions?
- What information may be outside your knowledge?
- How could you broaden your lens to support this client better?

Vignette 4

At your settlement agency, a client walks in looking for resources about the community. They share that they just moved here from another province to pursue their studies. They have never lived in a big city before and are having trouble adjusting to

public transit, dense crowds, and accessing essential services. The client reports feeling overwhelmed.

Self-reflections:

- What might you be mindful of while working with this client?
- Where could there be biases or assumptions?
- What information may be outside your knowledge?
- How could you broaden your lens to support this client better?

The Workshop Twist: Unpacking Assumptions and Identifying Blind Spots

Self-Reflection

Prior to reading ahead, consider bringing to mind the client presented in each vignette and how you might approach building rapport with them and deepening your understanding of their intersecting cultural identities based on the vague information you have. We invite you to be curious to attend to the questions you might ask next, to the intersecting cultural identities that are introduced, and to the ways you might maintain cultural humility in your reflections. The intention is not to get it right. Instead, it is to consider thoughtfully how cultural identities intersect for many of our clients. You might consider how you could work with each client and how your approach may be similar or different depending on the information provided. Notice what arises.

The Twist

The workshop twist is that each of these vignettes is related to the same client. You might reread each of the vignettes and notice your thoughts, feelings, and sensations as you gain this new insight into your client. Ponder how you felt about each vignette and how you feel as you see all vignettes as leading to a richer description of one person. Consider the ways in which new information offers you an opportunity to reflect back on any biases, assumptions, or blind spots.

Recognizing intersectionality helps us acknowledge the interconnectedness between someone's intersecting cultural identities that can lead to intersecting discrimination (Cho et al., 2013; Collins, 2018b; Crenshaw, 2019; Shin et al., 2017). Combining these four seemingly different scenarios presents us with an opportunity to explore how intersectionality can support us in viewing our fictitious client, Chris, through an individual, cultural, environmental, and systemic lens (Crenshaw, 1991). It is essential to consider the complexities that exist and that are amplified as we explore the intersecting cultural identities of this one client, who holds multiple cultural identifies in the face of numerous forms of adversity outlined in these scenarios. Consider the potential for unintentional harm if we missed taking into account Chris's intersecting and interlocking identities. **T**his exercise generated discussion at the live workshop. We believe

there is value for you, the reader, in considering how wearing a social justice lens can support and empower deep and meaningful relationships between you and your clients. Ongoing work with Chris will depend on the counsellor's own theoretical framework, and a range of different interventions are viable as long as the counsellor considers these complexities.

Through a practice of cultural humility, we empower our clients to be the experts and to share their lived experiences in the time and manner they feel most comfortable doing so. We developed this workshop with the intention of offering ourselves and participants an opportunity to put intersectionality into practice. While developing the workshop with our colleagues, we identified the importance of being nuanced in how we presented the four scenarios. From our experiences as counsellors and from our collaboration in planning this workshop, we recognize how self-awareness supports identifying unconscious assumptions and is enhanced through relationship. For example, through the review process of this manuscript, we were reminded of the importance of maintaining cultural humility as we received feedback regarding thoughtful prompts to include further context that we had unintentionally overlooked or excluded due to our own assumptions rooted in our privilege as academics. When we discussed this with workshop participants, they shared that this exercise led them to reflect on how quickly available information steers them toward focusing on presenting issues and gathering a full understanding of the intersectionality of each of their clients. Participants shared that their assumptions may be obstacles in ensuring that their counselling practice is collaborative. For instance, these scenarios offer examples of how one client can reach out to various agencies and/or resources for specific services in response to specific aspects of their cultural identities. We invite counsellors to consider what their practice might look like or how it might need to change to ensure the whole person is honoured, valued, seen, witnessed, and welcomed within the working alliance.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality offers us a lens through which we can consider various cultural identities and how their intersections lead to oppression or privilege (Cho et al., 2013). As noted earlier, cultural identities include but are not limited to race, sexual orientation, disability, ability, class, religion/spirituality, sex, gender, gender identity, age, language, Indigeneity, and ethnicity (McNair, 2017; Sinacore et al., 2011). We invite you to consider the interlocking systems of oppression and privilege as presented in the vignettes. Although each person has their own unique combination of intersecting identities, the significance of certain intersections varies for each person. Our blind spots as counsellors may obstruct our clients' self-expression. Perhaps consider how this may be discussed as part of therapy.

Discussion and Reflection

As practitioners, we hold immense privilege as we walk alongside our clients. It is our responsibility to be aware of our own blind spots and growing edges. By attending to a client's multiple cultural identities, we offer anti-oppressive and socially just counselling. Through building a working alliance in which the intersectionality of our identities and of our clients' identities is explored, we put social justice into action (Mizock & Page, 2016). One way we engage in social justice is through self-awareness. As socially just counsellors, we must work continually toward deepening our self-awareness and one way to do that is by creating time and space for own counselling.

Our experience facilitating this workshop reminded us that there is always room for personal and professional growth. As the facilitators, we found the discussion shifted in ways that we had not planned. Attendees were more vulnerable than anticipated by acknowledging their assumptions and missed opportunities with regards to attending to the intersectionality of the vignettes' imagined client. We invite you, the reader, to consider how this workshop activity could be applied in your practice. For example, this workshop could be used as a source of support in graduate counselling courses and supervision relationships. Typically, intersectionality and social justice articles are incorporated in special issues. Instead, we are encouraging counsellors to consider these action-based discussions as necessary and ongoing, rather than as requiring special attention and a specific venue of sorts. We are proposing an interactive activity that may encourage counsellors to acknowledge their own cultural identities and to engage in social justice by identifying blind spots, biases, and cultural assumptions. To close, we offer you our own evolving cultural identities with an invitation to explore your own.

Melissa Jay (she/her)—I am a cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied, Indigenous person with white-seeming privilege (Downey, 2018). As a registered psychologist, an assistant professor, and a yoga practitioner, I use my privilege to pave paths forward by integrating ancient wisdom traditions with modern psychology. I am dedicated to identifying my blind spots and evolving cultural identities, to learning and unlearning, to growing, and to embracing opportunities to walk alongside individuals and communities and advocating within systems for social justice and community care.

Jason Brown (he/him): I am a cisgender, heterosexual, third-generation German settler who carries a great deal of privilege as a middle-class, able-bodied white person. I use my privilege to write about critical consciousness and professional growth. While I continue to wrestle with denial and guilt at each "new" blind spot, I'm inspired by the humanity of so many who have worked so long to promote equity and social change.

Consider your own cultural identities, perhaps beginning with the cultural identities you hold. You may wish to draw circles to represent your various

cultural identities with intersections and merging/blending/overlapping until they represent you. Which combinations are most central to you? Which ones are fading? Which ones are growing? You may wish also to explore the contexts of your home, your community, your work, and your school in order to see how your cultural identities intersect. Thank you for your dedication to this important and ongoing work.

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About the Authors

Melissa Jay (she/her) is a Nehiyaw member of the Métis Nation of Alberta, an assistant professor at Athabasca University, and a registered psychologist in the province of Alberta. Her research interests include trauma-informed approaches integrating modern psychology, ancient wisdom traditions, and community care. She is also the current Indigenous director for the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association.

Jason Brown (he/him) is a settler, a psychologist, and a professor at Western University with interests in strengths-based approaches to mental health. Recently he has been involved in research with foster families, newcomer families, Indigenous youth, and service providers as well as families of individuals affected by prenatal alcohol exposure. Jason is interested in anti-oppressive practice as well as applications of a mixed-method approach to research called concept mapping.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Melissa Jay, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Athabasca University, 1 University Dr., Athabasca, AB, T9S 3A3. Email: mjay@athabascau.ca