ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

A GLIMPSE INTO USING A SOCIAL JUSTICE LENS IN THE THERAPY ROOM

BY

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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The thesis examination committee certifies that the thesis
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Abstract

The current global sociopolitical environment has highlighted the need for social change, bringing attention to the ways in which oppression and marginalization continue to live within many societal structures and systems. Counselling practitioners are called to better address the needs of culturally diverse clients and the social injustices that shape and contextualize mental health concerns. In the current study, I used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to describe the experience of six Canadian counsellors' intentional commitment to using a social justice lens into therapeutic conversations. Participants shared that it was important to set up a foundation with the client built on trust and understanding before bridging a social justice lens to therapeutic conversations. Strategic implementation, counsellors' personal and professional experiences of social injustices, and education affected participants' confidence in implementing social justice initiatives. I then discuss the limitations of the study and the implications for practice, research, and training.

Keywords: Social Justice, Social Change, Counselling Psychology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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Chapter 1. Introduction: Significance of the Problem

The world has faced several challenging events, including a global pandemic, war, and ongoing police brutality, that have impacted communities and individuals' sense of safety and trust in the institutional systems that govern our society. As a result, several political movements have put social justice at the front of our collective consciousness. I was first introduced to social justice in counselling psychology through a graduate course on sociocultural and systemic influences. This started my reflection on how social justice fits into counselling psychology. Throughout the course and in my reflections, I began to recognize my privileges as a white cis-gender female aspiring to be a psychologist. More specifically, I asked myself, "What does it mean to be a culturally responsive counsellor?" and "How can I integrate a social justice lens into my future practice?"

Problem Statement

Most counselling psychology and social justice journals are based in the United States. Many Canadian and international scholars end up publishing in American journals, making it difficult to understand the Canadian context (Kennedy & Arthur, 2014). Largely, the literature has focused on including a social justice approach in counselling psychology through case conceptualization, advocacy, and activism outside of the therapy room (Paré, 2014). Ideally, therapists should be prepared to deal with the potential impact of their culturally mediated worldviews and assumptions on the therapeutic space with clients early in the clinical experience. However, it is common for therapists to become aware of their assumptions and culturally mediated worldviews only when clients begin to discuss their backgrounds and cultural experiences (Rosa, 2019). The literature investigating how therapists actually navigate

the shared dialogue between themselves and clients through a social justice lens is sparse (Paré 2014, 2019).

Purpose of Inquiry

The purpose of this study is to explore how counsellors and counselling psychologists utilize a social justice lens in their therapeutic conversations with clients.

Research Question

The research question guiding this study is: *What is the experience of Canadian counselling practitioners' use of a social justice lens in the therapy room*?

Importance of Inquiry

The political climate of the last decade has sharpened the dialogue about how social injustices continue to live within the structures of our society, highlighting the need for social change. This call to action includes the imperative that the counselling profession evolve and continue to address better the needs of culturally diverse clients and the social injustices that shape and contextualize mental health concerns. It is crucial to help professionals continue to grow to meet the needs of the current social climate and learn how to support all clients better, as each client comes to therapy with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Social movements such as #metoo and Black Lives Matter are reminders that society, in general, and the counselling profession, in particular, have a long way to go in addressing systemic oppression. The current political climate can be seen as a call for action within society and its members to address social justice issues. Social change should be a shared responsibility among all professions; social justice should be a core value for all helping professions (Kennedy & Arthur, 2014).

Definition of Terms

Social Justice

Ginsberg and Sinacore (2015) defined the practice of social justice in Canada as a focus on the relative position individuals hold within a social group in relation to others in society and on the root causes of disparities and what can be done to diminish them. This definition of social justice includes but is not limited to the extent that social inequalities are measured, economic resources are fairly distributed, citizens are gainfully employed, and all individuals are successful in their pursuit of legal justice (Ginsberg & Sinacore, 2015). Social justice can be considered a broad term used to discuss issues of fairness, equality, and justice for all members of society that are enacted through social interactions and power differentials (Paré, 2014).

Microaggressions

Sue et al. (2007) referred to microaggressions as intentional or unintentional, hostile, offensive or harmful forms of communication, verbal and non-verbal, made towards members of marginalized groups. People who initiate microaggressions may not understand or be aware of their words/actions that have offended or harmed the marginalized individual (Sue et al., 2007). For example, a White colleague automatically speaking slower or louder with colleagues who speak with an accent can indirectly communicate an assumption and bias the colleague with an accent is less competent.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is an essential concept in understanding social justice and the ways individuals are impacted by social justice (Collins, 2018). The term intersectionality was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) an American lawyer and scholar of critical race theory, when she applied the concept of Black women's experience of workplace discrimination in the

United States. Emphasizing that Black women experienced discrimination in ways that are both similar and different to those experienced by white women and Black men. Rosa (2019) defined *intersectionality* as the study of sociocultural markers of identity and how they are interconnected within any individual. Such markers of an individual's identity are interconnected variables that shape an individual's life experiences; this includes but is not limited to ethnicity, gender, gender identity, age, class, sexuality, ability, religion/spirituality (Crenshaw, 2018; Jay & Brown, 2021).

Reflexivity Statement

Before I continue, it is important for me to situate myself with respect to my social location. I am a single, white, cis-gender, heterosexual, university-educated female who came from a working-class Italian Canadian family in the small town of Magog, Quebec. Growing up in Magog my family and I were one of the few English-speaking families in our neighbourhood and my sister and I were often put into community sports teams being the only English-speaking children present. Currently, I am living in a relatively affluent neighbourhood in Calgary, Alberta. I acknowledge, honour and respect that I live, work, and play on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani), the Tsuut'ina, the Îyâxe Nakoda Nations, the Métis Nation (Region 3), and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta. When I graduated from my undergrad in psychology, I was offered a position as a frontline staff for a non-profit organization and moved to Calgary, Alberta. It was during this transition I quickly realized the wide gaps of knowledge I held about different culture. Over the last 7 years, I have worked professionally as a family and adolescent mental health counsellor for the same non-profit organization and I have actively tried to fill my knowledge gaps with trainings being offered by the organization, supervision and consultation

around the intersection between culture and mental health.. Working for a non-profit

organization has allowed me to work with many families who have faced inequalities their entire

lives. I have worked with numerous families who share different cultural identities than my own

and attempting to understand how I could support families from all life positions has contributed

to my growing passion for this research project.

In the next chapter, I review and describe the literature that informs this study.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The term *multiculturalism* was introduced to larger Canadian society in the early 1970s by Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau; it later became a term included in Canadian government policy in the 1980s (France et al., 2013). More than 40 years later, multiculturalism in counselling practice continues to evolve in different contexts. Initially, multiculturalism in counselling psychology was narrowly focused on historically marginalized cultural groups, such as African Canadians, Asian Canadians, Canadian Indians, and Latina/o Canadians, without including other marginalized groups and thus perpetuating further marginalization. However, over time multiculturalism in counselling psychology has significantly evolved and this term now considers a range of sociocultural identities and marginalized groups, including those belonging to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, asexual, Two-Spirit and other diverse sexual orientation and gender identity (LGBTQIA2S+) communities (Gillis & Collict, 2022; Ratts et al., 2016). Consequently, counselling psychology must continue to broaden the understanding of multiculturalism beyond a focus on race and towards an integration that includes many aspects of a persons sociocultural identity, which includes but is not limited to race, gender, class, disability, religion, age, and weight diversity into aspect of counselling care.

From Multiculturalism to Social Justice

The push towards including a social justice orientation in counselling psychology has been noticeable through an abundance of proposed professional competencies, special issues of counselling journals, numerous presentations, and keynote speeches (Hunsaker, 2011). In addition, scholars have acknowledged that the science of psychology has been racially biased and limited to western European worldviews (King, 2022). Recognizing the structural racism within the foundations of psychology is essential to becoming a culturally aware counsellor. For

example, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) has been noted to

lack socio-cultural consideration, endorse attitudes and representation based on westernized

colonial views of health, and is often considered superior to other epistemologies (Gaete et al.,

2018; King, 2022). However, it is also important to note that DSM-5 diagnoses have helped

provide access to services to clients previously unavailable to them (Gaete et al., 2018).

Therefore, recognizing the structural racism within the foundations of psychology is crucial to

becoming a culturally aware counsellor and moving one step closer to including a social justice

lens.

Over the years, counselling literature and training have focused on understanding

multicultural competencies through individual differences (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue et al.,

1982). Research has now focused on making shifts towards understanding culture and diversity

through a social justice lens, which has encouraged counsellors to move beyond the individual

experience and brought a more profound understanding of the impact systemic injustices have on

an individual's mental health (Arthur & Collins, 2015; DeBlaere et al., 2019; Toporek, 2018).

Frameworks such as the multicultural counselling competencies (MCC), first established by Sue

et al. (1992), has been revised to include social justice competencies for counsellors. The

revision of the MCC has helped include a broader understanding of culture and diversity that

encompasses the intersection of identities and better addresses professional counsellors'

expanding role to include individual counselling and social justice advocacy (Ratts et al., 2016).

In the last decade, there has been an increase in qualitative and quantitative research on social

justice to prepared clinicians in being sensitive and competent when working with individuals

and groups across cultures (Suzuki et al., 2019).

Defining What Social Justice Means in Counselling Psychology

Generally, social justice is the belief that every individual has the right to quality education, appropriate health care, and equal employment opportunity regardless of ethnicity, race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, and economic status (Arthur & Collins, 2014; Lewis et al., 2011). Within counselling psychology, the goal of social justice is to foster equal opportunity for all individuals to reach their personal, social, academic, and career potential, free from barriers in society (Ginsberg & Sinacore, 2015). Overall, social justice practices in counselling psychology aim to minimize oppression and injustice in favor of equality, accessibility, and optimal developmental opportunities for all members of society (Kennedy & Arthur, 2014). However, racialized individuals continue to be mistreated by professionals through discriminatory and oppressive practices.

Canadian psychologists are required to adhere the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists (Canadian Psychologists Association, CPA, 2017), the first principle of which is *respect for the dignity of persons and peoples*. This includes practicing from a non-discriminatory lens, providing fair treatment to all clients, and protecting vulnerable individuals and groups (CPA Board of Directors and Executive Officers, n.d.). However, despite agreeing to follow an ethical code of conduct that respects all people's dignity, racialized individuals experience microaggressions from professionals in the health care systems (Shaw et al., 2012; World Health Organization, WHO, 2021). Due to the intimate care counsellors provide clients, it is imperative that counsellors create conditions and opportunities for racialized clients to feel comfortable and safe talking about topics of oppression, discrimination, and stigmatization in therapy (Rosa, 2019). However, having a social justice agenda within counselling psychology has been criticized as historically counsellors have been expected to focus on helping clients find

coping strategies and tools to navigate the issues they face in their lives (De Mello, 2022).

In 2009, Ratts introduced the concept of social justice as the "fifth force" in counselling paradigms, alongside the psychodynamic, cognitive behavioral, existential-humanistic, and multicultural forces. Ratts' (2009) work has opened the dialogue about the positive outcomes made possible by counsellors discussing and addressing social issues clients face every day. This means counsellors will need to go beyond an individualistic focus and acknowledge the existence of social issues to be able to play a role in healing trauma related to social justice issues. The CPA has released a statement on committing to social change and fighting against racial injustice after receiving open letters by graduate students urging the association to act towards social justice. The board stated that the input and feedback received would be included and aligned in the CPA's 2020-2025 strategic plan and provided resources for those looking to further their education on human rights and social justice.

Taking a social justice approach to counselling means more than just acknowledging social and system injustices, it means using social advocacy and activism as a means to address social, political, and economic inequalities that impact academics, careers, and personal/social development of individuals, families, and communities (Ratts, 2009). Furthermore, counsellors who are not culturally aware or sensitive risk enacting microaggression in dialogue with their clients (MacLeod, 2013; Paré, 2019). Nittle (2018) defined microaggressions as brief experiences that can take the form of verbal and nonverbal forms of behaviors towards marginalized individuals and are considered a form of racism. Over time, microaggression can severely impact one's physical and mental health (Nittle, 2018). Within counselling psychology, the hope is to support counsellors in being culturally aware of bringing sensitivity and acknowledgment to how issues of culture and oppression influence the counselling process and

client issues.

Intersectionality in Counselling Psychology

At the core of the shift towards including a social justice orientation in counselling psychology is the concept of intersectionality, which is attentive to context, privilege, inequality, and dominant cultural values such as patriarchy and individualism (Robinson-Wood, 2022). We all hold multiple identities as we carry ourselves in this world, and each part of our identity influences the way we see and understand the world. The term intersectionality, coined by Crenshaw (1989), refers to the idea that we all hold multiple cultural identities and that each of these identities intersects with each other. Thus, there is no one way to define someone's identity because there are multiple pieces that define our cultural identity and are all essential and influence the way we interact with the world and the way the world interacts with us. Furthermore, the pieces that make up someone's identity are closely related to their social location or positioning. Social location refers to the place, status, or position (social, economic, or political) that individuals or groups hold within society, based on various markers of differences, and most often related to various dimensions of their cultural identities (Cheshire & Noldy-MacLean, 2022).

Since Crenshaw introduced the concept of intersectionality within critical race theory literature in 1989, it has become a growing point of discussion within counselling psychology literature (Chesire & Noldy-MacLean, 2022; Cho et al., 2013). However, what is left to understand is how counsellors are practically applying the concept of intersectionality in practice with clients. Recently, Jay and Brown (2021) proposed a self-reflective method presented through a workshop at the 2019 Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association conference that asked attendees to read through four vignettes that later collapse into one

vignette and apply Collin's (2018) Culturally Responsive and Socially Just (CRSJ) case conceptualization framework. This framework is a practical way for practitioners to support self-examination of areas outside of their awareness and learning and unlearning assumptions about diversity and intersectionality. Part of the mission of the workshop was to raise consciousness about how practitioners can address systemic oppression within counselling and move closer toward anti-oppressive and anti-racist practices. By supporting practitioners in understanding and knowing how to apply intersectional knowledge into practice, they can begin to center liberation and radical healing at the heart of all counselling (Suzuki et al., 2019). Such an approach focuses on healing beyond the individual and extends to interpersonal relationships, communities, and transforming institutions, policies, and systems that are causing harm to begin.

The multiple intersections of a counsellor's identity can complicate the therapeutic relationship as therapists and clients have both similarities and differences regarding identity (Ratts et al., 2016). People hold multiple identities that have intersecting privileged and marginalized statuses; for example, Black women experiencing discrimination in the workplace are different from white women and Black men due to their intersecting marginalized statuses being a woman and Black that contribute to their overall life experiences (Crenshaw, 2018). Research shows that traumatic experiences fueled by race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic identities have the potential to negatively influence mental health outcomes (Cerezo et al., 2014; Hankivsky et al., 2010). Discussions about identity diversity and culture within counselling psychology are often referred to as what Moodley (2007) calls the Big 7, which represents seven categories, including race, gender, class, disability, religion, age, and weight diversity. Moodley et al. (2022) argued that a counsellor's theoretical approach and practice must consider all seven identities and how they intersect to create a clients' social

locations instead of focusing on one sole aspect of a client's identity. The following sections will cover issues in counselling settings related to Moodley's Big 7 identities and how counsellors can work towards anti-oppressive practices.

Race, Culture, and Ethnicity

King (2022) pointed to the disconnection between western science evidence-based treatments being considered superior to Indigenous knowledge and how Eurocentric ideals are embedded into mental health knowledge and systems. Consequently, non-western cultures and traditional medicine force systems into what King calls "white packing" of providing evidence according to western standards of testable elements, or they are considered inferior. This approach is problematic across cultures, and within the counselling context, as the self is defined very differently from a western perspective compared to Indigenous and Eastern perspectives. For example, Indigenous psychology focuses on a larger sense of self that extends into family and community (King, 2022). King encourages counsellors to question the profession's definition of a healthy person because it is based on an autonomous self that does not fit into all cultures' understanding of health. Moreover, De Mello (2022) suggested that counsellors understand critical race theory to integrate concepts of antiracism and critical race theory in counselling practices.

Gender Diversity and Sexual Orientation

Much of the adversity that the LGBTQIA2S+ community faces stems from discriminatory practices and policies at an institutional and systemic level (Gillis & Collict, 2022; Vegter, 2022). For example, systems upholding binary gender identification specifically oppress transgender and gender diverse (TGD) people from having equitable access to employment, housing, education, public facilities, and health care (APA, 2015; Vegter, 2022).

As such, TGD people have faced elevated mental health challenges and poorer therapeutic outcomes due to socially unjust, inadequate, and ill-equipped mental health services, over the years (Vegter, 2022). Guidelines put forth by APA (2015) encourage clinicians to (a) view gender and sexual orientation as a nonbinary construct; (b) understand the intersectional nature of gender and other cultural identities; (c) be aware of their attitudes and knowledge of gender identity and expression; (d) recognize discrimination and stigma; (e) recognize the influence of institutional barriers; (f) promote social change; (g) assess if mental health challenges are stemming from minority stress; and (h) recognize the effects of changes in gender identity and expression on relationships.

Class

Class can be defined through socioeconomic status (SES), income, education, and occupation that categorize people into low, middle, or upper class (Audet, 2022; Pope & Arthur, 2009). Social privilege is closely related to ideas of class as it includes the benefits, entitlement, opportunities, and status that individuals are automatically given (Liu et al., 2007). Moving up in class categorization is often encouraged, highly valued, and typically associated with individual achievement, while disregarding that many opportunities emerge from privilege (Audet, 2022). For this reason, relying solely on class as a categorization is problematic in understanding an individual's mental health because it can lead to counsellors making assumptions and misguided conceptualizations of client problems. Due to this, Audet (2022) encouraged practitioners to understand class experience and classism through an intersectional lens of social identities, keeping the client at the centre of their understanding and focusing on the client's subjective experiences. Furthermore, it is paramount that counsellor begin to centre class in their understanding of inequalities as class controls factors that greatly impact an individuals life such

as, the freedom of choice, stability of one's life, societal supports, access to services, and upward mobility (Liu et al., 2007).

Disability

Defining disability is difficult as people have disagreed on what constitutes physical and mental impairment compared to social and environmental factors. The WHO (2021) defined disability as a physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment that poses barriers for individuals to participate in society fully and effectively. It is crucial to remember that many people within the disability community also have intersecting diverse identities, where disability is sometimes secondary but equally important in experiences of oppression within health systems (Andrews & Forber-Pratt, 2022). The WHO (2021) reported that people with disabilities are twice as likely to find health care providers' skills inadequate and often experience discrimination. Within the United States, Shaw et al. (2012) found that the highest proportion of harassment complaints within the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) was from Lantix and American Indian women with behavioral disorders compared to the lowest, which were European Americans with physical impairments. Within Canada, Lindsay et al. (2022) found through a systemic review that even healthcare professionals themselves experienced workplace ableism. At an institutional level, they found that healthcare providers and trainees experienced ableism through unsupportive work environments, physical barriers, and inaccessible environments. At an individual level, they found that professionals faced negative attitudes, bullying, and harassment. Andrews and Forber-Pratt (2022) highlighted the importance of clinicians viewing a client's disability through the lens of intersectionality to avoid cultural assumptions as different cultural groups hold differences in their beliefs, practices, and values around disability.

Religion/Spirituality

Dixon and Smith (2022) advised clinicians to pay close attention to the intersections of religion and spirituality in the context of gender, ethnicity, race, and sexual orientation. Indigenous cultures view spirituality as an important component of health and view health more holistically through the wheel of wellness model that includes eight dimensions that assess wellness (Myers et al., 2000). Several religious groups to view same-sex orientation as sinful or deviant. Due to this, Dixon, and Smith (2022) urged clinicians who hold strong religious values to become aware of their attitudes and views regarding sexual orientation and act according to the professional codes of ethics when engaging with sexual minorities. Accordingly, clinicians must seek to understand the intersections of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and religion within their clients.

Age

Research indicates that mood, anxiety, and substance disorders decrease, and overall well-being (i.e., self-reported happiness) increases with age (Blanchflower, 2021; Reynolds et al., 2015). However, research also shows that experiences of ageism lead to poorer physical and mental health outcomes across several countries and health domains (Chang et al., 2020). Additionally, Chang et al. found that individuals who experienced ageism living in underdeveloped countries and who are part of disadvantaged groups experienced poorer health. Due to the likelihood of physical health problems increasing with age, the intersection of age and disability contributes to discrimination and prejudice older adults face (Deal, 2007). Furthermore, education on how to work with seniors is lacking. For this reason, Mackenzie and Berard (2022) urged clinicians to seek training and supervision specific to supporting older adults.

Weight Diversity

Weightism and fatphobia are rooted in colonial worldviews that suggest weight is controllable, large bodies reflect failure, and that fat shaming people is acceptable (Nutter & Russell-Mayhew, 2022; Nutter et al., 2018b). These attitudes negatively impact people with large bodies, resulting in discrimination in the quality of healthcare they receive, poorer employment opportunities, wage gaps, and reduced educational opportunities (Nutter et al., 2018a; Puhl & Heuer, 2009). The same biases that result in discriminatory practices lead therapists to view large people negatively (Nutter & Russell-Mayhew, 2022). Davis-Coelho et al. (2000) asked 200 counselling psychologists to create a treatment plan for two clients based on pictures of a thin and a large body client. They found that the psychologists were more likely to create a treatment plan for the large body client based on a lower general assessment of functioning, to diagnose an eating disorder, and focus more on body image issues than the thin body client. This study suggests that trained professionals are not free of weight biases. Due to the pervasive and acceptable nature of weightism, Nutter, and Russell-Mayhew (2020) noted the importance of starting with creating an inclusive environment such as taking note of narrow chairs, unaccommodating doorways, and hallways. Furthermore, including and amplifying the voices of people with large bodies by involving them in decision-making processes for policies and practices that affect them is highly valuable in preventing weightism in counselling (Nutter et al., 2018a).

Translating Knowledge to Practice

Despite the call to action for counsellors to use social justice initiatives in their work with clients, there is a lack of evidence that individual counsellors are actually competent to do so. Pieterse et al. (2009) found that APA-accredited counselling psychology programs gave little

attention to the development of social justice competencies. They noted that course syllabi focused on knowledge and awareness, with little attention to skill development and application. Accordingly, counsellors likely receive inadequate training to implement social justice practices.

Dollarhide et al. (2021) noted that American Counselling Association (ACA) conference sessions on social justice featured gender, sexual orientation, and race/culture, while SES, international/immigrant/refuge, and faith traditions were underrepresented. The lack of social justice content covered in conferences suggests that practicing counsellors may not have adequate opportunities to be learning social justice practices through what is being offered in training. Aspiring counselling psychologists are not being provided with adequate training that will allow them to learn how to implement social justice initiatives in their future practices (Dollarhide et al., 2021; Singh et al, 2010).

Social Justice and Therapeutic Frameworks

Several social justice conceptual frameworks attest that multiculturalism and social justice should be at the centre of all counselling as all humans are political (Bava et al., 2017; Collins, 2018; Paré, 2019; Ratts et al., 2015). Research has focused on how clinicians integrate social justice within their practice through advocacy. Kozan and Blustein (2018) found that practitioners reported practicing social justice by advocating for an individual client's needs by connecting people with limited access to health care to resources, working with marginalized populations, and partaking in organizational-level advocacy. Similarly, Garland and Brookman-Frazee (2015) discussed the need for counsellors to be action-orientated and seek to partner and collaborate with prospective community allies and interdisciplinary teams to implement more effective counselling strategies and models. Winter (2019) proposed that for counsellors to work toward social justice, they must begin with self-reflection and acknowledgment to be then able to

move into collaborative and community-based action.

At the core of using a social justice lens in therapy sessions is counsellor self-awareness (Collins & Arthur, 2018). Developing self-awareness as a counsellor means becoming aware of one's attitudes, assumptions, biases, beliefs about group identities, marginalized and privileged group statuses, power and privilege, limitations, and strengths (Collins & Arthur, 2018). Both Collins (2018) and Rosa (2019) frameworks require a therapist to become aware of their worldview to grasp how their worldviews shape their clinical and cultural perspective when conceptualizing cases. Similarly, Ratts et al.'s (2016) multicultural and social justice counselling competencies (MSJCC) framework place the therapeutic relationship at the centre of social justice work by focusing on the various ways power, privilege, and oppression intersect between the client and the therapist. The MSJCC framework acknowledged four quadrants representing the various ways power, privilege, and oppression impact the therapeutic relationship between a counsellor and client: (1) privileged counsellor-marginalized client; (2) privileged counsellor-privileged client; (3) marginalized counsellor-privileged client; and (4) marginalized counsellor-marginalized client. For example, a White cis-gender female counsellor would hold varying levels of power and privilege compared to their Black trans-gender male client in regards to race, class, and gender identity. However, it is important to note that the quadrants reflect a snapshot of a particular moment in time and that because identity is fluid, counsellor self-awareness is fundamental (Ratts et al., 2016).

Social Justice Issues in Counselling

Teachings on these models tend to focus on student counsellor awareness and less on how knowledge translates to skill development and implementation (Kassan & Nathoo, 2022). Each model asserts that cultural contexts should be considered in understanding client problems

and choosing appropriate interventions. Kassan and Nathoo present the case of Rafi, a 1st year counselling psychology doctoral student who identifies as a cis-gender, bisexual, able-bodied woman raised in a Muslim household who left her family and small farm town to pursue her studies. Rafi encounters an uncomfortable situation when a client makes a homophobic comment during an intake and later consults about the incident with her supervisor Beth. Beth explained that such situations are daily, and counsellors must learn to "toughen up." During this conversation, Rafi recalled some other comments Beth had made in passing, for example, asking Rafi if she wears a hijab by choice and questioning the necessity of using a multicultural/social justice lens with all her clients. Rafi's experience highlights the need for better support within academic and training programs in navigating social justice issues with clients and colleagues. In the interest of working towards equity, diversity, inclusion, social justice, and human rights, Kassan and Nathoo proposed that Rafi have an open conversation with her supervisor about how she has perceived her comments. Although such conversations can be difficult and uncomfortable to have, academic and training programs have many resources and experiences they can utilize. Kassan and Nathoo highlighted the need for individuals in similar positions as Rafi to connect with someone she considers an ally in supporting her to address the matter with her supervisor. The Kassan and Nathoo (2022) case study demonstrates the need for academic programs to hold space for peers and colleagues who hold minoritized identities and/or appreciate nondominant worldviews in its social justice teachings. Without this support academic programs run the risk of leaving counselling psychology students feeling isolated and unsupported in enacting social justice work.

The literature on teaching multicultural and social justice competencies and infusing social justice within training programs is scarce (Cohen et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2010). Research

has focused on discussing social justice work through interventions that go beyond the therapy room and target systems-level change. However, what remains to be understood is how clinicians practically apply social justice initiatives at a conversational level. Including a social justice approach in practice goes beyond creating an environment for clients to feel comfortable telling their stories. It is important for therapists to pay close attention to repairing trust at the individual level with ethnic minority clients as research indicates ethnic minority clients experience higher rates of therapeutic ruptures leading to poorer therapeutic outcomes and higher rates of dropouts (Gaztambide, 2012).

Commitment and Readiness

Most Canadian counselling psychology programs have approached multicultural and social justice teachings through a single course approach or integrated within courses overall (Collins et al., 2015). Research has suggested that taking a single course approach has failed at supporting trainees in knowing how to implement competencies in practice (Cohen et al., 2021; Pieterse et al., 2009). Cohen et al (2021) suggested that counselling psychology education programs would benefit from integrating multicultural and social justice competencies in all their counselling teachings because failing to do so promotes future practitioners to think of culture and diversity as secondary within counselling. Cohen et al. (2021) proposed Canadian counselling psychology programs begin enhancing multicultural and social justice competencies in their curriculum by (a) implementing decolonization practices to help students self-reflect and recognize how the discipline of psychology has contributed to the marginalization and colonization of Indigenous people ; (b) engaging students through different methods of learning outside of academia and enhance community involvement; and (c) providing faculty with professional development opportunities in multiculturalism and social justice competencies.

Others have taken additional steps and implemented practicum placements specific to social

justice work to better prepare future counselling psychologists to implement social justice

initiatives in their practice (Hage et al., 2020).

Taking no action in social change, as a helping professional, means we are siding with

structures and systems that continue to oppress individuals of minority groups (Arthur & Collins,

2014). Kennedy and Arthur (2014) argued that counsellors should go beyond theoretical

discussion and commit to action. Singh et al. (2010) interviewed counselling psychology

doctoral trainees to explore how they perceived social justice preparation in their doctoral

programs. They found that participants felt unsupported in their training and programs in

learning how to incorporate social justice initiatives in their work, which led them to use

proactive self-education to increase their knowledge and experience on social justice issues

outside their academic programs. Additionally, Singh et al. (2010) found that participants felt

passionate about passing along their knowledge despite not being able to identify any training on

how to deliver social justice training to future trainees.. Many indicated that their professional

social justice practices were informed by their personal practices. Their passion for social justice

was echoed in the self-education they sought outside of their program training through

conferences that discussed social justice issues within counselling.

Commitments to social justice in one's personal life increases a counsellor's commitment

to social justice in their professional identities (Robinson-Wood, 2022; Winter & Hanley, 2015).

Beaton (2020) outlined the benefits associated with therapists using their experiential knowledge

with clients in therapy. Benefits included having insight and insider knowledge to understanding

what it is like to navigate social justice issues through life experiences and comprehension of the

healing journey despite the complex ethical issues that can arise when a therapist with a history

of an eating disorder treats a client with an eating disorder. Similarly, De Vos et al. (2016) found that using experiential knowledge in therapy allowed the therapist to build a stronger and more connected therapeutic alliance. Although using experiential knowledge can be helpful in increasing a counsellor's commitment to social justice work, working in public or private sectors could complicate a counsellor's ability to enact social justice initiatives if they are faced with systemic barriers at an organizational level. Counsellors may be put in a position where they must comply with agency mandates and incorporate employers' expectations into their treatment work and practice (Winter & Hanley, 2015).

Social Justice and Therapeutic Conversation

Counsellors can intentionally enact social justice or inadvertently support social injustice through the therapeutic relationship and dialogue with clients (Paré, 2014). Paré (2019) emphasized the importance of language in the therapy room and how this can indirectly perpetuate microaggressions and oppressive systems, for example, assuming a female identifying client's spouse is male identifying. Regardless of a clinicians' intentions to bridge a social justice lens in their work with clients, counsellors will make mistakes due to the complex nature of uncovering and understanding each client's cultural identity. Therefore, it is imperative to the therapeutic relationship for counsellors and therapists to pay attention to how their *well-intended* questions that may hold assumption about the client's lifestyle, affiliations, or sexuality. In these moments, reflexivity becomes paramount for therapists (Collins & Arthur, 2018). Dollarhide et al. (2021) discussed the essential role supervision plays in teaching social justice skills that help supervisees prioritize social justice counselling outcomes in their counselling work. Social justice supervision focuses on exploring concepts such as power, identity, and social justice systems to translate knowledge to practice and support counsellor reflexivity.

Counsellors need to understand their positions in the therapy room as justice and injustice play out in all social interactions (Paré, 2014). Therapeutic exchanges provide an opportunity to support people in acknowledging public identity-affirming stories and representations to create more helpful and inclusive constructions of the self that is not based on societal ideals (Paré, 2014). This concept of identity construction in therapy is even more critical for clients diagnosed with mental illnesses, as those diagnosed are pushed into categories that may not fully represent who they are. The Collaborative-Dialogic Practices (CDP) framework by Bava et al. (2017) demonstrates how a counsellor can begin to interrogate a social justice lens into the therapy room. One of the main pillars in the CDP framework is taking a not-knowing stance and positioning the client as the expert. Decentralizing power from the counsellor centers it in the therapeutic relationship rather than in a position or person. CDP endorses the idea that to understand social inequalities, one must first understand how people perpetuate them via communication and dialogue. Thus, it raises questions such as 'what is the dominant discourse and according to whom? Who does it serve?' to avoid hegemony in practice and case conceptualization.

Conclusion

Research shows that counsellor trainees feel unprepared to integrate a social justice approach into their practice. This review of the literature offers insight into potential barriers to learning how aspiring counsellors can integrate social justice approaches into their work, including lack of education and support in implementing social justice practices in counselling. Although much of the literature and research has focused on how counsellors can integrate approaches to diversity in clinical work, little has been researched on how counsellors experience implementing such strategies in practice. Shedding light on such experiences can illuminate

barriers counsellors face when attempting to implement and integrate a social justice approach

with clients and subsequently provide ways in education and training programs to better support

trainees in feeling able to integrate a social justice approach in their counselling practice.

      In the next chapter, I describe the theoretical framework and methodology for this study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

In this chapter, I will describe the methodology for this study. First, I describe the theoretical framework for my chosen research method, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Then, I discuss participant sampling and recruitment methods. Third, I outline important ethical considerations and how I have enhanced quality in this study. Finally, I describe the data collection strategy and data analysis procedures.

Theoretical Framework

IPA draws upon three major theoretical underpinnings: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography (Oxley, 2016). I describe each theoretical underpinning within IPA.

Phenomenology

There are two approaches to phenomenology, interpretative, also known as hermeneutic phenomenology, and descriptive or transcendental phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Descriptive phenomenologists such as Husserl adopt an attitude of consciousness that views human experience free from worldly and empirical assumptions (Giorgi, 2007). Phenomenology aims to uncover a detailed examination of the participant's lifeworld and explore the "individual's perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 53). Husserl's lectures and ideas contributed to the overall development of commonalities within the philosophical assumptions of phenomenology, which includes: the study of the lived experiences of persons, the view that these experiences are conscious ones, and the development of descriptions of these experiences (Husserl, 2006). One key concept within descriptive phenomenology is Husserl's idea of intentionality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). There is an intentional relationship between individual consciousness and the object of consciousness and this must be studied as they appear and

unbiased (Converse, 2012). Consciousness is a present-making phenomenon in the world

connected to individual experience and always directed towards an object. The phenomenon is

perceived through uncovering its pure essence; thus, the focus is on the reality of an object

(Converse, 2012).

Taking a descriptive phenomenological approach is strict and requires the researcher to

employ three principles: bracketing, reduction, and imaginative variation (Giorgi, 2007).

Bracketing refers to a reflective process by which the researcher suspends their opinions and

prejudices to focus on what is essential in the phenomena (LeVasseur, 2003). Bracketing, also

known epoché, is another concept brought forth by Husserl that requires a researcher to suspend

their judgement about what is real and take a natural attitude until judgements are founded on a

more certain basis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As much as bracketing aids the researcher in

focusing on the participants' account of their experiences, I believe it is unrealistic to think that a

researcher's own experience will not influence the processes involved in researching the

phenomena. The reduction process allows the researcher to consider their own experiences in a

way that allows a new phenomenon to show within themselves (Bernet, 2016). The researcher

considers their natural attitude as present but not reality; it is considered a reduction from

existence to the presence (Giorgi, 2007). The imaginative variation employs the researchers to

vary between different aspects of the phenomenon and determine which aspects of the

phenomenon are essential and random. Once the essential features of the phenomenon are

determined, they are then carefully described (Giogi, 2007).

Hermeneutics

Interpretative phenomenologists such as Heidegger, who followed in Husserl's footsteps,

focused on uncovering the 'being' of the phenomenon (Heidegger,1962). Heidegger (1962)

claimed that the nature of being is never-ending and circular, which led to the conceptualization

of the 'hermeneutic' circle. Hermeneutics can be considered the theory of interpretation, "the

assumption that humans are 'sense-making creatures' and so the accounts that they provide will

reflect their attempts to make sense of their experience" (Rodham et al., 2015, p. 60). The

hermeneutic circle reflects the cyclical process by which researchers continuously consider their

own experiences through their interpretations (Converse, 2012). Compared to Husserl's notion of

intentionality, Heidegger brought the importance of understanding the world in relation to the

person and not separate entities (Heidegger, 1962). Hermeneutic phenomenology does not see

description and interpretation as separate, thus, interpretative researchers are always influenced

by their impressions (Smith et al., 2009). The process of 'double hermeneutic' suggests that one

cannot understand another person's experience without the influence of their own experiences,

predisposition, and values influencing their understanding (Rodham et al., 2015). In research, the

researcher can only interpret their participants' experiences through their interpretative lens.

Idiography

The term idiographic was first used in English by Gordon Allport in the early 1990s, who

borrowed the term from German philosopher Wilhelm Windelband, and focused on describing

knowledge about unique events, entities of a person, and trends (Krauss, 2008; Pelham, 1993).

An idiographic approach starts with an in-depth analysis and focuses on examining one case in

close detail, then moves to a second detailed analysis, and so forth through the remainder of the

cases (Smith, 2004). The individual participant becomes the unit of study, unlike the nomothetic

approach typically used in psychology that draws from larger samples (Oxley, 2016). The

idiographic approach of IPA allows for a close examination of one participant's account at a time

that could then lead to an examination of similarities and differences across cases that help build

patterns of meaning (Shinebourne, 2011). Idiography lends itself well when recruiting a small

sample from a homogeneous group as it allows for a close examination of the participants'

experiences.

Taking an IPA approach involves a researcher identifying a phenomenon in which they

are interested, then reflecting on the essential nature of the phenomenon that helps lead to writing

a description of the phenomenon. At the same time, the researcher maintains a strong connection

to the topic of inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology within IPA is both a descriptive

and interpretative process. The phenomenological approach used to address the current research

questions was interpretative. The rationale for taking an interpretative approach to this research

is mainly due to the relevance of interpretative approaches to counselling psychology. Much like

the role of the researcher and participant in interpretative phenomenology, the therapist and

client are considered important factors in the counselling process. Of all qualitative research

approaches, IPA was chosen to address the research question, and the next section will consider

the reasons for this.

Rationale for the Selection of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Limited research has been conducted focusing on uncovering counsellors' experiences

and feelings using a social justice approach post-academic training. One of the main objectives

of this research was to uncover how participants felt they could translate knowledge into skill

development and implementation. IPA aims to explore participants' experiences on their terms

by looking at the connection between what participants say, their thoughts, and emotions (Smith

et al., 2009). Specifically, IPA looks to understand a phenomenon experienced by a

homogeneous set of individuals (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In this regard, using an IPA

approach has allowed me to focus on understanding how a specific sample of counsellors have

experienced using a social justice lens in their therapeutic conversations with clients (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Moreover, targeting counselling psychologists with a commitment to social justice, either professionally or personally, has facilitated a deeper understanding of how this commitment is experienced and translated in the therapy room with clients. The small sample sizes often used in IPA have allowed for a closer examination of how each counselling psychologist uses social justice action in their practice. In addition, it has allowed me to focus on in-depth analysis and to support theoretical transferability rather than empirical generalizability (Pringle et al., 2011).

Sampling

A sample size of three to six participants is recommended for novice IPA researchers to generate rich, in-depth, and meaningful information from participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). I recruited six participants who could speak to their experiences using a social justice approach in therapy. Therefore, the inclusion criteria required participants to be a registered member under a counselling regulatory board. Additionally, participants were required to have an educational background in counselling psychology because I sought to capture how participants transferred knowledge into practice in the field of counselling psychology. Furthermore, participants were required to self-identify a commitment towards enacting social justice work professionally or personally because this increases the likelihood that their commitment to social justice guides their treatment work with clients (Kennedy & Arthur, 2014; Winter & Hanley, 2015).

Recruitment

I recruited participants through an advertisement posted to the Canadian Psychological Association's (CPA) recruit Research Participant Portal (R2P2). Out of the six participants, I

recruited two from the advertisement in R2P, see Appendix A, and four through a snowballing

approach based on emails and information shared via my thesis committee and myself. Using a

snowballing approach within this research meant that participants were asked to identify other

people they know who would fit the inclusion criteria and be interested in participating for

recruitment (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants

Of the six participants in this sample, five identified as female, and one identified as non-

binary. Four participants identified their ethnicity as Caucasian, one as biracial

(Canadian/Trinidadian), and one as Vietnamese. Four participants had under five years of

experience, and two had over 15 years of experience. All participants had a minimum of a

master's degree, with two participants holding a Ph.D. in counselling psychology. Participants'

work experience ranged from working with individuals, couples, and families with trauma,

disabilities, addictions, depression, anxiety, and various life transitions.. Participants identified

using various therapeutic approaches to working with clients, such as feminist therapy,

cognitive-behavioral, emotion-focused, and positive psychology.

Megan identifies as a Caucasian cis-gender female who resides in Vancouver, British

Colombia, and uses she/her pronouns. Megan completed her master's in counselling psychology

from Adler University. Megan identified working with substance use and trauma with various

clients.

Cindy identifies as a Vietnamese, cis-gender female who resides in Calgary, Alberta, and

uses she/her pronouns. Cindy has five years of counselling experience, four years as a

provisional psychologist, and one year full registered. In addition, Cindy completed a Master of

Counselling. Cindy stated her specializations include working with adults experiencing

depression, anxiety, relationship issues, stress and burnout, identity development, racism, and micro-aggressions. Cindy shared that she primarily works from cognitive-behavioral, emotion-focused, and positive psychology as her therapeutic approaches.

Raine is of Scottish and Northern English descent, identifies as non-binary, and uses they/them pronouns. Raine lives on treaty lands and has been a registered provisional psychologist for three years after completing their Master of Counselling degree. Raine works with neurodivergent individuals, LGBT2SIA or non-gender confirming concerns, and individuals with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Melissa identifies as a cis-gender Caucasian female. Melissa has worked in counselling environments for over 18 years and has been a registered provisional psychologist in Calgary, Alberta, for the last year, after completing her Master's in Counselling Psychology. Melissa specializes in addiction and trauma with adults and couples.

Susie identifies as a cis-gender female who is biracial, Canadian, and Trinidadian and uses she/her pronouns. Susie registered as a psychologist in Calgary, Alberta, after completing a Master of Science in counselling psychology and a Ph.D. counselling psychology degree. Susie works with persons with disabilities, and brain injuries, supporting persons through various life transitions and with couples and families. Susie stated she works primarily from post-modern therapeutic approaches, including narrative, and solution-focused, with some reliance on systemic therapies, emotion-focused therapy, and feminist theory.

Dawn chooses to work with women and children primarily dealing with trauma. Dawn identifies as a cis-gender Caucasian female. Dawn has been a registered psychologist in Calgary, Alberta, for 18 years and uses she/her pronouns. Dawn holds a Ph.D. in counselling psychology. Dawn regularly attends protests and marches for women's rights and education curriculum.

Ethical Considerations

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB) approved this study; see Appendix B. As the primary investigator, I completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE) before starting this research. I discussed informed consent with participants at two different junctures of the recruiting process. First, at initial contact, I provided participants with the invitation to participate and informed consent forms; see Appendix C and D. Second, I reminded participants about informed consent before the interviews started.

I asked participants to describe stories about their experiences and work with clients during therapeutic conversations. As such, participants were not subjected to higher levels of distress that they would encounter in a typical workday. Throughout the interview process, I was careful to invite participants to only disclose what was emotionally manageable for them and ensured that participants did not become unnecessarily emotionally upset. For example, one participant was subject to racism as a child, so rather than assume, I asked if they were comfortable describing those events. All participants stated they were comfortable sharing stories of their personal experiences and connections to social justice issues. As participants shared their experiences with social justice issues, I focused on using Sarah et al. (2020) conversational strategies such as validation and reflective listening skills to help participants feel more comfortable and build rapport. Before starting the data analysis phase, I completed member checking with participants to safeguard their identity and verify that their comments accurately represent their experiences. Each participant was sent a copy of their interview transcript and was asked to review it and make changes by adding or removing comments to reflect their

intended responses better. Participants were also asked to review examples they shared about

their work with clients and remove any identifying information to safeguard the identity of their

clients.

Preparation for Interviews

I created interview questions in collaboration with my thesis committee; see Appendix D

for a list of interview questions. Consulting with several clinicians supported me to formulate

questions that directly addressed dynamics within the therapeutic process, then I narrowed the

focus on participants' experience in using social justice action within the therapeutic process. I

provided the interview questions to participants before the interviews to invite them to reflect in

advance; See Appendix E.

Rigor and Trustworthiness

Following Rodham et al. (2015), I worked to uphold rigor and trustworthiness through

what Roberts (2013) refers to as *researcher reflexivity*. I did this by keeping a research journal,

as suggested by Oxley (2016). I noted my initial reaction to the data; this included my emotional

reaction, mainly when participants shared personal stories from their own lived experiences in a

paper notebook. I also noted connections and patterns I was making as I worked across each

transcript in a paper notebook. Noting my reactions in my research journal helped me be aware

of my biases and presuppositions as I analyzed the data, permitting me to acknowledge factors

that could have shaped the data.

Bracketing is considered beneficial in enhancing rigor and trustworthiness when using a

phenomenological approach. However, bracketing can also present a concern during data

analysis. LeVasseur (2003) suggested that researchers using IPA should take on a natural attitude

towards bracketing, which involves bracketing everyday assumptions and maintaining a curious

stance. By taking a curious approach, we become better at taking a not-knowing stance in understanding the phenomena being investigated and subsequently better able to acknowledge how our past experiences influence our analyses (Rodham et al., 2015). As such, I have approached bracketing by reflecting and acknowledging how my past experiences working with children and families in a family support capacity have shaped my initial assumptions and consciously approach the research project through a lens of curiosity and acknowledgment. Additionally, I enhanced rigour and trustworthiness by member-checking participants' transcripts. I asked participants to review their transcripts to ensure that their voices were being accurately represented, or to make modifications as needed.

Data Collection

Focus groups, diaries, and interviews are various ways data collection takes place in IPA studies (Oxley, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). However, IPA researchers typically use semi-structured one-on-one interviews. I collected data via used individual interviews. Using an IPA approach allowed me to remain flexible in my interviews by providing opportunities for follow-up questions to help investigate the phenomenon (Roberts, 2013; Smith et al., 2009). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I interviewed using Zoom Video Communication Inc. (Zoom). Using Zoom video calls is helpful for qualitative research studies (Gray et al., 2020). To ensure privacy and security, I used password-protected meetings with the waiting room feature. Following the interviews, I saved audio and audio-video files on a password-protected USB key.

As part of the informed consent process, before interviews started, I reminded participants that they could withdraw consent at any point during the interview; however, they would not be able to do so once the interview was complete. Participants chose a pseudonym, by which they would be referred when I reported this study. Once interviews were completed, I

saved them under the participants' pseudonyms to protect anonymity. A codebook matching each

participant to their retrospective pseudonym and personal information (email and name) was

created in a password-protected word document and only viewed by myself. Data was stored on

a password-protected USB. Additionally, the transcript of each individual interview was

password protected. Participants consented for the data to remain accessible to me for five years

and to potentially use the data in future research.

Data Analysis

The researcher's role is vital when interpreting the data. Smith et al. (2009) recommended

that the researcher who conducted the interview also transcribe the interview, as they are familiar

with the participants' non-verbal communications. As the sole researcher, I interpreted the data

which permitted me to capture the essence of the participant's voices through their verbal

communication and non-verbal communication. This included noting their tone of voice, facial

expressions, and body language during the analysis.

After completing the transcription (see Appendix F, for a sample transcript) I followed

the six steps proposed by Smith et al. (2009) for novice IPA researchers. First, I immersed

myself with the data by *reading and rereading one transcript at a time*. During the initial

reading, I simultaneously listened to the audio recording to move closer to a complete analysis.

My focus during this step was on slowing down, bringing myself back to the moments of the

interview, and noting any moments or descriptions made by participants that stood out to me.

Reflecting on the nonverbal communication during the interview has allowed me to immerse

myself with the whole of the interview rather than a sum of its parts. Next, I reread each

transcript three times before moving to the second step of the analysis, initial noting.

Initial noting requires researchers to grow increasingly familiar with the data, making

extensive notes and comments on the transcript. During the process of initial noting, I focused on

what participants discussed, understood, and thought about how social justice competencies enter

their therapeutic conversations with clients. My initial noting started by taking notes of

descriptive comments made by participants, such as the participant's explicit meanings. I then

examined participants' comments and highlighted specific words and phrases used within the

context of their lived experiences and world. Finally, I identified conceptual comments within

the transcripts and attempted to bring together the participant's overall understanding of how

social justice lives within their therapeutic conversations. This step helped me move into step

three of data analysis, the beginning stages of emerging themes; See Appendix G.

To develop *emerging themes*, I moved back and forth between analyzing parts of the

interview and the whole interview. Through this process, I used the initial notes I made to create

themes that reflected the overarching themes of the participant's interview. Once emergent

themes were identified, I moved into step four of the analysis, searching for connections across

themes for one participant at a time.

While *searching for connections across themes*, I worked towards clustering themes that

were related to each other into main themes. As suggested by Smith et al. (2009), I paid attention

to several factors during this process, such as context, how many times a theme had emerged,

and reflecting on the functionality of what and how participants made descriptions. Once this

was complete, I moved on to step five, which involved *moving on to the following transcript and*

repeating the steps above.

As I moved on to more transcripts, I attempted to bracket ideas, thoughts, or feelings

associated with transcripts by reading one transcript a day and recording my reactions in my

research journal. I spent time reflecting on these reactions before looking at the next transcript so

that I was viewing each transcript as a standalone case and focused on its distinctions. For the

final step in my data analysis, I looked for *patterns across cases*; See Appendix H. I created a list

of all emerging themes to facilitate seeing all themes across cases and identify ones that are

connected, similar, different, and dominant. For the final list of main and subthemes, please see

Table 1.

Table 1

Table of Themes

Main themes	Subthemes
Setting the stage	Psychoeducation
	Gathering more information
	Planting seeds
	Therapeutic relationship
Strategic implementation	Client centred or social justice
	When and whom
Familiarity with social justice	Personal connection
	Political climate
	Professional experiences
Facing barriers	Employer demand
	Limited education leading to lack of confidence

Conclusion

In following the specific procedures put forward by Smith et al. (2009), this IPA study explored the lived experience of registered mental health professionals with counselling psychology training implementing social justice initiatives in the therapy room with clients. First, six counselling psychologists described their experience implementing social justice initiatives in their conversations with clients, what social justice means to them as counsellors, what promoted their implementation of social justice initiatives, and what posed barriers. I then analyzed these experiences as recommended by Smith et al. (2009) data analysis steps presented above to generate rich themes that described the essential characteristics of counselling psychologists' experience in bringing social justice initiatives to their conversations with clients. The results of this process are presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Results

As a result of the data analysis, the following four main themes emerged from the data:
(1) setting the stage for social justice dialogue; (2) strategic planning for social justice dialogue
(3) familiarity with social justice issues; and (4) facing barriers to implementation. After
describing the participants, I will discuss these overarching themes and their subthemes through
quotes from interview transcripts, and my subsequent interpretations. To address the idiographic
nature of participants' experiences, I will outline similarities and differences in participants'
accounts.

Setting the Stage for Social Justice Dialogue

Participants shared that any attempt made at initiating social justice dialogue with clients
did not flourish without building a foundation first. Building this foundation led to developing
the first main theme, setting the stage for social justice initiatives. This main theme represents
four subthemes identified as psychoeducation for shared language, gathering more information
to look for patterns of meaning, planting seeds, and the therapeutic relationship.

Psychoeducation for Shared Language

Participants described working towards creating a shared language targeted at helping
educate clients about what social justice is and how it impacts individuals, explicitly providing
information on how systems and societal structures impact individuals' mental health and well-
being. Cindy described that it becomes harder to do social justice work with clients without
creating shared language and knowledge around what social justice is:

> *The biggest hurdle is ? consciousness and awareness and understanding ... I've done a*
>
> *lot of reading I know a lot of clinical terms; I know all the big words ... and I can educate*
>
> *people on them but when you don't have a shared language with clients it's really hard to*

> *do social justice work*

Raine was more specific than Cindy by describing using psychoeducation to support clients in recognizing how social systems are affecting their problems and supporting them in being able to label their experiences:

> *A lot of the time it comes up and we're looking for language to name an experience. For example, my client was talking about a particular experience with the doctor that was very traumatizing for them, and we discussed the fact that ableism is rampant in the medical system both individually and as the procedures and policies the doctors are following both ethically and medically ... really opened up the discussion because they finally had a name for something that they were experiencing: ableism, and they hadn't actually ever come across the term before ... We got into a discussion about, you know, how it is part of society in general and that we don't see a lot of accessibility for non-hearing folks, for folks who have mobility issues, for folks who are developmentally delayed, and then we started talking about how that impacts our ability to access treatment whether it's physical mental etc. as well as how that impacts ongoing access to stuff like financial security for disabled folks*

Gathering More Information to Look for Patterns of Meaning

Within participants' accounts of setting the stage for social justice dialogue, they described gathering more information about the clients' problems to move closer to discussing the client's experiences through a social justice lens. They asked specific questions that invited clients to think more broadly about the social systems they occupied and probed them to connect contextual factors to their lived experiences. Raine demonstrated this by asking clients, "*Who benefits?*" when discussing the problems, they are experiencing in sessions. Raine stated that it is

important in their work with clients to ask questions that are intended to support clients to think systemically about positions of power and privilege:

> *Recently-ish - changed my approach a bit and asked, "Well, who benefits?" Well, I'm feeling desperate and tired, and my job hates me, well who benefits from that being your framework, and who benefits from that being the space that you're pushed into? And then that seems to really give some folks the space to wonder and be curious about it, rather than us having a prescribed conversation specifically about social justice*

Similarly, Dawn identified using questions that targeted system-level thinking, specifically with women. For example, in the following passage, *"Looking at ... the diagnosis of women especially, histrionic, borderline, and asking what happened in your life that has harmed you in this way"*, Dawn shared that they ask clients questions intended to uncover contextual and environmental factors related to client concerns and diagnoses. Dawn further identified how she gathers information through supportive listening to invite clients into using a social justice lens:

> *Supportive listening into what happened to you and then I look at it from a feminist perspective and saying is this related to oppression of women and silencing women in some sort of way, so I imagine myself as a therapist and having an imaginary bulletin board behind me that whenever I hear social justice issue, I stick it on a Post-it note on the bulletin board and were going to return to that later.*

Comparably, Susie also alluded to using supportive listening with clients to gather more information to identify the subtle ways clients could be experiencing racism:

> *I was listening to how their understanding their interactions with the world. So, thinking of a client who was kind of like she didn't want to say that it was racism because ... how it's experienced in Canada is a lot of microaggressions, a lot of subtlety and deniability.*

So, part of what I'm doing is I'm also listening going mm how do you make sense of that

... sometimes I might even label it just sounds like 'oh that really does that feel like it's

something about you or did you feel that that was warranted?' And eventually sometimes

people will get there ... I wait for enough evidence as much as I can.

Planting Seeds

Participants often referred to "planting seeds" as part of their social justice work.

"Planting seeds" is a direct quote mentioned by several participants, expressing that they often

saw it as a crucial first step to slowly introduce social justice ideas and concepts to allow clients

time to reflect on an alternative perspective to their concerns and issues, as described by Raine:

Maybe it is just a little seed that we plant and then it germinates much later ... that seem

to really give some folks the space to wonder and be curious about it rather than us

having a prescribed conversation about specifically social justice.

Dawn directly referred to their social justice work as planting seeds, "*I called my social justice*

work planting seeds. I plant seeds of goodness, and some of them land and sprout, and some of

them don't, and when people are ready, they're ready. And sometimes it takes years". Planting

seeds is a rich metaphor for how participants have described introducing social justice ideas in a

gentle way that encouraged clients to reflect and be receptive to understanding their presenting

problems in the context of larger systems. Later, Dawn described the patience required when

introducing new ideas to clients through a different metaphor, "*it's like giving a toddler broccoli,*

and sometimes you might have to introduce it 50 times before they will eat it and like it, but it's

introducing it in small pieces".

Therapeutic Relationship

The fourth subtheme refers to the actions of participants to build and strengthen the

therapeutic relationship, with a view toward creating a foundation for social justice dialogue with clients. Megan described building trust and safety with their clients:

> *I slow down or try to act like this secure base, relationship-based counselling. If there is a stain or if they are avoiding and I don't want to push that, again, I don't want to take the power away from them especially when working with client of colour who is oppressed in whatever way. Again, slowing down and focusing on safety building relationship.*

In Cindy's account, they identified centering the client as the expert to create trust in their therapeutic relationships, specifically when attempting to gather more information about their client's experience with the identified issues and concerns that brought them to therapy:

> *[When] you're challenging their illness ... the thing with anxiety or challenging it [a counsellor may explain] this is bad for you and they're [saying] this is not bad for me and so sometimes when we say no something isn't what they think it is ... [we risk] our clients interpreted as you're oppressing me, you're not listening to me, you think you're the expert you think you know more. yeah, so in those moments I have felt like I wonder how we can better deliver education and understanding so that marginalized folks don't feel like their experiences are like being invalidated.*

Strategic Planning for Social Justice Dialogue

"Counselling is both a science and an art, and the art is knowing. When and where and the art is acknowledging when an effort fails" – Dawn

Some participants struggled to know when to take a client-centred approach or a social justice approach to therapeutic conversations. Participants defined taking a client-centred approach meant focusing on what clients wanted to discuss in counselling and understanding

problems and concerns through individual capacity. While taking a social justice approach meant

helping clients understand their problems through a wider lens that takes into consideration how

the systems, they occupy are impacting client problems and concerns. Participants expressed

feelings of hesitation around how, when and whom to integrate social justice concepts with, as

all participants were conscious of not wanting to push their own social justice agenda. Further,

participants expressed that their feelings of hesitancy became more complicated when assessing

the client's readiness to hear and understand social justice concepts related to their issues and

concerns. Thus, the second main theme, strategic planning for social justice dialogue, represents

participants' experiences bridging a social justice lens to therapeutic conversations and is

characterized through two subthemes identified as *client-centred or social justice* and *when and

whom*.

Client-Centred or Social Justice

Overall, participants shared similar experiences in struggling to discern when it was

appropriate and fitting to introduce a social justice dialogue to conversations with clients. For

example, Megan described her experience trying to navigate her tentative reactions to the client's

experiences and leaving her feeling reluctant to take a social justice direction:

> *It's really hard there is that tension that I can sometimes feel around maybe my own*
>
> *belief in my own body is coming in and wanting to call attention to these things and*
>
> *trying to remain client centred. I think there's something really tricky about knowing*
>
> *what's mine to kind of work on elsewhere and also being kind of transparent in session*
>
> *sometimes naming that a little, but past that see what's coming up for you while also*
>
> *being very conscious of this idea of therapists not pushing their own agenda.*

Other participants shared similar experiences as Megan. Some labeled their experiences

as receiving pushback from clients when introducing social justice concepts or dialogue. For

example, Melissa described how her experience working in domestic violence has made it

complicated to know when to bring attention to individual needs versus macro-level influences

with clients:

> *You start to get to know them and then either they identify are you can start to see and*
>
> *hear of this is a bigger issue but if you try to bring it up and they say I don't want to talk*
>
> *about that or no that's not about domestic violence it's just about whatever is going on*
>
> *with me. I can't push them but then there's times when I think should I have pushed a*
>
> *little bit more?*

Whereas Megan also chooses to view such experiences as social justice moments that help

clients feel empowered through honouring their resistance:

> *I love it when clients resist and set boundaries and say no … that can be related to social*
>
> *justice and protecting themselves I think in general resistance … especially for folks who*
>
> *have not been heard … to have a person in a bit of a position of power who is being said*
>
> *no to and being resistant … I think that is a wonderful act of empowerment.*

However, Melissa added that she found it necessary in her practice to start with supporting

individual needs and waiting for the right time and moment to broaden their interventions to be

systemically focused:

> *I listen and I try to bring them back to their own stuff first, right, we're not going to solve*
>
> *poverty in this office let's talk about how it's impacted you and then some things that*
>
> *maybe you can do to help yourself or others who are affected by this but first and*
>
> *foremost it's about problem-solving for their own individual journey.*

> Although participants shared that it was a complex process figuring out when to be client-

centred or social justice oriented, many expressed that it was helpful to embrace both a client-centred and social justice approach rather than choosing either/or, as described by Cindy:

> *I feel like I have my approach now like blending in social justice is that it's not one or the other, there could be a multitude of realities. So, you could have psychiatric symptoms and illnesses, but you can also have a subjective lived experience and lived reality of your experience related to oppression and injustice. So, I think that there is value and kind of see both and invite. so instead of dichotomy in therapy it's kind of like I'm inviting people to see both sides like expanding their worldview as opposed to shrinking it into being just like this is the only way, only one way. So, I feel like there's really room for both*.

When and Who

Participants shared many instances of being strategic around how they attempted to integrate a social justice lens into therapy sessions, many referencing timing as an important aspect to consider and thinking about who to invite into social justice dialogue. Participants expressed that client distress and level of active trauma made it more challenging to determine when and with whom it was appropriate to bring a social justice dialogue within the conversation. For example, Dawn shared waiting until a client's emotions have settled to introduce social justice ideas:

> *I just kind of wait until the crying has stopped and sometimes it takes a few sessions, and they are ready to consider, yeah I don't have to carry the weight of this problem anymore because it's not actually mine" … "easing them into the idea starts with calming [the] nervous system down so they can receive potentially new information and recognizing that they are going to be very skeptical about it to begin with because its new*.

Megan agreed that they were less inclined to bring up a social justice dialogue with clients in

extreme distress and connected to active trauma, specifically with BIPOC clients connected to

present-day social justice issues, than white clients:

> *Dependent on …what systems in which the client is a part of … for example if I'm*
>
> *thinking about a client or white cis gender male client who's coming in and talking a little*
>
> *bit about the racism and the acts of violence that we're? seeing … I think it makes me feel*
>
> *a little bit more like OK I could maybe push a little bit more on this 'cause it's not*
>
> *something that is impacting them in the way that it would impact a client of colour ,so*
>
> *that definitely plays into it and then if I think about clients of colour so if I think of like a*
>
> *woman of colour, an Asian woman may not want to talk about this, I absolutely do not*
>
> *want to be a part of taking away their autonomy and their power in that. So, that's*
>
> *something where it's super easy for me to say like OK let's talk about whatever you want*
>
> *to talk.*

Here, Megan described not wanting to push clients personally connected to traumatic incidents

occurring due to the current political climate as clients may not be emotionally or mentally ready

to discuss how they are affected by such events. However, in Susie's account, they felt more

willing to bring up a social justice dialogue with BIPOC clients experiencing microaggressions

in their community to help empower them to have a voice to speak up against what they were

experiencing:

> *In the last six months or so … it's been a lot around racial interactions, racial identity,*
>
> *what does it mean for me now as a person of colour or Black woman or a Black man …*
>
> *people might be thinking oh well you know I don't deserve this and I'm not in a position*
>
> *to really ask [questions] … so I just need to mind my P's and Q's, particularly around*

the workplace or standing up for themselves. I have one woman … where she was facing

a lot of racism but it was very subtle and so some of the more concrete things of helping

her recognize that she doesn't have to tolerate it, it's something that you just have to sit

back and listen to…I think a lot of it focused on empowering the client and really

encouraging them to speak up and find their way of self-acceptance, but also to get them

to start speaking out more about some of these things.

All participants shared similar experiences of regret about not bringing social justice ideas into conversation with clients when they had the opportunity. However, Megan also shares that her attempts at integrating a social justice dialogue with a client has failed in the past:

When I brought up systems of oppression, there's been a little bit, 'I came here to talk

about depression, and I came to talk about my relationship. So that's been interesting to

navigate … clients were not necessarily wanting to focus on in session …shrugging it off

Megan goes on to share that it has been helpful for her to find comfort in knowing she will make mistakes when trying to bridge a social justice lens to conversations due to its complex nature:

It's kind of like a tricky thing to navigate and sometimes in my life or my experience

there's pressure to do things perfectly or really well and in the last year and a half [I] try

to really remind myself all the time, I'm going [to] make mistakes and that's also

comforting, [knowing] I'm going [to] screw this up because this is new and this is hard

and things are complex [and] that's maybe even a little bit comforting.

Familiarity with Social Justice Issues

The overarching theme, familiarity with social justice issues reflects factors that participants have expressed influencing their experiences using a social justice lens in conversations with clients. All participants shared that their personal and professional

experiences with social justice issues, both negative and positive, influenced their work in

bridging a social justice lens in therapy sessions.

Personal Connection and Experience

        Participants shared that their personal experiences and connection to social justice issues

fueled their passion for using a social justice lens to understand client problems and

conversations. Melissa shared how her connection as a survivor of exploitation has fueled her

passion for supporting others in similar situations:

> *I'm a survivor of a few issues myself so I guess it is someone who came up out of a lot of*
>
> *difficulty and with support and some therapy was able to follow some of my dreams and*
>
> *goals. I want to show other people they can do it to*.

Dawn shared an example from their own life visiting the emergency room due to severe

adnominal pain and dealing with healthcare professionals making assumptions due to her age:

> *She looked up at me and then she turns to the student nurse who was looking after me*
>
> *and goes female, fat and 40 its probably her gallbladder. And I lied there in extreme*
>
> *pain, and I started to cry and then I was said wait a minute I'm a PhD psychologist I*
>
> *work in eating disorder, obesity, social justice … so I called the nurse out on it, and I*
>
> *thought you know me with all my experience, and I felt so shamed by that … what about*
>
> *people who don't have a voice to say something*.

Dawn goes on to describe how her own experience with microaggressions with healthcare

professionals has supported her professional intentions to help clients who may not have the

knowledge or courage to speak out against people in positions of power:

> *So, I take it next step in terms of if it's happening to me, it must be happening to a whole*
>
> *bunch of people and if nobody speaks up then nothing is going to change so then I*

become a change agent as we can and speaking to some power and encouraging women

to speak towards power.

Political Climate

Several participants mentioned that the political climate and events had influenced how

social justice narratives entered conversations with their clients. Many expressing those political

events made it easier to bridge a social justice lens to their clients' conversations as events and

incidents triggered thoughts and emotions in their clients' lives. For instance, Cindy specifically

referenced how the Black Lives Matter movement has brought up issues related to racism in

sessions:

> *I would say like I think contextual … in the climate of like 2020 2021 with like Black*
>
> *Lives Matter last year and a lot of reckoning that we had to do with an anti-racist work I*
>
> *think that clients have really brought these issues to the forefront more than they have*
>
> *historically.*

Similarly, Megan described living and working in Vancouver during the COVID-19 era has

prompted conversations about racism, specifically with Asian clients:

> *I live and work in Vancouver, BC, and especially in the last year and a half or so*
>
> *there's been lots of anti-Asian racism, for example to calling attention to the ways in*
>
> *which racism is happening here and racism is happening other places [for] an Asian*
>
> *client for example. So, I think acknowledging, it validates it, and bringing it up in a*
>
> *way that you know the client might not always be bringing it up and also sometimes*
>
> *naming it as trauma for a lot of folks.*

Professional Experiences

Some participants described that their professional experiences with social justice issues

helped implement a social justice lens in therapy sessions. In contrast, others shared that their

professional experiences posed a barrier to discussing issues of power and privilege and societal

structures in therapeutic conversations due to being subjected to sexism and discrimination from

clients. Several participants shared that they felt their experiences working with women and

domestic violence helped them be able to conceptualize client problems through the lens of

power dynamics, as described in the following passage by Cindy:

> *I spent seven years working in domestic violence a lot of what you learn is to see*
>
> *everything through the lens of my power and control. It's like who has power in this room*
>
> *and who's trying to use their power to control the situation. I think the same is true for*
>
> *therapy sessions in terms of when we both walk into the room who has power.*

Whereas Susie described that being a biracial therapist meant that clients would seek her out for

her BIPOC identity, and others would avoid working with her for the same reason:

> *I would say that psychology is probably only place where you can actually be openly*
>
> *discriminated against because you don't connect because you're worried about the*
>
> *person being white or black … it was a hard lesson for me to learn.*

Similarly, in Dawn's case, they faced several instances of male clients making sexist comments

toward her, which later influenced her only to continue working with women:

> *Over time I just got bolder, and I just call people out immediately whereas as a beginning*
>
> *psychologist I was too nice and I thought the client knew everything, that I had to you*
>
> *know do whatever the client wanted, and the truth is we don't have to. We are the experts*
>
> *we are the ones who hold the therapeutic environment, and we have to be safe in it too.*

Facing Barriers to Implementation

The final main theme illustrates participants' shared experiences of facing different

barriers when implementing a social justice lens in conversations with clients. This main theme is defined in two subthemes: employer demands and limited education, leading to a lack of confidence in themselves.

Employer Demands

Participants shared that their work environment, including agency mandates and missions, either supported their social justice work or made it more difficult to do so. For example, Megan described feeling supported through their work environment due to their employer taking an anti-oppressive and intersectional stance on mental health:

> *I work at a practice that identifies in and really kind of advertises itself as being an intersection practice part of the way that we all work together as we have like anti-oppression meetings twice a month that we talk about the ways in which highlight racism that will be all of these things impacted clients, so I think a lot of it is really ingrained into the system that I occupy.*

Compared to Melissa's experience working for a non-profit that would use women's stories for fundraising purposes and having to advocate for clients who felt their trauma was being exploited for the agency funding:

> *I actually ended up … fighting with the staff and I took it up … to the board when later on a member to the board was telling women stories for fundraising efforts … in print was a variation of her story but they didn't blur the details on it, and it made its way onto … a fundraising package … she was volunteering at … in Ontario … she's reading and says that's my story, that's me and my son story and they didn't blur the details there's no names, thank God … but to her it felt gross.*

Limited Education Leading to Lack of Confidence

All participants indicated that their academic programs taught them limited social justice content and support in knowing how to apply social justice ideas in practice. Some participants mentioned that social justice was typically a topic covered within a multicultural course. They shared that their limited education caused them to feel insecure and worried about making mistakes. As a result, all participants expressed experiencing a lack of confidence earlier in their careers. Megan described how she has actively been working on growing and becoming more comfortable with having social justice conversations:

> *I think it for me in the last year has been like a big attempt of trying to grow in that*
> *area because it was definitely hard when I was a baby therapist.*

Megan goes on to describe how her lack of confidence earlier in her career left her feeling unprepared to bridge a social justice dialogue in conversations with clients:

> *I was often worried about saying the wrong thing or yeah having conversations that were*
> *yeah, I might take a thing, I think it was new and scary and I was often worried about*
> *saying the wrong thing or yeah having conversations that were yeah, I might take a thing*
> *I was scared to screw it up.*

Similarly, several participants indicated that their further education and professional development have helped them learn how to implement social justice practices in their work, causing them to feel more confident. Cindy described how her connection and commitment to social justice work encouraged her to pursue further education.

> *A lot of it probably had to do with my own lived experience as a woman of colour…I just*
> *felt like there wasn't really at the time I guess a lot of understanding of what people of*
> *colour experience was and how to facilitate that in therapy sessions with clients in a*

meaningful way. So, in a lot of ways it wasn't technically built into a lot of academic

programs or coursework either and so I've had to kind of just learn about it on my own.

So, a lot of work that I've done on my own is reading work by people of colour, it's really

kind of extracts their experiences, their understanding of the world and experiences with

mental health.

Conclusion

This chapter provided evidence about each participant's experience in how they have

implemented and integrated a social justice approach with clients. Participants shared much

about what they found necessary steps toward social justice work. They spoke about providing

psychoeducation to clients, gathering more contextual information, finding openings to integrate

a social justice dialogue through open-ended questions, and building a trustworthy and safe

relationship with clients. Participants also emphasized personal connection and professional

experience as helpful factors in their experiences. Some participants spoke about experiences in

having to deal with social justice issues from clients, for example, racism and sexism, which left

them feeling upset and unprepared to manage. Furthermore, participants spoke at length about

the barriers they experienced in their attempts to use a social justice approach with clients,

including limited education, that they felt contributed to a lack of confidence within themselves

to implement a social justice approach, as well as employer demands. The next chapter will

discuss the limitations and implications of this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter will explore the meaning and importance of the data presented in the previous chapter. First, I will consider the findings from each main theme and its connection to existing literature and research related to the research question that is aimed at understanding the experience of how counselling psychologists use a social justice lens in therapy sessions. Then, I will describe the limitations of the present research and implications for practice, counsellor education, and research.

Setting the Stage for Social Justice Dialogue

When participants were asked to describe their experiences using a social justice lens in therapy sessions, they described the need to take foundational steps with their clients before introducing social justice language or dialogue. Participants spoke at length about the various ways they provided psychoeducation to their clients about what social justice is and how unjust conditions affect people. Some participants identified providing psychoeducation to create a shared language with clients to help foster social justice dialogue in sessions. Specifically, expressing that the definition and terms encompassed in understanding social justice may be beyond some clients' understanding of social systems, and how such systems are created to place specific groups of people at a disadvantage

Secondly, participants' shared feeling the need to gather more information about their clients' experiences before introducing social justice ideas. Interestingly, how participants gathered more information from their clients varied. However, they were attuned to picking up on the contextual factors affecting their clients and were also intentional about exploring this further with their clients by asking specific questions that invited systemic thinking. Asking these questions is reminiscent of using postmodern therapeutic approaches such as narrative and

feminist therapy that invite clients to think about context and systemic? affecting their concerns.

Young (2018) labeled this as getting to know the person "away from" the problem, which invites

clients to think more broadly about the social systems they occupy and probes them to connect

contextual factors to their lived experiences.

Similarly, Paré (2014) brought attention to client-affirming accounts that encourage

counsellors to get to know the person facing the challenge rather than the person with problems.

Most participants identified using a feminist and narrative approach to therapy, which became

more apparent in the descriptions of the specific questions they would ask clients. These

approaches seemed to help participants feel that they were helping their clients move closer to

thinking about their issues and concerns through a social justice lens that inherently focuses on

understanding how power and privilege contribute to manifesting disadvantages and advantages

for people. This process is similar to Collins' (2018) work that focuses on understanding how

clients' cultural identities intersect with statues of power and privilege.

Furthermore, participants shared that this foundational process required time and patience

to allow clients the space to reflect on a different way of understanding their issues and concerns.

Many participants used the metaphor of planting seeds to describe the tedious and delicate

process required to let ideas grow and root without pushing their agenda. Emphasizing the

delicate and patient process that is essential when doing social justice work is important (Collins,

2018; Paré, 2014).

Subsequently, using such a patient and thoughtful approach to introducing a social justice

lens in therapy sessions created trust and safety within the therapeutic relationship, which all

participants viewed as necessary for social justice work. Participants stated explicitly that it was

essential to first build a solid therapeutic relationship with clients before discussing social justice

issues. Similarly, the MSJCC framework places the therapeutic relationship at the centereof social justice work by focusing on statues of power, privilege, and oppression intersecting between the client and therapist (Ratts et al, 2016). The next theme, strategic planning for social justice dialogue, explores further how participants attempted to bridge a social justice dialogue with clients once a solid foundation was formed.

Strategic Implementation for Social Justice Dialogue

All participants agreed that it was essential to use a social justice lens in their conceptualization of client issues and concerns, thus, embracing the idea of understanding client diversity through identity politics (Moodley et al., 2022). Taking such an approach is similar to several scholars' assertions that the political cannot be separated from the person (Collins, 2018; Moodley et a., 2022; Paré, 2014; Winter, 2018). Thus, supporting counsellors in learning to assess when to consider clients' sociocultural identities and social locations and how to safely integrate this in therapy has the potential to have a positive impact on client engagement in their search for well-being and healing (Moodley et al., 2022).

Client-Centred or Social Justice

Interestingly, it appeared that participants differed from one another when it came to implementing a social justice lens in therapy sessions, encapsulating the next main theme, strategic implementation for social justice dialogue. Some participants prioritized the individual client, while others emphasized the systems clients occupy. This difference is reflected in the subtheme, client-centred or social justice. Some participants were more inclined to focus on individual needs first, while still considering how the large systems are impacting the client as an individual, whereas others talked about social justice being at the heart of all their interactions with clients.

Consequently, it seems that the participants could not agree if a client-centred or a social justice approach were better than the other, and instead, participants viewed the importance of using both simultaneously. This present research, in a similar way, has added to the research base that supports counselling psychologists embracing the concept of intersectionality and viewing clients through the lens of context, privilege, and inequalities (Robinson-Wood, 2022). More importantly, understanding the client's status of privilege and oppression through a multifaceted lens considers the client's multiple cultural identities and consequently supports a broader understanding of the client's lived experiences (Crenshaw, 2018).

Furthermore, participants emphasized care and deliberation about when and whom to bring up social justice issues with when reflecting on their experiences strategically implementing a social justice lens with clients. More specifically, there were suggestions that participants' deliberation around how to bring up social justice issues was influenced by the social systems clients occupied. Participants also emphasized client agency and autonomy in therapy to engage in social justice action; this aligns with a previous study by Winter and Hanley (2015). Additionally, participants expressed that attempts to integrate social justice conversations with clients seeking therapy to address concerns such as depression or relationship concerns have failed and left them feeling unsure about when to bring up social justice conversations with clients in the future. Avoiding or failing to acknowledge how systems of oppression have impacted racialized clients can become problematic as counsellors risk invalidating the client's trauma due to such systems (De Mello, 2022).

Participants shared that they felt as though their academic programs and training did not prepare them to know how to integrate social justice conversations with clients. The lack of learning support from educational programs left participants feeling insecure about bringing up

social justice conversations early in their careers and embracing the notion of making mistakes in their attempts at discussing clients' sociocultural identities. Many participants stated that it was their own experiences and research that helped them overcome their fear of attempting to integrate social justice conversations with clients. This study suggests that academic programs and training are not adequately supporting counselling students in knowing how to implement social justice competencies with clients. Thus, counsellors are left to experiment and learn on their own how to implement social justice initiatives with clients, which can run the risk of counsellors upholding systems of oppression and inadvertently communicating a neutral stance that supports the idea that client challenges are solely individual and within their control.

Despite the participants' differing opinions on when and with whom to bring up the impact of social justice issues with clients, they all agreed that it was essential to collaborate with clients and allow their clients to be active participants throughout the therapeutic work. This aligns with other scholarship indicating that addressing power issues and using collaboration to embrace a social justice approach in therapy is at the core of all participants therapeutic relationships (Collins, 2018; Ratts et al, 2016). Embracing both approaches and remaining flexible allows clients to be in the driver's seat of the therapeutic process, which all participants emphasized was necessary for their social justice work to be successful. For example, although participants were sometimes less inclined to bring up social justice dialogue with clients, they still used a social justice approach to their case conceptualization. Thus, participants were attuned to using both a social justice lens and a client-centred approach.

Familiarity with Social Justice Issues

Participants expressed contextual factors, such as personal connection, political climate, and professional experience, impacted their attempts at implementing a social justice lens with

clients. All participants shared examples of how their own experiences with social justice issues,

professionally and personally, influenced their practices at bridging a social justice dialogue with

clients in therapy sessions. Accordingly, participants' ability to use their cultural self-awareness

is consistent with the competencies required for social justice work (Collins, 2018).

Within this research, participants stated that their experience with social justice issues

helped them relate to clients and, in turn, enhanced empathy for clients, subsequently fueling

their passion for supporting clients through social justice issues. Accordingly, participants

described personal connections as helpful to their attempts to implement social justice work with

clients, specifically, some identifying similarities to their clients' experiences. Acknowledging

such similarities encouraged Dawn to use their position of privilege and power to help others

overcome similar social justice issues they have encountered in their own life. Winter and

Hanley (2015) asserted that commitment to social justice in a counsellor's personal life increases

commitment to social justice in their professional life, consistent with previous research (Singh

et al., 2010; Winter et al., 2018).

Similarly, participants connected their life experiences with social justice issues as

motivation to implement a social justice dialogue with clients. Participants ability to use their

personal experiences to drive their social justice work and understanding of their clients connects

to Beaton's (2020) research. Additionally, therapists became more committed to increasing

clients' sense of hope while reducing shame and stigma (De Vos et al., 2016). As such,

counsellors with experiential knowledge must use a critical lens when treating clients with

similar adverse life experiences as their clients, maintain good self-awareness, and seek

appropriate supervision (Beaton 2020; De Vos et al., 2016).

Lastly, participants shared that their professional experiences impacted their ability to

execute social justice work with their clients differently. Some participants found that where they worked directly impacted their social justice work with clients, specifically, work in domestic violence. At the same time, some identified negative experiences dealing with social justice issues enacted towards them by clients. It could be argued that the present research has reinforced the vital role of reflexivity for counselling psychologists. Reflexivity requires counsellors to think about, write, and talk about their practice (Paré, 2019). By engaging in a reflective process, counsellors can consider the space between what they set out to do and what unfolds in the counselling room. Subsequently, paying attention to factors influencing the counselling process, such as assumptions, family and personal history, and the broader culture, can impact the counselling process (Paré, 2019). Comparably, Gaete et al. (2018) highlighted the need for dialogical reflexivity, specifically during a diagnostic conversation, to avoid enacting injustice through dialogue and to better understand the client's life experience through the lens of power and privilege. Dialogical reflexivity helps counsellors pay attention to the social positions held by themselves and the client at every conversational turn.

Facing Barriers to Implementation

The evolution of diversity and multiculturalism in Western counselling and psychotherapy has significantly evolved in research and practice over the last 60 years. However, theory and practice continue to fall short of supporting radically anti-oppressive practices required to heal underserved populations (Moodley et al., 2022). The present research serves as a reminder that counselling psychologists continue to face barriers in supporting marginalized clients through a socially just capacity. Non-profit organizations face challenges when it comes to balancing funding needs and ethical practices that protect the respect and dignity of all clients (Reynolds & Hammoud-Beckett, 2017).

This research offers insight into how counselling psychologists implement a social justice lens in therapy sessions with clients. Participants seemed to reflect on several helpful and unhelpful factors in their experiences in implementing a social justice approach in their practice. Without prior experience, participants felt hesitant and scared to implement a social justice approach. They emphasized the lack of training received for both teachers and students in counselling psychology programs. This lack of training becomes worrisome considering the mental health needs of the ever-evolving diverse Canadian population. Suppose educational institutions do not begin to respond to the gap and the need for better multicultural and social justice competencies training. In that case, future mental health professionals risk perpetuating oppressive and racist practices.

Furthermore, what was apparent within the research was that personal connection served as an aid in encouraging counsellors to take a social justice approach with clients. These findings imply that those who do not have a personal connection to a social justice issue may struggle more to use a social justice approach out of fear of making a mistake or saying the wrong thing. Opportunity and experience become paramount for aspiring counsellors without personal experience with social justice issues. Findings suggest that our educational systems are not supportive enough in teaching anti-oppressive and anti-racist practices to future counsellors.

Direction for Education Programs

Considering how counsellors are trained is essential to the facilitation of social justice competencies in counselling (Ginsberg & Sinacore, 2015). Although there has been an increase in research and presentations on social justice and counselling psychology (Hunsaker, 2011), mental health professionals still report multiple barriers to implementing social justice initiatives in practice (Suzuki et al., 2019). Overall, participants expressed that they found it challenging to

implement social justice initiatives in their practice due to the limited education on social justice

competencies in counselling while completing their academic programs. Participants shared that

as they progressed in their career and furthered their counselling experience, they felt more

confident taking and implementing a social justice approach with clients than earlier in their

career. This lack of confidence indicates that counselling psychologists find it challenging to

implement social justice initiatives without proper knowledge and prior experience using a social

justice approach in counselling. Thus, participants within this research were left feeling

unprepared to invite conversations about clients' social location and identities. As a result, some

participants sought education on social justice and counselling.

Currently, there is no agreement across universities on how multicultural counselling

should be taught (Arthur & Collins, 2015). It appears that multicultural counselling courses have

focused on concepts of cultural diversity and increasing student awareness rather than on skill

development (Arthur & Collins, 2015; Malott et al., 2010; Pieterse et al., 2009). Furthermore, the

majority of courses used deductive pedagogical styles such as lectures, textbook readings, class

discussions, and self-reflection assessments (Malott et al., 2010). Counselling psychology

programs should provide students with opportunities that expose them to non-traditional ways of

learning aimed at immersing students in discourse about social justice and multiculturalism and

opportunities to put knowledge into practice (Ginsberg & Sinacore, 2015). Additionally,

education programs should be including a standalone course dedicated to teaching social justice

in the context of multicultural counselling versus integrating social justice as a topic within a

multicultural course to better support students in learning skill implementation (Pieterse et al.,

2009).

Implications for Future Research and Practice

Research has shown us that cultural identity impacts one's individual lived experiences in many different settings. This research offers several implications for future practice and research for social justice and multiculturalism in counselling psychology. Everyone has assumptions and biases towards others; counselling psychologists are not immune to this. Every participant spoke about how their life experiences have affected the way they view and come to understand problems. For this reason, it becomes vital that counsellors are given the opportunities to learn and build skills in recognizing what assumptions and biases they hold and how to navigate the effects of this on the counselling relationship. As such, this research supports the implication for Canadian University programs in counselling psychology to take a more active role in teachings around social justice competencies.

Additionally, it would be beneficial for future research to continue exploring ways in which counselling psychologists are attending to social justice initiatives within therapy settings. Specifically, it is also encouraged that future research investigates how social justice dialogue occurs between a therapist and client, as well as how counsellors are using a social justice approach in their case conceptualization. Furthermore, engaging in social justice work is complex and emotional. I recommend investigating the intersection between self-care, supervision, and social justice in counselling psychology.

The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the sociopolitical, racial, and environmental stress on communities of color. This harm is repeatedly noticed across national crises and disasters and disproportionately affects communities exposed to the toxic stress of poverty, crime, unemployment, racism, and discrimination (Fortuna et al., 2020). Counselling psychologists are uniquely positioned to walk alongside people and communities impacted by

trauma rooted in systemic oppression and support the liberation and healing of marginalized

individuals (Moodley et al., 2022). There is a need for therapists to understand global political

currents and regional movements that affect and impact both communities and individuals.

Clients can gain insight into understanding their feelings and experiences when therapists

consider the impact social, cultural, political, and economic realities have on their mental health

(De Mello, 2022). The impact of the sociopolitical environment in the last few years has brought

to the forefront the importance of counselling psychologists to attend to sociocultural factors

through a broader lens of understanding diversity and to embrace anti-oppressive and antiracist

practices. Adopting such practices becomes integral during points in history that create stressful

and hostile environments that cultivate discrimination, prejudice, and stigma and consequently

increase minority stress (Meyer, 2003). Many participants identified that the political climate and

aftermath of social movements such as Black Lives Matter and COVID-19 increased

conversations about race and injustices with clients. For this reason, counsellors must

acknowledge and consider clients' social identities through an intersection lens that can uncover

the degree to which clients are impacted by minority stress. Considering and discussing several

measures of a person's identity unveils the implications of cultural oppression on others, past and

present. Taking this approach supports the counsellor in avoiding falling into the 'I know what is

best for you' category and instead attempts to understand clients in context (Collins & Arthur,

2018).

Supervision

Currently, there is strong momentum in situating social justice as central to ethical

practices within multicultural counselling (Ginsberg & Sinacore, 2015; Kennedy & Arthur,

2014; Ratts et al., 2016). Cultural sensitivity is necessary; however, it is essential that counsellors

move beyond cultural sensitivity and mobilize action both within the therapy room and beyond
(Arthur, 2018). However, moving from the world of values and aspirations to the real world of
practice is complex. For example, supervision has been identified as an important factor that
helps counsellors improve their relationships with clients (Arthur & Collins, 2015). As such,
counselling psychology faculty instructors and supervisors have an ethical responsibility to
address and engage students in social justice issues (Mackie & Boucher, 2018). Mackie &
Boucher (2018) discussed using the deliberate practice of supervision with their supervisees' that
attends to increasing awareness of that counsellor's social location and address the context of
social inequalities through sharing stories and experiences.

Similarly, Arthur (2018) encouraged supervisors to have transparent conversations about
the influence of power and privilege on the supervisory relationship between counsellors and
clients. Furthermore, Arthur (2018) also encouraged supervisors to have continuous discussions
about contextual factors influencing clients' presenting concerns, which has the potential to lead
to new interpretations and potential actions identified. However, research suggests that doctoral
trainees feel unprepared to deliver social justice training through their teaching pedagogies
(Singh et al., 2010). Thus, this research serves as a reminder that integrating social justice into
counselling psychology is a shared responsibility between educational programs, supervisors,
and counsellors in training and one's own personal development.

Professional Commitment

Despite the lack of education on social justice in counselling psychology, a counsellor
can support centering social justice in counselling by committing themselves to continued
professional learning and reflection around multicultural and social justice counselling.
Reflection can be a powerful tool in helping counsellors identify and create specific learning

goals for professional growth in multicultural and social justice competencies that can later be

applied and evaluated in practice (Arthur, 2018).

This research study indicated that a personal connection to social justice issues fuels

one's commitment to social justice work. However, regardless of personal experience, I

encourage counsellors to take an ethical stance on social justice within their practice and work

towards allyship. Counsellors can work towards social justice by walking alongside clients, on

behalf of clients, or publicly to address matters of systemic oppression and social injustices. In

addition, counsellors can use their personal and professional power toward social change

(Arthur, 2018).

Limitations

There were several limitations related to this research study. The diversity of participants

was limited. Specifically, in gender identification and having no male representation. As such the

idiographic nature of the findings are limited to the experiences of the six counsellors

interviewed for this research. Other counsellors may not share the same experiences or opinions,

particularly when considering the limited diversity presented in the sample size. The research

project is aimed at understanding the individual experience of any given counsellors' experience

in using a social justice approach in therapy. Therefore, there could be countless ways to

describe and interpret the experience of how counsellors use a social justice lens in therapy

sessions. Additionally, for the six counsellor who were interviewed their thoughts, opinions and

understandings of using a social justice lens in therapy will continue to evolve as they gain more

experience with time and continue to see different clients. subsequently, the inconsistency of the

number of years of experience and education present as a limitation. Participants directly

referenced experience as being a helpful factor in building their social justice competencies. As

such, participants with less years of experience could have been limited in their discussion; participants with over 10 years ofexperience have had more time to develop their skills and professional identity.

Secondly, each theme was related to and built on the preceding one, this could be indication that bracketing proved to be challenging for myself as a novice researcher. Overlapping of themes could be representing a parallel process. However, in the spirit of intersectionality it should be noted that it is encouraged for counsellors to acknowledge and embrace several positions in understanding their client as a whole and like the themes cannot be fully separated.

Lastly, my own sense making is made through participants' sense making which represents the double hermeneutic process within an IPA and presents as a limitation within this research (Tuffour, 2017). Thus, my experiences have inevitably impacted my understanding and interpretation of the participants experiences. Furthermore, I am a novice researcher at the beginning of my training and development of epistemology which has caused me to explore and consider multiple perspectives and points of view. As such, data analysis was challenging.

Concluding Reflexive Statement

As a counselling psychology graduate student, developing my professional competencies is important to me. My culture-infused counselling graduate course was the catalyst to my interest in wanting to grasp a better understanding of how I could learn how to take an anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and socially just approach to my counselling practice. I have worked with marginalized families in the past before and have experienced first-hand the importance of needing to understand the intersection between culture and mental health. When I started this research study, I began to reflect on my knowledge and skill development in multicultural

counselling. I quickly realized that I, too, shared the same sentiments of insecurity my

participants described when they were in the early stages of their careers. While I was aware that

social justice work is complex, I quickly realized that social justice work is a continuous journey

that requires commitment and strength, as social justice work can be emotionally taxing.

Participants in this research reminded me of the importance of self-care and continuous learning.

This reminder has helped me broaden my perspective on what it means to be a culturally attuned

and sensitive counsellor. I now realize that self-awareness is not enough and that I will need to

do my part toward continued professional learning to integrate social justice dialogue

successfully and safely with future clients. Overall, this research study has strengthened my

commitment to becoming a socially just and culturally responsive counselling psychologist.

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Appendix A – Recruitment Advertisement

**PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR
RESEARCH IN SOCIAL JUSTICE AND COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY**

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study of
*look to better understand about how counsellors and therapists are using a
social justice approach in their dialogue with clients.*

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to: complete a 1:1 interview
via video call and a follow up conversation via video call or email

Your participation is **entirely voluntary** and would take up approximately 1
hour of your time over 2 occasions. By participating in this study, you will help
us to better understand how clients can be supported in a socially justice
manner in the therapy room.

To learn more about this study, or to participate in this study,
please contact:

Principal Investigator:
*Angela Chieco, Masters of Counselling Psychology student, Athabasca
University
achieco1@athabasca.edu*

This study is supervised by: Dr. Jeff Chang, jeffc@athabascau.ca

This study has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board.

Appendix B – Ethics Approval

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB) has reviewed and approved the research project noted below. The REB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) and Athabasca University Policy and Procedures.

Ethics File No.: **24313**

Principal Investigator:
Ms. Angela Chieco, Graduate Student
Faculty of Health Disciplines\Master of Counselling

Supervisor:
Dr. Jeff Chang (Supervisor)

Project Title:
A Glimpse into Using a Social Justice Lens in the Therapy Room: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Effective Date: May 26, 2021   **Expiry Date**:   May 25, 2022

Restrictions:

Any modification or amendment to the approved research must be submitted to the AUREB for approval.

Ethical approval is valid *for a period of one year*. An annual request for renewal must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date if a project is ongoing beyond one year.

A Project Completion (Final) Report must be submitted when the research is complete *(i.e. all participant contact and data collection is concluded, no follow-up with participants is anticipated and findings have been made available/provided to participants (if applicable))* or the research is terminated.

Approved by: **Date: May 26, 2021**

Emily Doyle, Chair
Faculty of Health Disciplines, Departmental Ethics Review Committee

_____
Athabasca University Research Ethics Board
University Research Services, Research Centre
1 University Drive, Athabasca AB Canada   T9S 3A3
E-mail rebsec@athabascau.ca
Telephone: 780.213.2033

Appendix C – Invitation to Participate

A Glimpse into Using a Social Justice Lens in the Therapy Room: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Principal Investigator (Researcher): Angela Chieco, **achieco1@athabasca.edu**
Supervisor: Dr. Jeff Chang, jeffc@athabascau.ca

My name is *Angela Chieco* and I am a *Masters of Counselling Psychology* student at Athabasca University. As a requirement to complete my degree, I am conducting a research project about how counselling psychologist are using a social justice lens in the dialogue that occurs between themselves and their clients in the therapy room. I am conducting this project under the supervision of Dr. Jeff Chang.

I invite you to participate in this project because you may be a registered counsellor or therapist, who has experience and education in counselling psychology and identify a commitment to social justice.

The purpose of this research project is to contribute to gaining a better understanding about how counsellors are using a social justice approach in their dialogue with clients.

Your participation in this project would involve complete a recorded interview via Zoom video call. The interview will be arranged for a time and place that is convenient to your schedule and will require approximately 1 hour of your time. A follow-up conversation will be scheduled to review themes that will be developed based on the interview.

The research should benefit counselling psychologists in reflecting on how social justice issues enter the therapy room with their clients and how clients can be best supported. I do not anticipate you will face any risks as a result of participating in this research.

Thank you for considering this invitation. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact me, Angela Chieco by e-mail achieco1@athabasca.edu or my supervisor, Dr. Jeff Chang by email jeffc@athabascau.ca

Thank you.

Angela

This project has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in this project, please contact the Research Ethics Officer by e-mail at rebsec@athabascau.ca or by telephone at 1-800-788-9041, ext. 6718.

Appendix D – Consent Form

LETTER OF INFORMATION / INFORMED CONSENT FORM

A Glimpse into Using a Social Justice Lens in the Therapy Room: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Principal Investigator (Researcher):   **Supervisor:**
Angela Chieco, achieco1@athabasca.edu   Dr. Jeff Chang, jeffc@athabascau.ca

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled 'A Glimpse into Using a Social Justice Lens in the Therapy Room: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis'.

This form is part of the process of informed consent. The information presented should give you the basic idea of what this research is about and what your participation will involve, should you choose to participate. It also describes your right to withdraw from the project. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research project, you should understand enough about its risks, benefits and what it requires of you to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully as it is important that you understand the information given to you. Please contact the principal investigator, *Angela Chieco* if you have any questions about the project or would like more information before you consent to participate.

It is entirely up to you whether or not you take part in this research. If you choose not to take part, or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you now, or in the future.

Introduction
My name is *Angela Chieco* and I am a *Masters of Counselling Psychology* student at Athabasca University. As a requirement to complete my degree, I am conducting a research project about how counselling psychologist are using a social justice lens in the dialogue that occurs between themselves and their clients in the therapy room. I am conducting this project under the supervision of Dr. Jeff Chang.

Why are you being asked to take part in this research project?
You are being invited to participate in this project because you may be a registered counsellor or therapist, who has experience and education in counselling psychology and identify a commitment to social justice.

What is the purpose of this research project?
The purpose of this research project is to contribute to gaining a better understanding about how counsellors are using a social justice approach in their dialogue with clients. The hope is that counsellors and therapist are able to use his information to better support their clients in a socially justice way.

What will you be asked to do?
Your participation in this project would involve complete a recorded interview via Zoom video call. The interview will be arranged for a time and place that is convenient to your schedule and

will require approximately 1 hour of your time. A follow-up conversation will be scheduled to review themes that will be developed based on the interview.

What are the risks and benefits?
The research should benefit counselling psychologists in reflecting on how social justice issues enter the therapy room with their clients and how clients can be best supported. I do not anticipate you will face any risks as a result of participating in this research.

Do you have to take part in this project?
As stated earlier in this letter, involvement in this project is entirely voluntary. You will have the opportunity to end the interview at any point and will be reminded of this at the beginning of the interview. Any data or information collected at that point will be deleted and not used towards the research project. Data will not be removed post the follow up conversation as all data at that point will become anonymized.

How will your privacy and confidentiality be protected?
The ethical duty of confidentiality includes safeguarding participants' identities, personal information, and data from unauthorized access, use or disclosure. As interviews will occur via Zoom video call it will be important that you identify a space where information can be kept private. All information will be held confidential, except when legislation or a professional code of conduct requires that it be reported.

How will my anonymity be protected?
Anonymity refers to protecting participants' identifying characteristics, such as name or description of physical appearance. Following the completion of the interview participants will be coded with a pseudonym to be identified as moving forward in the research project. I will be the sole person who has access to any identifiable information. Every reasonable effort will be made to ensure your anonymity; you will not be identified in publications without your explicit permission.

How will the data collected be stored?
Data will be collected via a recorded interview using Zoom video call. You will not need to create an account to use Zoom video call. Interviews will be password protected and will be saved on a password protected computer. Both an audio file and combined audio video file will be saved. Individuals who may have access to the data will include myself and my supervisor Dr. Jeff Chang. Data may be used for future secondary use; however, REB approval will be sought if this occurs.

Who will receive the results of the research project?
The existence of the research will be listed in an abstract posted online at the Athabasca University Library's Digital Thesis and Project Room and the final research paper will be publicly available. Direct quotations may be used under pseudonyms. Participants will be given the option to provide an email address to send the final report.

Who can you contact for more information or to indicate your interest in participating in the research project?
Thank you for considering this invitation. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact me, (the principal investigator) by e-mail achieco1@athabasca.edu or my supervisor Dr. Jeff Chang by email jeffc@athabascau.ca. If you are ready to participate in this project, please complete and sign the attached Consent Form and return it as soon as possible by email to Angela Chieco at achieco1@athbasca.ca.

Thank you.

Angela

This project has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in this project, please contact the Research Ethics Officer by e-mail at rebsec@athabascau.ca or by telephone at 1-800-788-9041, ext. 6718.

Informed Consent

Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the information about the research project.
- You have been able to ask questions about this project.
- You are satisfied with the answers to any questions you may have had.
- You understand what the research project is about and what you will be asked to do.
- You understand that you are free to withdraw your participation in the research project without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect you now, or in the
- You understand that if you choose to end your participation **during** data collection, any data collected from you up to that point will be destroyed.
- You understand that your data is being collected anonymously, and therefore cannot be removed once the data collection has ended.

	YES	NO
I agree to be audio-recorded	◯	◯
I agree to be video recorded	◯	◯
I allow my name to be identified in any publications resulting from this project	◯	◯
I am willing to be contacted following the interview to verify that my comments are accurately reflected in the transcript.	◯	◯

Your signature confirms:

- You have read what this research project is about and understood the risks and benefits. You have had time to think about participating in the project and had the opportunity to ask questions and have those questions answered to your satisfaction.
- You understand that participating in the project is entirely voluntary and that you may end your participation at any time without any penalty or negative consequences.
- You have been given a copy of this Informed Consent form for your records; and
- You agree to participate in this research project.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

Principal Investigator's Signature:

I have explained this project to the best of my ability. I invited questions and responded to any that were asked. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in participating in the research project, any potential risks and that he or she has freely chosen to participate.

_____   _____
Signature of Principal Investigator   Date

Appendix E – Interview Schedule

A Glimpse into Using a Social Justice Lens in the Therapy Room: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
Interview questions

1) How would you define social justice?
2) What does social justice mean to you as a therapist?
3) How did you learn about social justice and its connection to counselling?
4) What does using a social justice lens in your counselling practice mean to you?
5) What social justice issues have you encountered with clients?
6) How have these social justice issues played out in the therapy room
   a. Please describe a specific example of a social justice issue and how it played out in the therapy room.
7) In what ways do social justice competencies enter in the therapeutic dialogue between you and a client?
   a. Please describe a specific example of how social justice competencies entered in the therapeutic dialogue between you and a client.
8) How do you invite social justice as an additional discourse where only a symptom-based, psychiatric one has been a focus?
9) What are the struggles against power relations that clients present to you in counselling?
10) What therapeutic practices have you already been exposed to, or have generated yourself, that attend to social justice issues?
11) How have you held space for clients to express their legitimate rage over historical cultural oppression – even when that rage is directed at you or what you represent?
12) Tell me about a time when you wished you would have done something differently, in a conversation, with clients to practice from a more socially justice lens?
13) What has been your biggest hurdle in including a social justice orientation in your conversations with clients?
   a. What contributed to overcoming this hurdle?
   b. What's contributed to your growth in exercising social justice competencies in therapeutic conversations
14) What advice would you give to aspiring counsellors in how they can include a social justice lens in therapy sessions?

Appendix F – Sample Transcript

4

114 RAINE: Honestly, I found it welcomed by my clients. **When I do it, I always offer a free 15**
115 **minute consult before I book any appointments just to see about whether or not we fit, and**
116 **nine times out of 10 when we're talking about stuff and I mentioned that for me, individual**
117 **aren't the problem they have problems and those problems might be exacerbated or, you**
118 **know, 'turned up' by the environment that we're in or the socioeconomic position we occupy**
119 **or other things that are beyond our control but are still acting on us and within us.** I haven't
120 had anyone yet go EW yuck gross

121

122 ANGELA: OK such been pretty well received, and I thought yeah that's interesting to hear and
123 I'm kind of glad to hear in a lot of ways because sometimes I think

124

125 RAINE: I find **a lot of my clients are really happily surprised by that approach and are like "oh**
126 **wow so you actually give a crap that my job might be harming me as opposed to just telling**
127 **me to quit and find a new one"**

128

129 ANGELA: yeah I just always wonder kind of how that's perceived sometimes from clients
130 especially people who like me they identify either with the diagnoses that they've been given
131 and trying to add an additional you know story to that I wonder if it is sometimes is it well
132 received or other times is it too much to kind of step into it you know me being kind of relates
133 back to work sing a little bit earlier that you were saying you notice sometimes talking about
134 he's like bigger concepts that include that you know are under the umbrella of social justice
135 becomes a little too much for some clients to like step into and go into

136

137 RAINE: **I think it's not that the information is unwelcome, or not able to be received, but more**
138 **that they're just not in a space for that knowledge as helpful or beneficial at that point.** So
139 sometimes, like with the client that I was talking about with toxic masculinity, we had a recent
140 session where we talked a little bit more and they had mentioned that they had been thinking
141 about capitalism and they weren't like - they didn't have any like great epiphanies or anything,
142 but they were like it's making me think and I don't know what I think yet but I'm thinking about
143 it. **And I was like OK that's really cool because maybe it is just a little seed that we plant and**
144 **then it germinates much later,** but that's OK too yeah?

145

146 ANGELA: so, kind of hearing you say I like going with where the client goes as well and not kind
147 of forcing may be are sort of agenda and wanting to educate them a little bit more on bigger
148 systems at play and things that might be intertwined into it or talking about and being OK with
149 letting like planting the seed or bringing it up and letting it go if it just doesn't kind of fit or land
150 for them
151

Angela Chieco
Presenting social justice to clients in description about one's therapeutic approach.

Angela Chieco
Overall clients welcome the idea that contextual factors and systems are influencing their problems

Angela Chieco
Although introducing the idea of social justice issues in to clients understanding may not land it has planted seeds or ideas for clients to think about more

Appendix G – List of Emerging Themes

Setting the stage for social justice in their practice. For some social justice was at the heart of their interactions with clients

1. **Supporting and empowering clients to take social justice actions outside of the therapy room in hopes to shift social change, typically related to social justice issue the client is experiencing ex: racism, sexual assault, sexism**

2. **Taking an educational stance on including social justice in their work with clients (providing psycho-ed to set the stage for social justice conversations)**
   a. **Note: creating shared language was an important process to set the stage for social justice conversations in therapy**
      ▪ Sharing knowledge about what social justice is and how it may be affecting the client's mental health. For example, listening to content and looking for opportunities to help clients make connections and make sense of their experience through a social justice lens
      ▪ Needing to introduce ideas and information about social justice specifically with white/male/ cis-gender clients
      ▪ not having a shared language and understanding about what social justice is and how it affects people has posed as a barrier to actively including it in therapy sessions and instead would take note of social justice connections to client problems and try to come back to at a later date with them (looking for openings).

3. **Most have had to deal with handling social justice issues in the therapy room between themselves and clients or with their employers**
      i. Female counsellor and male clients (sexualized comments)
      ii. White males and white supremacy
      iii. Hate speech (racist comments or refusing to discuss thought patterns that uphold white supremacy)
      iv. **With a client:**
      v. **With employer**

4. **Contextual factors (job, educational program, personal experience, political climate) play a role in how counsellors implemented using a social justice lens in their case conceptualizations of client problems and concerns**

5. **Creating safety within the therapeutic relationship has been the foundation for counsellors to bridge social justice conversations with clients in therapy session**
   o Self-disclosure has helped:
   o Naming privilege and identity

o   Calling attention to their experiences and labelling it as racism has created safety in the relationship and provided opportunity for clients to examine how it is affecting their mental health

o   All mentioned importance of remaining client centred. Going where the client wants to go.

6. **Differences: participants had different experiences bringing up privilege and oppressive systems most speaking about their experience with white clients**

o   Some shut it down (Megan) and having to deal with racist comments being made in the therapy room

o   Some were open to acknowledging it effects on society

7. **Participants emphasized the importance of practicing within your capabilities and training as a form of social justice. Often, they discussed referring clients or consulting with professionals to remain socially justice in their work with clients**

a. **Note: some spoke about importance of continued education to avoid clients feeling as though they have to educate you on their BIPOC experiences**

8. **Most participants found it difficult to find a balance between being client-centred and bridging social justice ideologies into the conversation**

o   Some clients have brought conversation back to themselves and what's brought them to therapy ex: depression. Bring it back to individual focus

o   Some terminating therapy and refusing to acknowledge their internalized homophobia or racism

9. **Participants identified that updated professional development around social justice issues is important to avoid the client feeling or having to educate you on their issues related to social justice**

10. **Timing on when to bridge social justice to client problems and issues posed as a barrier (or struggle) for participants. Some stating that bringing it up to soon would not land or cause rupture in the therapeutic alliance. Many participants spot about planting seeds of social justice in therapy sessions with clients and waiting for openings (or patterns) to bring it up again with clients**

a. Many quoting a lot of the social justice work they do in conversations with clients is planting seeds and waiting to come back to it at the right time. This has been both successful and unsuccessful because sometimes clients don't come back, and they never get a chance to bring it up again

b. Some have also mentioned wishing they would have had more courage to push the social justice conversations when it comes up and not being afraid. A lot mentioned that being more difficult in the early years of their practice and now they feel more confident talking about social justice issues with clients in sessions.

Side ones to think about:

- Some participants found certain social justice issues easier to talk about
    - Factors that influenced this include degree of trauma and healing related to the social justice issue
- Talking about the aspects of social justice like identity, systemic oppression, power and privilege has been harder for participants to do at the early stages of their career
- Advice participants would give to aspiring counsellors wanting to include a social justice lens in their work
    - Focus on the relationship by slowing down and allowing space for clients to resist and/or say no to you. This creates safety in the relationship and empower the client. Ask questions and try not to make assumptions around how people have been impacted by their race, gender or sexuality

Appendix H – Clustering Themes Across Participants

1. **Setting the stage for social justice**
    a. <u>Planting seeds</u>
        i. *"Social justice work is planting seeds. I plant seeds of goodness and some of them land and sprout and some of them don't and when people are ready, they're ready. And sometimes it takes years" (Dawn)*
        ii. *"it's like giving broccoli to a toddler and sometimes you might have to introduce it 50 times before they will eat it and lie it but it's introducing it in small pieces" (Dawn)*
    a. <u>Psychoeducation for purpose of shared language</u>
    b. <u>Gathering more information, looking for patterns</u>
        i. Who is it serving? (Raine, Dawn)
        ii. Asking what happened to you? (Dawn)
    c. <u>Therapeutic relationship as a foundation for social justice work</u>
        i. Creating trust and safety (dawn, Megan, Cindy)
        ii. Communicating allyship when needed
2. **Strategic planning for social justice dialogue (timing)**
    a. <u>Hesitancy on when and who to push a social justice dialogue</u>
        i. *"Counselling is both a science and an art and the art is knowing when and where" (Dawn)*
        ii. Dealing with discriminatory comments and microaggressions from clients. Raine experiences were more focused on challenging clients and Susie was more accepting to understanding client and counsellor needs to be a good fit, and that people are look for what fits for them.
    b. <u>When to be client centred vs social justice approach</u>
    Differing opinions: Melissa prioritizing and focusing individual support and intervention

      i.Dawn and Susie Starting interventions at individual level (CBT interventions) and

        using this as foundation to build on understand issues through systemic lens.

        (Dawn, Susie)

     ii.Other not choosing either or and instead viewing it from both lens (Cindy and Raine)

        Some questioning if making accommodations for client's problems i.e anxiety. It is

        further oppressing them if what is causing anxiety stems from systemic and social

        justice issues, for example how women or minorities are treated at work.

        1. *"I find a lot of my clients are really happily surprised by that approach and are*

        like "oh wow so you actually give a crap that my job might be harming me as

        opposed to just telling me to quit and find a new one" **(Raine, line 125-127)**

    c. <u>Client readiness (stages of change)</u>

    i.Bringing systemic thinking into the conversation too soon has fallen flat with clients

    ii.Client distress and active trauma

3. **Familiarity with social justice issue**

    a. <u>Personal experiences and connections</u>

      i.Personal life experiences with racism, sexism, ageism, weightism

    b. <u>Professional experiences</u>

      i.Being both good and bad. One thing that was surprising and different is that

        some participants spoke about how they worked with clients who experienced

        social justice issues professional contexts (ex: women and domestic violence)

        and others spoke about their own experience facing social injustice from clients

        (ex: experience working with men, employers using client stories for

        fundraising, being openly discriminated against and it being out in counselling

        setting). This led to participants talking about barriers to implementing social

        justice initiatives.

4. **Facing barrier to implementation**

    a. <u>Employers</u>

    b. <u>Lack of confidence earlier in career</u>

       i. "As a beginning psychologist I was too nice and thought the client knew

       everything, that I had to do whatever the client wanted, and the truth is we don't.

       we are the experts we are the ones who hold the therapeutic environment, and

       we have to be safe in it too" (Dawn)

    c. <u>Limited of education</u>