

**Therapy in Solidarity: The Ethical Imperative of Social Justice in Counselling  
Through Decolonizing and Queering your Practice**

by

Nicole Randell

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APPROVED BY

Alicia Spidel, Ph.D., MA, RCC, Capstone Supervisor, Master of Counselling Faculty

Milah (Miles) Smith, MA, CCC, Faculty Reader, Master of Counselling Faculty

School of Health and Social Sciences

### **Abstract**

The integration of social justice principles into counselling practice is essential for promoting inclusivity, advocating for systemic change, and dismantling oppressive structures; however, there remains some contention around what implementing social justice in counselling practice means. This capstone project investigates the important relationship between social justice and counselling and aims to investigate how social justice manifests itself in counselling practice. While advocating for a deep integration of social justice principles into counselling practices, emphasizing the ethical obligation of counsellors to address systemic inequalities and advocate for their clients, this capstone explores the multifaceted ways in which social justice are shown through counselling practice. Through a lens of decolonization and queering, the project explores ways in which counsellors can move beyond conventional practices to actively engage in social justice efforts. By examining the manifestations of social justice in counselling and emphasizing the importance of being accomplices or co-conspirators in advocacy, this project aims to inspire counsellors to question the status quo and shed light on the transformative potential of incorporating social justice into therapeutic processes. By exploring the historical, theoretical, and academic foundations of social justice in counselling, this project seeks to inspire counsellors to become agents of change in dismantling oppressive systems, advancing social equity, and understand the ethical imperative of implementing social justice principles into practice.

*Keywords:* social justice, solidarity, accomplice, co-conspirator, activism, advocacy, decolonizing, manifest, queering, collective liberation, wokeness or woke-culture, ethical practice, anti-oppression, counselling education, narrative therapy

### **Dedication**

I dedicate this capstone project to all people fighting for social justice and collective liberation of oppressed peoples around the world and stand in solidarity to recognize their resistance. I would also like to dedicate this capstone project to my parents, Wayne, and Diane, for equipping me with the confidence to question the status quo, my sister Natalie, for walking alongside me in my outrage, and my partner Micha, for supporting me like no other throughout this journey. To our kids, Harmony and Finley, and my niblings, Parker and Lainey, you give me hope for a future filled with kindness, justice, and collective resistance.

**Territorial Acknowledgement**

I respectfully and graciously acknowledge the Lekwungen peoples on whose unceded (stolen) territory I live, learn, work and play. I also recognize the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEC peoples whose ancestral relationships with the land continue to this day.

## Table of Contents

<b><i>Chapter 1: Introduction</i></b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Overview of Topic</b> .....	<b>7</b>
The Relationship Between Mental Health & Social Justice.....	8
The Ethical & Cultural Imperative Toward Social Justice & Counselling .....	10
<b>Purpose Statement</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Theoretical/Conceptual Framework</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Contribution to the Field of Counselling</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>Reflexivity and Positionality Statement</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>Definition of Terms</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>Outline of Capstone Project Chapters</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b><i>Chapter 2: Literature Review</i></b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>Education Counsellors Receive</b> .....	<b>27</b>
Culture-Infused Counselling & Decolonizing Education.....	28
Queering Your Practice .....	31
<b>The Ethical Obligation Toward Social Justice</b> .....	<b>34</b>
Code of Ethics: Cultural Competency, Accountability, & Supervision .....	34
<b>Counselling Implications of Therapists as Activists</b> .....	<b>36</b>
Understanding the Therapist’s Role as an Activist .....	37
Therapist Activism as Strategic Resistance to Oppression .....	38
Challenges and Criticisms of Therapists as Activists.....	39
<b>Moving from Practice to Action</b> .....	<b>40</b>
Bridging the World of Therapy to Social Justice .....	41
Individual, Community, & Systemic Action .....	42
Burnout versus Sustainability .....	43
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<b><i>Chapter 3: Discussion and Applied Practices</i></b> .....	<b>47</b>
<b>Discussion</b> .....	<b>47</b>
Should counsellors be activists? .....	48
Where does activism fit into counselling practice? .....	49
How can counsellors move from practice into action?.....	49
How does social justice manifest itself in counselling practice?.....	50

**Limitations ..... 50**

**Applied Practices..... 52**

    Recommendations for Practice ..... 52

    Recommendations for Future Research..... 54

**Reflections on Personal Learning ..... 56**

**Final Overview and Closing Thoughts ..... 58**

*References ..... 61*

*Appendix A ..... 74*

## **Therapy in Solidarity: The Ethical Imperative of Social Justice in Counselling Through Decolonizing and Queering your Practice**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

#### **Overview of Topic**

In a time marked by growing awareness of systemic inequalities and the pursuit of a more just and inclusive society, the field of counselling stands at a crossroads. The traditional role of counsellors as empathetic listeners and facilitators of personal growth is evolving into a broader and more complex mandate—one that calls for a deep engagement with the principles of social justice. This paradigm shift underscores the essential need for a critical examination of the intersection between social justice and counselling. For some, counselling and social justice go hand-in-hand, but for others, there seems a disconnect between the implementation of social justice in counselling practice and action, with many counsellors struggling to address systemic-based problems in individual therapy (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018).

Critiques of social justice in the counselling space claim it indoctrinates practitioners to see their clients only as representatives of larger groups within systems, and not as individual people (Satel, 2021). However, much of the peer-reviewed scholarly research echoes a call toward social justice in counselling, citing that an understanding of the intersection of identities of our clients, under the systems of power and oppression, is necessary to not only *primum non nocere* or *do no harm*, but also account for culturally respectful interventions (Buchanan & Wiklund, 2020).

As counsellors —paying close attention to the privilege we possess, the power dynamics at play, in a Eurocentric field founded by white, cis, hetero men —we continue to find ourselves

in a world grappling with multifaceted issues of inequality, discrimination, and marginalization. The impact of these challenges on individuals' mental and emotional well-being is undeniable, making the inclusion of social justice considerations in counselling practices both timely and imperative. However, therein lies a stringent disagreement between the incorporation of social justice attitudes and the dichotomous opinions of conservative, right-wing supporters who see it as unnecessary, citing social justice as an unwarranted consequence of “woke-culture” (Cammaerts, 2022). This is concerning, since scholars within the counselling profession, through education and research, must understand, not only the critical connection—but also the ethical imperative—between mental health and social justice.

### ***The Relationship Between Mental Health & Social Justice***

The relationship between mental health and social justice is deeply intertwined. Social justice encompasses the principles of fairness, equity, and the elimination of discrimination within society. When we examine mental health through a social justice lens, it becomes evident that factors such as economic disparities, access to healthcare, stigma, discrimination, and systemic inequalities significantly impact individuals' mental well-being. Inequities in these areas can lead to disparities in mental health outcomes, with marginalized and disadvantaged communities often bearing a disproportionate burden of mental health challenges, without support (Ratts et al., 2016; DeBlaere et al., 2019). Research has shown how oppression affects human development and leads to emotional, psychological, and behavioural issues (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). Achieving social justice in mental health involves addressing these underlying social determinants, reducing stigma, advocating for equitable access to quality mental healthcare, and fostering a society where every individual, regardless of their background, can achieve optimal mental health and well-being.

Since the development of Multicultural Counselling Competencies (MCC) by Sue, Arrendondo, and McDavis (1992), the world of counselling and psychology has come to recognize multicultural perspectives, which in turn, has influenced the creation of ethical codes, competencies for specific populations, and an overall, more holistic view of historically marginalized groups (Ratts et al., 2016). It should be noted that the emergence of MCC arose in response to the pervasive Eurocentric and predominantly white perspectives prevalent in psychology education and that these competencies were created specifically for European and North American counsellors to curb the Eurocentric bias in counselling education (Sue et al., 1992). With that in mind, studies have shown that the intersecting identities of a person —such as their race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, religion, spirituality, socioeconomic status, and disability —have significant impact on mental health outcomes (Ratts et al., 2016). From a social justice perspective, it is imperative that counsellors seek a contextual approach to working with historically marginalized clients and communities, realizing that individuals have multiple intersecting identities of both privilege and marginalization, that are part of looming systems at large. (Ratts et al., 2016). The MCC eventually became the Multicultural and Social Justice Counselling Competencies (MSJCC), incorporating *social justice* within it to better represent the expanding role of counsellors toward social justice advocacy, as a reflection of ongoing societal changes (Ratts et al., 2016). The MSJCCs outlined by Ratts et al. (2016) includes four developmental domains (counsellor self-awareness, client worldview, counselling relationship, and counselling advocacy interventions) and four competencies (attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills, and actions). These domains should all be considered within the context of social justice counselling.

Historically and currently, people experience oppression through racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, ageism, and ableism, which is embedded within the systems at large (Timothy & Umana Garcia, 2020). While these modes of oppression are interwoven through a system-wide scale through rules, policy, and law, on an individual level, they manifest into *microaggressions*, or daily verbal and non-verbal forms of assault (Ratts et al., 2016). *Minority stress* (Meyer, 2003) is a term coined by scholars that refers to the societal oppression and stigma experienced by marginalized groups that lead to negative mental health outcomes, from a biopsychosocial standpoint. For instance, trans and gender-diverse youth experience significantly higher rates of depression, suicidality, and self-harm compared to their cisgender counterparts (Black et al., 2023). From a socioecological standpoint, we can understand the reciprocity between an individual and their environment and how those oppressive factors contribute to the mental health and well-being of individuals from a micro interpersonal level to a macro global scale (Ratts et al., 2016). Does linking multicultural competency and insight to inequities experienced by marginalized groups pave the road to consideration of social justice engagement toward client mental health and well-being, both on an individual client level and within systems-level work? Is this enough?

### ***The Ethical & Cultural Imperative Toward Social Justice & Counselling***

Regardless of the apparent contention among some mental health professionals, social justice themes remain entrenched in the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association's (CCPA) *Code of Ethics*, which pinpoints Justice and Societal Interest as two of six ethical principles (2020, p. 2). Within the CCPA's *Code of Ethics* (2020), it is stated that a counsellor's primary responsibility is "to promote the welfare of their clients" (p. 9), and to continually be

aware of diversity and difference, while also understanding the past and current historical contexts that intersect client identities.

Culturally, the updated CCPA *Code of Ethics* (2020) has dedicated an entire section focused on the ethical considerations toward working with Indigenous Peoples, communities, and contexts across the north of Turtle Island (or so-called Canada). Academics and activists use the term “so-called Canada” as an expression of Indigenous solidarity and to highlight the country’s illegitimacy based on its foundation of stolen land and genocide (Hopper, 2023). As CCPA’s response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action, the integration of Indigenous not-knowing, awareness, and understanding within the *Code of Ethics* (2020) advises practitioners to be aware of historical and contemporary contexts of Indigenous Peoples, respect, and appropriate participation in traditional practices, while reflecting on their personal identity as it relates to the harms of colonialism—to name a few that coincide with social justice. Ansloos et al. (2019) point out that the field of counselling and psychology within so-called Canada has a unique position to provide valuable training to address the specific needs of Indigenous communities. This speaks to the absolute ethical necessity toward culturally competent and socially just modes of counselling.

### **Purpose Statement**

This capstone endeavors to explore the varied dimensions of social justice within the counselling context. It seeks to shed light on how counselling professionals can harness their expertise to address the roots of societal inequities, advocate for their clients, and contribute to the larger endeavor of dismantling oppressive systems. Furthermore, the purpose of this capstone is to foster a deeper understanding of how the very principles of social justice can be integrated into the fabric of counselling practices, enhancing both the therapeutic process and the broader

pursuit of social equity —aiming to answer the research question: *How does social justice manifest itself in counselling practice?*

In the chapters that follow, we will embark on a comprehensive journey to understand the nuances of social justice in counselling. We will delve into the historical and theoretical foundations that underpin this intersection through the education counsellors receive, explore the ethical obligation toward social justice in counselling, the practical implications for counselling practitioners as activists, and illuminate the transformative potential of integrating social justice into the therapeutic process, moving from practice to action. Together, we will embark on a quest to answer critical questions about the role of counselling in advancing social justice, offering insights and recommendations that resonate with the evolving landscape of our times.

The field of counselling and psychology has been greatly influenced by social justice issues yet remains a contentious topic in terms of how it fits, manifests, and where it belongs in and out of the counselling space. This capstone project aims to uncover where social justice and counselling intersect and perhaps, where they do not. The project has been spurred on by the primary research question: *How does social justice manifest itself in counselling practice?* Supporting the exploration of this primary question are several secondary research questions: *Should counsellors be activists? Where does activism belong in a counselling practice? How can counsellors move from practice into action? How do myself and others who identify as white, cis, settlers provide meaningful and ethical therapy, while making space for marginalized voices?*

The rationale for exploring the ethics of social justice within a counselling capacity has been supported by an overwhelming majority of scholarly resources throughout my studies in the Master of Counselling Program with City University. However, social justice activism and advocacy, although ethically imperative, continue to be a hotly debated topic within the realm of

counselling therapy since the workforce lacks diversity, is often overtly pathologizing, and fails to meet with social and cultural factors toward mental health (Buchanan & Wiklund, 2020).

While there exists scholarship that takes an alternative view to the question of *how social justice manifests itself in counselling practice*, with reference to both client and therapist burn-out (Danquah, et al., 2021; Gorski, 2019; Gorski & Erakat, 2019; Wolbring & Lillywhite, 2023), I have been struck by the resources that explore social justice as an ethical imperative to practicing as a counsellor. The impact of this has spurred deep self-reflection as to how best I operate as a counsellor, while implementing social justice within my practice. The learnings I have received from social justice scholars in the field, like Travis Heath (2018; 2020), Manivong Ratts (2008, 2009, 2018), Vikki Reynolds (2008; 2009; 2010; 2011; 2013; 2020), Julie Tilsen (2013; 2021), and Laura Anne Winter (2019), continue to inform my personal and ethical alignment toward social justice, advocacy, and activism in my practice.

*Should counsellors be activists?*

The research aims to investigate the ethical implications of counsellor involvement in social justice advocacy and activism. Knowing that it is not the job of counsellors to solve the problems of their clients, nor should we be bringing our own personal agendas into sessions, uncovering where to draw the line between our own activism and social justice perspectives and our clients' is explored. Activism is not a one-size-fits all approach, therefore every counsellor needs an understanding of social justice implications in their practice. We will also discover the differing perspectives and opinions around counsellors engaging in activism.

*Where does activism fit into counselling practice?*

Activism within the realm of social justice may have a place in counselling for both counsellors and clients; the question is where it fits and how it manifests. The purpose of social

justice and activism in counselling raises questions about its beneficiaries: the counsellor, our clients, or others? Is social justice only for marginalized folk, and where does it fit within the counselling context? The research continues to address the relevance and application of social justice in counselling, including when and how to employ it. Finally, comprehending the distinction between a counsellor who engages in activism and advocacy from one who does not is also explored.

*How can counsellors move from practice to action?*

If activism within a social justice advocacy realm can be integrated into counselling practice, considerations around its place, beneficiaries, purpose, methods, and timing must be considered. Moving from practice to action involves determining the necessary steps for counsellors, like personal engagement and supervision, beyond merely acknowledging the need for activism. Encouraging sustainable engagement in social justice activism require strategies to prevent burnout for ourselves and our clients, which is explored. While encouraging clients to advocate for themselves is important, counsellors may also need to engage with community organizations and spaces outside of the counselling room to fully enact social justice in their practice.

*How do myself and others who identify as white, cis, settlers provide meaningful and ethical therapy, while making space for marginalized voices?*

With an overwhelming fear of coming off as some sort of white saviour who feels the need to help all people, I am exploring how I, as a white, cis, hetero-with queer leanings, settler, woman provide meaningful and ethical therapy, while making space for marginalized voices. I am considering how to responsibly use my privilege for good, as an umbrella for others. I am also examining whether white settler people can work competently with Black and Indigenous

people of colour (BIPOC), acknowledging potential challenges and responsibilities. I am also assessing whether cisgender, heterosexual humans can effectively support and counsel members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/Two-Spirit, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, and other identities (LGBTQIA+) community, aiming to move beyond mere allyship toward genuine solidarity. This study aims to actively seek ways to transition from allyship to practice in solidarity with clients, aiming to function as an accomplice or co-conspirator in our shared pursuit of social justice and liberation.

The intended audience for this capstone project is counselling practitioners who aim to stand alongside clients in the power and agency they carry with them, while navigating and overcoming the effects of systemic oppression and discrimination and promoting their client's mental health and well-being in an overall equitable and supportive manner. This capstone is also intended for counsellors with access to privilege —often in white bodies—who are unsure of what incorporating social justice principles within their practice means, and how to move that practice into action. Social justice and advocacy are not necessarily meant to be applied to one single group of people, but instead work toward creating a world of equity, fairness, and inclusivity for all. I would argue that while social justice matters within the counselling field were once considered applicable to competently working as a multicultural counsellor, social justice has grown to consider the many intersecting identities of our clients and enables us as practitioners to ethically work alongside all clients. Further to this, both decolonizing and queering our practice makes space for ethically working from a place of not-knowing and questioning the heteronormative restraints that continue to permeate the societal systems in which we operate.

### **Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

A social constructionist worldview is one of the theoretical frameworks that informs this capstone project. Adopting a social constructionist worldview in research involves recognizing and exploring the ways in which individuals collectively shape and construct meaning in their social contexts (Creswell, 2018). Operating within this framework forms an understanding that reality is not an objective, fixed entity but is rather co-constructed through social interactions, language, and cultural influences. In employing a social constructionist lens, research prioritizes studying the diverse perspectives and interpretations that different groups bring to a phenomenon. This approach encourages an examination of the power dynamics, societal norms, and historical contexts that contribute to the formation of knowledge. Creswell (2018) also points out that researchers reflect and recognize their own background and social location in reference to their conclusions and interpretations, making self-reflexivity and positionality fundamental to my capstone. More on this under my reflexivity and positionality statement that follows.

A transformational worldview supports a social constructionist one but takes it a step further toward advocating for actionable changes for marginalized folx, incorporating their voices and stories throughout (Creswell, 2018). Implementing actual change toward social progress lends to the notion that researchers taking on this worldview must consider and address issues of power, oppression, and equality (Creswell, 2018). Further to this, Creswell (2018) states that a transformational worldview calls for the integration of varied perspectives such as feminist theory, queer theory, and racialized dialogues. The nature of the research is relational, to collaborate with others towards well-being (Ness, 2021). Transformational research calls for change and action from the research. Social change is the natural outcome of relational research, when focussing on the well-being of people —this is the goal.

In addition to the guiding theoretical frameworks of a social constructivist and transformative worldviews, I am further informed by a qualitative narrative theoretical orientation. Narrative research emphasizes the importance of personal narratives and stories in shaping individuals' identities and experiences, which are then retold by the researcher (Creswell, 2018). For social justice matters of advocacy and action, utilizing a narrative approach to research not only addresses problems, but also fosters an ongoing sense of empowerment, highlights strengths, and encourages alternative perspectives.

Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, integrating queer theory, decolonization, and feminist theory into a theoretical and conceptual framework continues to provide a rich and intersectional lens for understanding and addressing complex social issues. Queer theory challenges normative binary assumptions about gender and sexuality, emphasizing the fluidity and diversity of identities (Tilsen, 2021). Decolonization, rooted in dismantling colonial legacies, calls for a critical examination of power structures, centering the voices and experiences of marginalized communities —both in the research and in the counselling space —while minimizing the power differential toward culturally competent research and practice (Fellner, 2018). Feminist theory, with its focus on gender equity, offers insights into the intersections of gender with other social categories, that amalgamated to inform queer theory (Tilsen, 2021). Combining these perspectives allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities within social systems. These frameworks not only recognize the importance of acknowledging and dismantling oppressive structures but also emphasizes the need to amplify diverse voices and experiences. It encourages a transformative approach that challenges existing power dynamics, promotes inclusivity, and seeks justice in a way that acknowledges the interconnectedness of gender, sexuality, race, and other social dimensions.

**Contribution to the Field of Counselling**

It is my goal to have this capstone contribute to the field of counselling by offering a guide to encourage counsellors to find their own way of facilitating social justice practice into action. By highlighting the ethical imperative of both decolonizing and queering our practice, the hope is that counsellors will be inspired toward activating in solidarity with the folx we have the honor of walking alongside, in and out of the therapy space. The confusion and disconnect between social justice and counselling seems to be located at the crux of understanding that social justice is a counselling concern, learning about it, but somehow falling short in how to truly implement it through action. This exploration seeks not only to enrich the discourse within the field of counselling but also to contribute to the broader dialogue surrounding social justice in our world. By merging these two domains, we aspire to create a future where counselling becomes a powerful instrument for healing, empowerment, and the pursuit of a more equitable and socially just society.

**Reflexivity and Positionality Statement**

Being a social justice advocate and activist was never something I thought would personally resonate with me, not understanding where I fit into the equation, although I often romanticized the idea. I have always admired the guts and confidence that it takes for someone to stand-up for the rights of others, speak-out against intolerance and injustice, while rallying others to do the same. Surely the role of activist is only reserved for people as magnetic and willing to take a stand as Martin Luther King Jr., bell hooks, Marsha P. Johnson, Viola Desmond, Gloria Steinem, Winona LaDuke, Greta Thunberg, and Malala Yousafzai —individuals who have made it their life's work to raise a fist, speak to systemic injustices, and for some, die trying.

Growing up with parents who encouraged critical thinking, I believe I always questioned the status quo of why things are the way they are—how did they get to be that way, and why are so many things so unfair for so many? Undoubtedly, the location that I was born in relation to the structural system of white colonialism is one of whiteness, privilege, and opportunity. I recognize that my position as a white, middle class, cisgender, heterosexual with queer-leanings, able-bodied, settler woman affords me the allowance to prize my chosen values, beliefs, and politics with favourability. Although Turtle Island, otherwise known as Canada, prides itself on our multicultural identities, a great number of the population holds opinions that disrespect other's diversity, therein upholding a settler colonial attitude and social inequality (Arthur, 2018c). I was raised in a small Northern British Columbia town where colonial attitudes of racism and oppressive policies continue to be maintained. I do consider my quest for social justice as a reaction from being surrounded by the casual mistreatment and overtly racist attitudes toward Indigenous peoples of the stolen land of the Lheidli T'enneh.

The privilege I hold from attending post-secondary has also led me to question values and beliefs that have emerged because of my location in relation to settler colonialism. Upon reflecting on the benefits I have received from my location as a settler among the structural power system of settler colonialism and the values and beliefs that have developed as a result of this location, I understand that my position has implications in my therapeutic work with others. I believe it is my ethical obligation to decolonize and queer myself, my spaces, and my practice to ensure accountability for harm caused and seek to change the broken systems that perpetuate harm and provide access to privilege and power. For me, this ethical imperative had led me on a path toward activism, advocacy, and social justice.

As a first time Chief Shop Steward, beginning to involve myself in committees and paying attention to union issues, I remember shyly asking my union President: *How do you become an activist?* I was told by the President, *Well you are, you're doing it!* I held my head suddenly a little bit higher, thinking to myself, *Hmmm... maybe I am an activist?* I was not necessarily standing in front of a large crowd of people, waving signs, and shouting through a megaphone, but I was doing work to ensure people were being treated fairly by their employer. It felt meaningful to represent members who may have otherwise been short-changed by management, making sure their rights were accounted for via the collective agreement. Active involvement in my union provided me the opportunity to speak to issues involving advocating for students with disabilities, women's rights, precarious work, and labour organizing. Nevertheless, working within the disrepair of a vastly flawed school system takes its toll and lends to burnout. I needed a change, but social justice and activism remained in my heart.

Making the shift from union involvement to beginning this Master of Counselling program, I had assumed I would need to hang up my proverbial activist cap, at the time assuming that therapists should be a blank slate and bring nothing of themselves into the therapy space. My initial introduction to this program through the Diversity and Cultural Psychology course seemed to flip that assumption on its head, and make space for social justice —nay, even promote it as a foundational tenant of practice —which enlivened me to get excited and truly know I am on the right path.

Being introduced to Narrative Therapy (White & Epston, 1990) and Feminist Therapy (Biana, 2020; hooks, 2000), again, saw me re-adjusting my initial understanding of how therapists can *show up* for their clients. However, this research question — *How does social justice manifest itself in counselling practice?* —is one that I have been pondering throughout

my experiences with different instructors over the past two and a half years as a Master of Counselling student with City University. The baseline from which I understood the place of social justice, advocacy, and activism seemed to fluctuate, depending on the instructor. I began to see a spectrum, with a binary on either end, of where our instructors saw the place of social justice, advocacy, and activism in counselling —some on one end, arguing that it comes with the territory, while others took a hard-lined stance that there was no place for it, with others seemingly floating somewhere in-between. There seems to be an incongruence between the concept and the action of social justice in counselling. Scholars share in this conundrum, stating that a “disconnect between the cognitive understanding and practical application was noteworthy, as it seemed as though individuals were clear that they understood that it was a part of their responsibility to reach systems, organizations, and policymakers, but they did not know how to move their responsibility into action” (Evans & Russell-Mayhew, 2020, p. 687). How is social justice showing up in actual practice and where should it? We learn it, but what do we do with it? I also understand that this topic is a contentious one in the realm of counselling, and I am therefore curious, *how does social justice manifest itself in counselling practice?*

### **Definition of Terms**

For this capstone project, I have defined the following terms to better elaborate on the meanings of each as they apply to the research question: *How does social justice manifest itself in counselling practice?* The meanings of some terms have been informed by the various texts, journals, and podcasts I have encountered throughout my Master of Counselling journey by scholars in the field of social justice as it pertains to counselling. Others have simply been referenced by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary online.

**Accomplice (or co-conspirator)** is used to incorporate the idea of straight and cisgender therapists (or people) queering their practice (or lives) in challenging institutional and systemic injustices that go against queer and trans community practices (Tilsen, 2021). This term doesn't mean an accomplice to a crime, but a person who actively works to queer their practice; one who refuses to take a position of power and will listen to queer and trans community voices, follow their lead, and demand accountability, even when (*especially when*) questioning so-called "normative" conventions (Tilsen, 2021). This term moves beyond the actions of allyship or being an ally, as it entails more than just individual support (Tilsen, 2021).

**Activism** is "a doctrine or practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue" (Merriam-Webster, n.d., Definition 1). I would argue that "controversial issue" is a subjective term since the basic human rights of others should by no means be "controversial." Within psychology, activism relates to activity or direct action to changing or transforming political, social, and economic systems through protesting, boycotting, lobbying, organizing, and petitioning, among other methods (Lee, et al., 2018), with the shared goal of protecting, extending, and advocating for the rights of others.

**Advocacy** is "the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal" (Merriam-Webster, n.d., Definition 1). According to the Council on Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), advocacy should "... promote individual human worth, dignity, and potential; and oppose or work to change policies and procedures, systemic barriers, long-standing traditions, and preconceived notions that stifle human development" (CACREP, 2016, p. 59).

**Decolonizing**, to decolonize means "to free from the dominating influence of a colonizing power, *especially* to identify, challenge, and revise or replace assumptions, ideas, values, and

practices that reflect a colonizer's dominating influence and especially a Eurocentric dominating influence" (Merriam-Webster, n.d., Definition 2). As therapists, decolonizing is part of self-location and understanding psychology's role in cultural oppression, social control, and pathologization of Indigenous ways of being (Fellner, 2018), while also standing with a commitment to Indigenous governance and land return (Reynolds, 2020).

**Manifest** is "to make evident or certain by showing or displaying" (Merriam-Webster, n.d., Definition 3). How social justice *manifests* in counselling is essentially how it shows up or is displayed and utilized in the counselling space and beyond.

**Social Justice** is defined as "a state or doctrine of egalitarianism" (Merriam-Webster, n.d., Definition 1). However, for the purpose of this capstone, it must be more specifically defined as a "best account" in reference to psychology, to consider its historical development, context, and contemporary challenges, attempting to clarify the conflicting ways this "buzzword" legitimizes and endorses ideologies it serves (Thrift & Sugarman, 2019). The definition of social justice most widely used in counselling and psychology scholarship is "the fundamental valuing of fairness and equity in resources, rights, and treatment for marginalized individuals and groups of people who do not share equal power in society" (Constantine et al., 2007, p. 24). Social justice is conceptualized beyond intrapersonal accounts of identity politics and works to address social and systemic influences that transcend borders with a commitment to progress an equitable and inclusive society (Arthur, 2018a).

**Solidarity** is defined as "unity (as of a group or class) that produces or is based on community of interests, objectives, and standards" (Merriam-Webster, n.d., Definition 1). Working in solidarity with clients as a counsellor means, according to Reynolds and Polanco (2012), working collectively to resist oppression "on the shoulders of others, and we shoulder others up" (p. 44).

**Queering** is “an ever-emergent process of becoming, one that is flexible and fluid in response to context, and in resistance to norms” (Tilsen, 2021, p. 6). As a verb, *queering* something, like therapy, questions, disrupts, and breaks rules to “liberate people who have been held hostage by what the rules require and prevent” (Tilsen, 2021, p. 6).

**Wokeness (or woke-culture)** is the idea of being woke or aware to the recognition “of and actively attentive to important societal facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice)” (Merriam-Webster, n.d., Definition 1). Sobande et al. (2022) explain the origin of the term from Black grassroots activism meaning to stay alert to racial prejudice and discrimination.

### **Outline of Capstone Project Chapters**

The remainder of this capstone consists of two chapters. Chapter two is the literature review that introduces the four sub-themes that further examines how social justice manifests itself in counselling. The first section works to establish the scaffolding of social justice within the education counsellors receive as part of their training. Connecting the learning counselors receive throughout their education, the second section explores the ethical obligation of social justice competencies within counselling practice. This is followed by the third section outlining the implications of therapists as activists withing a social justice framework. Finally, this capstone will conclude the literature review by expanding on the idea or bridging the world of therapy and social justice, pinpointing the ways that we can move practice to action.

Chapter three will serve as a practical guide to implementing social justice principles and ways of being into everyday counselling practice and beyond. The application of these methods will be discussed, incorporating a meaningful and useful examination of how counsellors can work with individuals to implement transformational change on a social, political, and economic

level. Chapter three will conclude with a personal reflection on the learnings received throughout this journey, as well as a final overview and concluding thoughts.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Within the complex tapestry of counselling practice, the threads of social justice play a vital role in shaping the therapeutic landscape. As counsellors, navigating our way through the diverse realms of the human experience, it becomes imperative that we explore and understand the various ways in which social justice manifests itself in the therapeutic relationship and in counselling practice. This literature review delves into the intersection of counselling and social justice, aiming to unravel the threads that bind them together. Through exploring existing scholarship, theoretical frameworks, and academic studies, we seek to illuminate the multiple dimensions of social justice within counselling practice. From acknowledging and dismantling power dynamics to advocating for fairness and justice while walking alongside our clients, as accomplices or co-conspirators, in solidarity, unraveling the complexities inherent in fostering a socially just therapeutic practice is the goal of this review.

This literature review focuses on the research question, *how does social justice manifest itself in counselling practice?* To unpack this question, the chapter is set out into four sections: education counsellors receive, the ethical obligation toward social justice, counselling implications for therapists as activists, concluding with moving practice into action. It will examine the foundation and scaffolding counselling students receive toward social justice in their studies. This chapter will explore the ethical links embedded in the various codes and standards of practice that inform our alignment toward social justice. It will uncover the effects involved by counsellors who position themselves as social justice advocates and activists. Finally, this chapter will conclude by outlining research toward how counsellors involved in the pursuit of social justice activism and advocacy can move from holding these tenants in their practice to real world action.

Exploring this topic of social justice in counselling through the constructivist framework outlined by Ratts et al. (2016) under the Multicultural and Social Justice Counselling Competencies, we better understand how cultural competency and social justice advocacy are explicitly linked to counsellor actions. A constructivist framework honors the multiplicity of worldviews (Arthur, 2018a; Stewart, 2019), comprehending that there is no single reality, but many. Incorporating this worldview makes space to curiously explore the reality of others from a non-expert stance that enlivens collaboration between counsellor and client. Developmentally, and embedded in the education counsellors receive, students are encouraged to focus on their own personal self-awareness, the worldviews of their clients, the relationship between themselves and their clients, while holding counselling and advocacy interventions thereafter (Arthur, 2018a). These levels are meant to inform counsellors toward directly advocating for the people they work with, on their behalf, and to critically engage in addressing the larger systemic barriers that impede progress of marginalized groups. Special attention is placed on the axis of the apparent privilege and marginalization of counsellors and clients, meant to examine the intersection of people's identities across cultural and social locations (Ratts et al., 2016).

### **Education Counsellors Receive**

In his book, *The Skin We're In*, Desmond Cole reflects on the question; "*What is the purpose of activism? What are we all responsible for in the world, whether we call ourselves activists or not?*" (2020, p. 191). Thinking about this in reference to counselling practice, what is the purpose then, and what are we responsible for as therapists, whether we call ourselves activists or not? The education counsellors receive throughout their master's program inform how they will go on to practice in the world, with some experiences theoretically aligned with social justice, while others may fall short. Cultural-infused counselling and social justice are

weaved into the textbooks required to complete this master's degree (Arthur, 2018), along with instruction that outlines decolonizing responses and practice (Dupuis-Rossi & Reynolds, 2018; Fellner, 2018; Singh et al., 2020). If students were lucky enough to be introduced to the concept of *queering your practice*, then they may also have received learnings from queer leaning instructors that introduced the recent work of Tilsen (2021), whose work has been supported on the backs of Queer, Trans, and 2-Spirit peoples who paved the way for her and other scholars' and instructors' work (Czyzselska, 2022; McCann & Monaghan, 2022). As a critique of traditional social justice education, Cohen et al. (2022a) explore education within counselling programs from the lens of students from non-dominant groups and how they perceive their learning. Chang (2022) also provides an alternative viewpoint of the education counsellors receive by investigating an experiential, community-based social justice project. As a critique, specific to counselling and psychology programs across Turtle Island, or so-called Canada, Cohen et al. (2022b) dig into the ongoing evolution toward the implementation of multi-cultural and socially just counselling pedagogy, its efficacy, and the need for more exploration away from generalizing American-based literature. Working with these resources will help to uncover the learnings counsellors receive in their programs that lend to a future social justice-oriented practice.

### ***Culture-Infused Counselling & Decolonizing Education***

Chang (2022) outlines the importance of incorporating multicultural or culture-infused education as well as social justice principles in counselling education programs, and argues that in doing so, allows for students to understand and embody an advocacy role, making it possible to engage in social justice advocacy once graduated. Culture-infused counselling education prioritizes that counsellors explore their personal cultural identities and social locations, making

them less likely to oppressively impose their own worldviews on the folx they work with (Arthur, 2018a). Part of the process of making space for the cultural identities of others is the location of self—naming and self-disclosing our own personal social location, privilege, and intersecting identities with our clients to explore the limitations and/or benefits that result from our shared work together (Watts, 2010). Broaching the topic of the intersection of identities between counsellor and client can seem a daunting and uncomfortable task but works to “challenge the standard bearer-white, middle class, heterosexual, and male-to move over” (Watts, 2010, p. 409). Doing this identifies privilege and subjugation to address oppression at the forefront of therapy and encourages awareness toward self of the therapist, their personhood and sharing that through self-disclosure. Education around naming and addressing the many intersecting identities of ourselves and our clients makes space for social justice to manifest itself in therapy.

Receiving culture-infused education informs how we go on to practice, and Ansloos et al. (2019) argue that Indigenous leaders and BIPOC allies must be skilled in the art of decolonization, ensuring that BIPOC students have both space and cultural safety from the admissions process onward to later scholarship, for generations to come. Not only do our counselling psychology education programs require decolonization — “removing Eurocentric impediments to access” (Ansloos et al., p. 269) — to ensure the involvement of Indigenous folx at the highest levels of scholarship, but these programs must also implement decolonization into their learning so that others in the field are safely capable and culturally competent to work with diverse populations. Incorporating Indigenous membership from the academic top-down works to cut the proverbial cord of white supremacy that infiltrates its way into all levels of education (Ansloos et al., 2019). Creating access for BIPOC to influence academic policy by maintaining

leadership roles, removing barriers to receiving counselling education, and creating safe spaces for culturally diverse folx to receive counselling support are all intertwined facets toward uplifting cultural-infused counselling education.

The ongoing need for culturally infused education and continued decolonization practices remains paramount within the colonial structures of academia. The realm of western psychology and counselling has historically prized the experience of the Euro-American worldview that fails to incorporate the lived experiences of others that veer from that (Clegg & Marker, 2021). While this may be history, the propensity toward Eurocentric whiteness in counselling education remains through institutionalized racism that is embedded in every aspect of education (Wilcox et al., 2023). In considering this, there also continues to be a significant overrepresented saturation of white folx of privilege in counselling education programs (Wilcox et al., 2023) — myself included. The endurance of institutionalized racism within the education system speaks to the overwhelming imperative of decolonizing education at its roots, from a systemic wide perspective.

Centering the voices of those previously muted from the conversation of psychology and mental health counselling requires commitment from the voices of those predominantly heard. Embedding social justice principles around decolonization within the education burgeoning counsellors receive is imperative to the ongoing advancement of Indigenous knowledge and ways of being and in centering the lived experiences of oppressed groups (Ansloos et al., 2019). As one of the recommendations for instructors and graduate training programs outlined by Cohen et al. (2022b), engaging in decolonization practices so that students can better reflect on their advocacy and social justice principles and connect with marginalized community members to un-settle themselves helps to heal the colonial frameworks that continue to inflict harm within

the context of counselling psychology and best serve those affected. Working to unsettle ourselves—moving away from an oppressive settler-colonial mindset—and decolonize our practice and our lives leaves room for social justice and justice doing to take place.

Decolonization and decolonizing practice involve counteracting the colonial violence that stole land, culture, and identity from Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island and working, as anti-oppressive, trauma informed therapists, to rebuild these lost connections (Dupuis-Rossi & Reynolds, 2018). Therapeutic responses to these issues must be met and as non-Indigenous counsellors, a vital part of decolonizing our practice is taking a non-expert stance and demonstrating respect toward the knowledge clients brings to the space —acknowledging dislocation, honouring ancestry, truth-telling, dissociation as a symptom of colonialism, connecting to safety, integrating ceremony, and enlivening cultural practices (Dupuis-Rossi & Reynolds, 2018, p. 312). In decolonizing therapy and practice, Fellner (2018) places therapy as ceremony, not as an appropriation of sacred traditional ceremonies, but as a culturally responsive approach to honor the therapeutically sacred and relational space that exists between counsellor and client, which also levels the playing field as far as power differentials are concerned. Finally, Singh et al. (2020) reignites the necessity of centering Indigenous voices in decolonizing practice, because without doing this our efforts become a metaphor for change rather than impactful and real, concluding that social justice theories be embedded within the fabric of educational programs so that it can be manifested in practice.

### ***Queering Your Practice***

While culture-infused counselling competencies and decolonizing practice measures are seen to be overwhelmingly supported by academia and for the most part, embedded into the current education counsellors receive, the notion of *queering* counselling practice via that

education is a novel concept seemingly only implemented in learning if students are gifted with the opportunity to be taught by instructors who incorporate queer learnings into their teachings. Having been on the receiving end of this gift and introduced to the concept of queering my practice, the works of Tilsen (2013; 2021) stand out as revolutionary pieces to the social justice puzzle of counselling. At the heart of Tilsen's (2021) work on queering your therapy practice and queer theory is the idea of challenging and deconstructing traditional norms about gender, sexuality, and identity with therapy. Encouraging therapists to adopt an intersectional approach, recognizing, and validating the diverse experiences of clients across various categories, she emphasizes the importance of creating inclusive and affirming spaces where individuals of all sexual orientations and gender identities feel seen, heard, and respected (Tilsen, 2021).

By queering therapy practice, Tilsen (2021) prompts therapists to critically examine power dynamics, privilege, and systemic oppressions that impact clients —similar to how decolonial approaches to therapy meet with those same facets. This approach aligns with social justice principles, as it actively works towards dismantling discriminatory practices and fostering a therapeutic environment that champions equality and understanding. Essentially, Tilsen's (2021) teachings on queering therapy practice provide a roadmap for therapists to navigate the intersection of identity and social justice, contributing to a more just and affirming counselling experience for all clients. This is key in identifying *who* or *what* social justice in counselling is for —all humans, everywhere. As hooks (2020) reminds us, *feminism is for everybody*, and so too is social justice —collective liberation for all!

Lending to this idea of queering therapy practice, podcast guest, queer worldmaking connoisseur, and aforementioned instructor who bestowed the gift of queer learnings, Dr. Meera Dhebar, explains how we can extend our viewpoint in seeing, hearing, and listening to the voices

that have always been there as part of queer worldmaking to include “queer as an identity that is fluid, that’s relational, that’s situated, that’s contextual” in a way that escapes binary assumptions (Hoff, 2022, 17:15). When we move past the cis-heteropatriarchal white supremacist view of conceptualizing, we are better able to challenge the existing norms, structures, and systems to create a more equitable world for diverse identities —the very goal of social justice. When applied to therapy practice, queering, as a verb, becomes a dynamic process of not only affirming individual identities but also actively working to reshape the larger cultural narratives and social structures that impact their daily lives. Queering your practice and further to that, your life and way of being and seeing the world, like decolonizing, allows a welcoming for social justice to manifest itself in practice by creating safety and space for people to arrive as they are.

The education counsellors receive at the outset of their journey to become therapists is integral to forming how they will interact with social justice in their future practice and make space for it to manifest. There remains a need for continued research on social justice education for counsellors and for students to better meet with advocacy competencies throughout their studies (Ramírez Stege et al., 2017). While decolonizing mental health and incorporating culturally infused competencies have recently become much more prominent in counselling education, queering therapy practice remains the luck of the draw in who students end up with as instructors who decidedly incorporate queer learnings and leanings into their teaching and those who do not. While understanding this is a binary statement at its core, it highlights the necessity of embedding queer theory and practice into all education counsellors receive prior to licensing. Further to that, as supported by Ansloos et al. (2019), to truly meet with social justice tenants in counselling education, those programs must prioritise the inclusion of marginalized voices throughout all levels of policy, curriculum, research, and instruction. As Reynolds states; “If I

don't take an overt, intentional, active position against racism and against homophobia I will replicate them" (2010, p. 15) —the same goes for the education counsellors receive.

### **The Ethical Obligation Toward Social Justice**

Regardless of an alignment with or without a social justice framework within a counselling program, there still lies an ethical obligation, outlined in each *Code of Ethics*, toward social justice. The Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) *Code of ethics* (2020) is based on the fundamental ethical principles of beneficence, fidelity, nonmaleficence, autonomy, justice, and social interest (p. 2). Throughout the CCPA *Code of Ethics* (2020), there are various points that speak to the ethical imperative of maintaining a social justice lens in practice; A12. Diversity Responsiveness, B9. Respecting Inclusivity, Diversity, Difference, and Intersectionality, C10. Sensitivity to Diversity when Assessing and Evaluating, E12. Diversity Responsiveness, and an entire section on Indigenous Peoples, Communities, and Contexts. From a social justice lens, counsellors must possess the ability to work competently and responsively with a diverse range of clients. Many sources speak to the ethical imperative of including social justice at the forefront of competent practice, including Arthur (2018c), Buchanan & Wiklund (2020), Reynolds & Polanco (2012), and Reynolds, et al. (2021). As an alternative source, Counselors of Social Justice (2020) offer an ethical standards of practice document that outlines a particular set of guiding principles, specific to working from a social justice perspective.

### ***Code of Ethics: Cultural Competency, Accountability, & Supervision***

If we revisit the previously defined mention of social justice as "the fundamental valuing of fairness and equity in resources, rights, and treatment for marginalized individuals and groups of people who do not share equal power in society" (Constantine et al., 2007, p. 24), it is easy to spot where tenants of it are embedded in the ethical codes we use to inform our practice. The

CCPA's *Code of Ethics* (2020) embodies fundamental principles surrounding advocating for the best interest of the people we serve, doing no harm, respecting rights, dignity, and autonomy, alongside upholding a responsibility to a just and fair society. Cultural competency, as we have uncovered in the previous section, is necessary to practice in alignment with social justice principles and this competency is apparent in the CCPA's *Code of Ethics* (2020). Section A12. Diversity Responsiveness (CCPA, 2020) outlines the ethical imperative of counsellors to continue to respectfully develop awareness of the multitude of ways their clients show up, as well as attending to their own identities and how that impacts the therapeutic relationship. Sections B9. Respecting Inclusivity, Diversity, Difference, and Intersectionality, C10. Sensitivity to Diversity when Assessing and Evaluating, and E12. Diversity Responsiveness (CCPA, 2020) all outline the ethical necessity of ongoing awareness of the historical context of cultural backgrounds, ensuring sensitivity and alternative ways of interpreting and evaluating, and respecting individual differences in supervision. Certainly, social justice tenants are rooted throughout the overarching *Code of Ethics* (2020) that informs many counsellors across Turtle Island. As an alternative to the CCPA's *Code of Ethics* (2020), the Counselors of Social Justice (2020) *Code of Ethics* takes social justice values a step further and advocates for social actions and activism, in addition to the ethical competencies.

Reynolds (2012) argues that counsellors must center these ethics to be accountable and unrelenting in the work we do. Within this idea is one of collective ethics in solidarity — meaning that the work we do as therapists is not done in a vacuum, it is meant to be collaborative, inviting solidarity and imperfect allyship to address the division of power that separates us, to be collectively accountable to one another through justice-doing (Reynolds, 2012). Reynolds' (2012) ethical stance for justice-doing further informs the ethical necessity of

fostering collective sustainability and inviting us in remaining excitedly alive and sharing in collective care and accountability that requires us to consider others outside our individual lens. We are ethically accountable to our clients, our peers, and ourselves.

According to the CCPA's (2020) *Code of Ethics*, seeking consultation and participating in ongoing clinical supervision is ethically necessary to practice as a counsellor. Aligning with this ethical necessity is Reynolds et al. (2021) revelations around supervision with a solidarity team toward a practice of sustainability. Not only does participating in supervision in solidarity create accountability toward our own sense of community and support, it creates a space for others to bare witness and access the wisdom of others who are also practicing in solidarity toward an anti-oppressive and socially just world. While the various ethical codes we look to contain many facets that point to the ethical imperative of social justice in counselling, the literature points out that it is our responsibility to remain culturally competent, accountable, and engage in an ongoing supervision in solidarity to continue involvement in justice-doing for our clients.

### **Counselling Implications of Therapists as Activists**

Ratts and colleagues (2016) outline a formula for practicing counselling and advocacy from a multicultural and socially just framework that focusses on one's attitudes and beliefs, how those inform knowledge, and how that knowledge lends to counsellor skills and ultimately, action. Counsellors must first arrive with specific attitudes and beliefs that signal a commitment to counselling toward a social justice framework, obtain knowledge that guides socially just competence, which therein informs skill-based interventions, that give way to genuine and authentic action (Ratts et al., 2016, p. 37). Thrift & Sugarman (2019) offer a look at the implications that surround therapists as social justice advocates and activists. Winter (2019)

critiques the view that implementing social justice into practice is a complicated and difficult to understand endeavor, illustrating suggestions toward seamlessly incorporating those values into practice. There are also several references that speak to the consequences of both counsellors and clients as activists in and outside of the therapy space and how best to support that. Not everyone aligns with the ethos of social justice advocacy and activism in the counselling space, and we will explore a few of those critiques. Building on the education counsellors receive, toward the ethical imperative of social justice, then paves the road to implications of counsellors as socially just activists.

### *Understanding the Therapist's Role as an Activist*

Roysircar (2009) argues that activism is embedded in the social justice counsellor's personal and professional identity—it is intentional. Taking a passive stance toward addressing social inequalities that impact mental health is no better than standing alongside the colonial, heteronormative, patriarchal status quo (Arthur, 2018b). The Multicultural and Social Justice Counselling Competencies (MSJCC) outlined by Ratts et al. (2019) integrate advocacy as a necessary aspect of multicultural and social justice competence, encouraging counsellors to become activists in their communities. Alongside continued education to understand the diverse backgrounds of clients and consistent self-reflection, counsellors must engage in ongoing consultation and supervision, working toward continued and improved competency.

Thrift and Sugarman (2019) argue that clinicians within the realm of psychology have a responsibility to address the social, cultural, political, and economic factors that act as barriers to equal participation. While working with individuals is integral to the practice, counsellors must move beyond this toward sociopolitical reform and advocate for broader societal and political systemic change (Thrift & Sugarman, 2019). Using interventions and strategies that are

culturally relevant and address individual and community level change (Ratts et al., 2016; Rose, 2020) might involve guiding clients in reflecting on the ways in which internalized oppression may have helped or hindered their own actions, how family and friends influence their well-being, the ways in which systemic policies personally influence them, the people and resources within their communities that provide support, the connections between local, state, and federal legislation in their everyday lives, how community values and norms influence well-being, and the ways in which their specific intersecting identities may play a part in their circumstances and the actions that can be taken to change them. Overall, the therapist's role as an activist is to work towards creating a more just and equitable society, both within and outside of the counselling relationship, as well as challenge established limitations, question normative agendas, and advocate for our clients (van Der Merwe, 2018). The role of therapist as an activist, according to the literature explored, comes with the territory of the work we do.

### ***Therapist Activism as Strategic Resistance to Oppression***

Reynolds (2013) outlines how getting involved, and ‘leaning in’ as imperfect accomplices or co-conspirators with our clients further works to strategically resist oppression in all its forms. Naming abuses of power and highlighting our clients’ incredible acts of resistance serves as a reminder that there is always resistance to oppression wherever power is subjugated (Reynolds, 2010; Wade 1997). Therapeutic activism surrounds honouring and witnessing resistance and repairing the dignity inherent in reacting to oppression —with the hope and purpose of implementing a more just society toward collective liberation (Richardson & Reynolds, 2012). Moreover, honoring and witnessing resistance speaks to the way we embody the post colonial/capitalist futures into being in how we listen, reflect, and see people already living this way. Halliwell and Shannahan (2023) touch on therapeutic activism as “returning the

gaze on what's going on around people" (Hoff, 2023, 5:25), positioning listening as activism, returning the gaze onto our own therapeutic practice, and highlighting vicarious resilience as a generative effect. By participating and entrenching our practice through the lens of social justice and activism, we work to strategically resist the oppression we see in the world. Our activism as therapists is null unless we aim to amplify the visibility of resistance our clients describe as such (Wade, 1997), and not to understand them as symptoms of trauma, but in witnessing their behaviours as safe and trustworthy agents in their own lives (Reynolds, 2020). "Activism is not just tolerable but necessary" (Reynolds, 2008, p. 5), and folx working on the front lines of a helping profession and in witnessing oppression in its many forms must invite collective responsibility through an *ethic of resistance* that keeps us accountable in building and advocating for justice, systemic change, and a paradigm shift.

### ***Challenges and Criticisms of Therapists as Activists***

Although it remains apparent that advocacy and activism is intrinsic to the work counsellors aim to do, there is hesitancy held by critics to implement social justice tenants into practice and action. For some, social justice activism in counselling is understood to be inappropriate or troublesome, often viewed as disconcerting to investors in the systems and social structures at large or from those with dominant identities (Washington & Henfield, 2019). Arguments have been made that taking a singular view or position on the practice of social justice can cause intellectual inflexibility and beliefs in false dichotomies which significantly limits seeing alternative ways of being, thinking, and doing (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018). Further to this, opponents liken social justice to "indoctrination" from woke-culture and make the argument that it should be kept out of the therapy space altogether, citing practitioners' methods being "compromised by ideological agendas" (Satel, 2021, p. 2). Language used by staunch

rejectors of social justice and activism within counselling trend toward *painting everyone with the same brush* or never being free from the “original sin of your privilege” (Dunn, 2021), relying on the apparent fallback that recognizing and reflecting on the rich histories and backgrounds of diversity and intersectionality between us and our clients somehow manualizes treatment and politicizes the therapy space. Remembering the feminist iteration that “the personal is political” (Winter, 2019), these criticisms point to a need toward a continued effort to expand education, research, standards, ethics, and conceptualization of social justice within counselling and psychology.

### **Moving from Practice to Action**

Reynolds (2020) talks about bridging the worlds of therapy and social justice through activism and community work. How can practicing counsellors transform the work they do with clients into social justice in the real world? Heath’s (2018) notion of cultural democracy aligns with Reynolds’ (2020) suggestion that we move from pathologizing the language of trauma and move toward a witnessing stance of resistance:

Justice-doing goes beyond the scope of anti-oppressive practice, which aims to not replicate oppression, but entails actually being just and ethical with people, which requires engaging the activist project to transform the social contexts in which suffering, and oppression occur, and to do this in ways led by persons and with accountability to their communities (Reynolds, 2020).

Moving from practice to action and when is appropriate are spaces addressed within this section. Uncovering where one might bridge practice into action, from various levels —individually, community, and globally —will also be attended to here. Evans & Russell-Mayhew (2020) explore the need for the counselling field to go beyond the therapy space toward dismantling

harmful systems, organizations, and policies. The resulting effect of front-line activism from a counselling perspective is often therapist burn-out, and there exists a multitude of resources that touch on sustainability with reference to social justice counselling (Gorski, 2019; Reynolds 2008; Reynolds, 2009; Reynolds, 2011; Wolbring & Lillywhite, 2023). Shifting our attention from practice to action, how that looks in participation on all levels, while maintaining sustainability and preventing burnout as a practitioner are supported and explored throughout this final section of the literature review.

### *Bridging the World of Therapy to Social Justice*

If, as Canadian activist and scholar Aziz Choudry (2015) would argue, activists and organizers learn through doing and participating in everyday forms of social activism —then bridging our practice to action, as therapists, through doing, points toward the final, but ever-evolving iteration of how social justice manifests itself in counselling. Reynolds (2020) speaks to the imperative of taking on a witnessing stance with our clients as means to truly see and hear their voices and experiences, to bridge the world of therapy to social justice. However, while we may have “a spirit of social justice alive in our therapeutic work” (Reynolds & Hammoud-Beckett, 2012, p. 58), we must not mistake our therapy of justice-doing as enacting the practice of activism through direct or indirect action. Reversing the tension between therapy and activism provides us the bandwidth to recognize them as two separate but linked entities, invoking “a spirit of solidarity... to stay amazingly alive in both” (Reynolds & Hammoud-Beckett, 2012 p. 59). Therapy and activism are linked, but bridging the two revolves around healing through direct and indirect action, which occurs outside of the therapy space and involves participation in community and systemic level interventions. Advocating for our clients, from an ethic of responsibility to dismantle and challenge the harmful systems that negatively impact society, can

sometimes look disruptive in the form of direct action through face-to-face meetings, blockades, strikes, pickets, and occupations, but can also look like providing mutual aid through volunteering with organization that seek to fill the gaps in meeting the needs of people who the systems have failed. When most people hear *social justice action*, they assume a stereotypical set of activist strategies like attending marches or demonstrating sit-ins (Wilcox et al., 2022), however, we can participate as social justice counsellor activists as top-down insider agitators, grassroots bottom-up changemakers, or as outsiders —as imperfect allies and accomplices in solidarity with justice-doing (Reynolds & Polanco, 2012).

### ***Individual, Community, & Systemic Action***

Evans & Russell-Mayhew's (2020) findings show that advocating for one person at an individual level, is a great place to start bridging therapy to action, however, it becomes problematic to locate issues within the individual when it is the system at large that is toxic. Psychology classically locates problems internally to the individual, but from a social constructionist standpoint that inherently positions itself toward the empowerment of others, we see the struggles of the individual overwhelmingly impacted by the larger systems at play, resulting in a need to aim higher toward disrupting and influencing from the systemic level. By locating the problem within the person, it allows society off the hook to make social change (Hoff, 2016) —the resistance around locating the problem within the person gained foothold with the birth of narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990). Individual advocacy for our clients can provide a stepping stone toward community involvement in activating for local community causes. As Registered or Certified Clinical Counsellors, with the privilege of receiving post-secondary master's level education, we have already infiltrated certain systems at large like

academia and psychology, making ourselves ideal candidates for influencing change and reaching systems, policymakers, and organizations toward real action.

Banks and colleagues (2019) outlines methods of systems-level intervention in their community advocacy toolkit toward delineating action among the individual, community, and systemic levels of conceptualization. The authors have created a handy advocacy flow-chart (see Appendix A) to inform clinicians on clarifying client values and problems, deciding on which level of advocacy they land, the type of involvement required, identifying sustainable goals, allies, and opponents, while guiding toward a choice between direct or indirect influence (Banks et al., 2019, p. 25). Direct action examples include being involved in government hearings, policy conferences, or serving on policy task groups (Banks et al., 2019). Indirect action focuses energy on processes likely to influence or shape public opinion about policy (like media, social media, or podcasts), but does not directly involve contact with policy makers (Banks et al., 2019). In deciding on direct versus indirect action, we should also consider our systems-level theoretical orientation and the mechanism (e.g., education, guidance, persuasion, or pressure) by which we hope to influence policy, as the mechanism of influence may shape whether one pursues direct or indirect means of change (Banks et al., 2019). Our involvement in advocacy and activism is an integral but cautious task as social justice counsellors because it is in this space where we walk the line between burnout and sustainability.

### ***Burnout versus Sustainability***

Although it is clear that individual, community, and systems level advocacy and social justice activism imperatively comes with the territory of counselling, it is often not inherent to the practice, which can lead to activist burnout, since measures toward sustainability are not carefully put in place. “Activist burnout has been defined as when long-term activism-related

stressors deteriorate activists' physical or emotional health or sense of connectedness to their movements, impacting their effectiveness or abilities to remain engaged" and "(m)aking matters worse, burnout begets burnout, as movement work is taken up by fewer people, who begin to burn out, engage less effectively, and take out their hopelessness on fellow activists" (Gorski et al., 2019, p. 364). This type of burnout that can trigger a significant loss of passion toward a cause, as well as emotional and physical burnout, tends to be much less forgiving on underrepresented groups such as BIPOC, folx with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community who also participate in social justice activism (Danquah et al., 2021; Wolbring & Lilywhite, 2023).

Reynolds (2011) argues that contrary to many beliefs, activist burnout is not located individually in the minds of helpers or resulting from the clients we work with but rooted in the injustice of society. She also states that burnout can not be counteracted simply by the ethos of *self-care*, and instead rallies for embracing justice-doing in our work, creating real change over having our clients conform to oppression, as well as continually revisiting the collective ethics we hold in solidarity with the work we do (Reynolds, 2011). Gorski (2019) also supports these findings by outlining a shift from self-care to community-care of resisting burnout as part of the activism rather than locating it individually. Speaking to the solidarity of the imperfect partnerships we co-create with our colleagues and clients leads us toward recognizing the intersecting oppressions that we balance and the sustainability of witnessing and connecting with others. This sustainability translates as an *aliveness*, a spark, and the sincere connection to others (Reynolds, 2011) that is fostered through solidarity, collective sustainability, and accountability of ourselves and our clients. This also speaks to the idea around vicarious resilience as a

generative effect, preventing us from burnout, as opposed to the commonly held notion of the prevalence of vicarious trauma in clinician burnout (Hoff, 2023).

We can not sustainability do this work in isolation, and remaining alive and accountable in the work we do and to resist burnout means to do this work collaboratively. Reynolds (2009) states that for us to remain sustainable in this work, we must “balance responsibility with power (p. 7). We can not do everything, alone, all at once, so we must rely on what is within our power to do, witnessing and connecting with others doing the same. Creating supervision of solidarity teams of like-minded people who are also dedicated to justice-doing and holding one another accountable in the face of oppression is a strategy to avoid burnout and remain *amazingly alive* in our work (Reynolds & Hammoud-Beckett, 2012).

Studies have also shown that white racial justice advocates often elevate burnout in racial justice activists of colour, calling for further measures to contribute to sustainability versus burnout (Gorski & Erakat, 2019). These measures, collected by Gorski and Erakat in their 2019 study, involve white social justice advocates to continually examine their privilege, fragility, and do the work of educating themselves on gaps in their knowledge; prioritizing the lived experience and voices of activists of colour (and/or folx with lived experience in whatever advocacy they are participating); sincerely meeting the goals of the justice-doing over personal recognition and validation; and being vulnerable to the cause, as accomplices, and not assuming activism is simply holding ideas of justice-doing (p. 804). As white advocates of social justice in counselling, we need to ensure we are helping and not hindering the causes we aim to support by centering our own experiences over the lived experiences of those who have been most affected by the systems social justice advocacy intends to change.

## **Conclusion**

The query of how social justice manifests itself in counselling practice seems a lofty question to unpack, however, its presence is ostensible within the education we receive as counsellors, the codes within which we base our practice, how we implicitly implicate ourselves toward it through advocacy and activism, and by the way we work to bridge our practice to meaningful action. As a bookends to this chapter, we can picture the threads of social justice beginning to be woven at the outset of our educational experience. This proverbial thread weaves its way into the education counsellors receive and while those studies continue to be influenced by a social justice lens, there remains space to improve by working to further decolonize and queer our studies and practice. The ethical imperative toward practicing from a place of anti-oppression and social justice again, is entwined amongst the ethical codes from which we base the basic moral principles of working therapeutically with other humans. This means we actively show up, ready to continue deconstructing and reconstructing the tapestry of social justice with our clients, regardless of critiques that fail to address the basic human rights of others. Finally, and knowing there is never an end to the work we do, threading ourselves bare is no longer an option, and moving from practice to action, from a multi-leveled approach, incorporates an ethos of sustainability by practicing in solidarity, with the support of others. “A socially just world is a mentally well world” (Hoff, 2016, 13:06), and if we, as counsellors, are privileged with the wherewithal to bridge the path between social justice and mental wellness, in solidarity with our clients and teams, we can see where social justice manifests itself in therapy, informing us how best to translate our clients’ needs toward advocacy, direct action, and activism, challenging and changing the ineffective and harmful systems currently in place.

### **Chapter 3: Discussion and Applied Practices**

The final chapter of this capstone offers a practical approach to the findings outlined in the literature review revolving around the research question: *How does social justice manifest itself in counselling practice?* The purpose statement made in Chapter One aims to delve into the multifaceted aspects of social justice within the realm of counselling. It seeks to illuminate ways in which counselling professionals can utilize their skills to confront the underlying causes of societal injustices, champion for their clients, and play a role in dismantling oppressive structures. Additionally, the objective of this capstone is to cultivate a deeper understanding of how the fundamental tenets of social justice can be woven into the framework of counselling methodologies, enriching both the therapeutic journey and the overarching quest for social equity. This chapter is outlined by the following sections: discussion, limitations, applied practices, and reflection on personal learning. Highlighting the main take-aways from the literature review will be laid out under the discussion section, followed by the limitations that emerged from the research and literature. The applied practice section outlines practical recommendations to implement social justice into counselling practice, while also exploring recommendations for future research on the subject. This chapter concludes with a reflection on personal learning throughout the research and writing process of this capstone, finishing out with a final overview, and closing thoughts.

#### **Discussion**

The findings emerging from the literature review highlighted several key learnings and appreciations within the current knowledge landscape. Firstly, the review emphasized the importance of cultural competency and social justice advocacy in counselling practice, underscoring the need for counsellors to adopt a constructivist framework that honors the

multiplicity of worldviews and engages in collaborative exploration with clients (Stewart, 2019). This approach not only enriches the therapeutic process but also empowers counsellors to advocate for clients and address larger systemic barriers that impede progress for marginalized groups. Additionally, the literature review illuminated the interconnectedness of gender, sexuality, race, and other social dimensions in shaping power dynamics within counselling practice (Creswell, 2018; Tilsen, 2021). By acknowledging these intersections and promoting inclusivity, counsellors can work towards creating a more equitable and socially just therapeutic environment that prioritizes the well-being and empowerment of all clients. However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations, constraints, and structural power systems that perpetuate societal inequities and gaps within the contemporary literature on social justice in counselling. These constraints may include institutional barriers, implicit biases, and historical legacies of colonial, capitalistic, and patriarchal oppression that continue to shape the counselling landscape. By critically examining these factors and challenging existing power dynamics, counsellors can strive to create more inclusive and equitable practices that address the root causes of social injustice within therapy sessions. Overall, the literature review on social justice in counselling practice offers valuable insights into the ethical imperative for counsellors to engage in advocacy, activism, and systemic change efforts. By recognizing and addressing the limitations and power structures that maintain societal inequities, counsellors can work towards creating a more just and compassionate therapeutic environment that promotes healing, empowerment, and social change for all clients.

### ***Should counsellors be activists?***

The literature review explores the debate surrounding whether counsellors should actively engage in activism. Delving into the ethical imperative for counsellors to advocate for

social justice and address systemic issues that impact their clients, the literature supports this notion. Activism comes with the territory of working with diverse clientele (Roysircar, 2009) and further to this, therein lies a responsibility within counselling practice to activate for systemic change (Thrift & Sugarman, 2019). The discussion highlights the importance of counsellors recognizing their role in promoting social change and challenging oppressive structures.

### ***Where does activism fit into counselling practice?***

The findings emphasize the integration of activism within counselling practice to address the broader social determinants of mental health. Activism is positioned as a tool for counsellors to advocate for marginalized populations, challenge discriminatory practices, and promote social equity (Richardson & Reynolds, 2012; van Der Merwe, 2018). The literature review underscores the need for counsellors to incorporate activism into their therapeutic approaches to effect meaningful change and moreover, as collective resistance to oppression (Reynolds, 2020; Wade 1997). While most of the literature review findings demonstrate that activism does fit into counselling practice, there remains some missing links. Educational curriculums can certainly improve on their delivery and teaching of ethics and the imperative toward decolonizing and queering practice, while also creating a culture of collective accountability for white bodied counsellors to specifically learn how to move from theory to action.

### ***How can counsellors move from practice into action?***

The literature review provides insights into practical strategies for counsellors to transition from theoretical knowledge of social justice issues to active engagement and advocacy. It discusses the importance of self-reflection, ongoing education, and collaboration with community organizations to amplify the impact of counselling interventions. The findings suggest that counsellors can move from passive practice to proactive action by aligning their

values with advocacy efforts. Moving practice into action involves participation in community and systemic level interventions, as imperfect allies and accomplices in solidarity with justice-doing (Reynolds & Polanco, 2012). Individual, community, and systemic action are all tiers in which counsellors can bridge the world of therapy to social justice activism (Banks et al., 2019).

*How does social justice manifest itself in counselling practice?*

Social justice principles manifest in counselling practice through culturally responsive interventions, advocacy for marginalized clients, and challenging oppressive systems. Within this manifestation, while understanding counsellors can find their own path to action, practical advocacy efforts might look like working collectively, in solidarity with others (Hoff, 2016), registering for funding toward low-cost, sliding scale, and equity fees, and expanding community support outside of the boundaries of counselling. Social justice shows up in many aspects of counselling practice, making it integral that clinicians comprehend the imperative of decolonizing and queering spaces, thinking, and therapy. The literature review highlights the significance of understanding the intersectionality of identities, power dynamics, and systemic inequalities in therapeutic relationships since those facets will undoubtedly manifest themselves in practice. The findings underscore the ethical obligation for counsellors to create inclusive and empowering spaces that promote social justice and equity, and that there is always room for improvement toward future research and educational curriculum change. Overall, this capstone project underscores the critical role of counsellors as activists in promoting social justice within counselling practice, advocating for systemic change, and fostering a more equitable and inclusive therapeutic environment.

**Limitations**

While social justice from a counselling perspective is not a new idea, there remains significant limitations in the process of implementing certain tenants addressed in the literature review. Specifically, the ongoing lack of diversity in the counselling workforce remains an issue toward implementing wrap around services that better uphold social justice aspects of therapy. The lack of diversity in the counselling workforce, which can impact the ability of counsellors to effectively address the diverse needs of clients from various backgrounds should be considered (Buchanan & Wiklund, 2020). The homogeneity within the profession may limit the cultural competence and sensitivity of counsellors in working with marginalized populations. There also remain some limitations in the tendency within counselling to pathologize certain behaviors or identities, which can perpetuate stigma and discrimination. This limitation underscores the importance of adopting a strengths-based, culturally and gender affirming approach in counselling practice to avoid further marginalization of clients. (Ratts et al., 2016; CCPA, 2020).

Another limitation discussed is the potential for burnout among both clients and therapists when engaging in social justice activism within counselling practice. The emotional labor involved in addressing systemic injustices and advocating for change can lead to exhaustion and compassion fatigue, impacting the well-being of both parties. However, sustainability from burnout continues to be discussed, researched, and written about (Reynolds, 2011; Gorski, 2019; Hoff, 2023), attempting to meet with this limitation and speaks to the importance of solidarity, collective practice, and collective accountability. If institutional inequality and racism, alongside social justice and activist practices were taught and more widely implemented throughout counselling education, there may be less burden on individual counsellors and therefore, less burnout.

Finally, structural barriers within the counselling profession and broader societal systems are identified as limitations that hinder the full integration of social justice principles into counselling practice. These barriers may include institutional policies, funding constraints, and power dynamics that impede efforts to promote equity and inclusivity. The limit of colonial structures of academia continues to create barriers to BIPOC and disabled students that have been overlooked, leading to a lack of inclusive curriculum as well as racist, Eurocentric practice in counselling education. By acknowledging these limitations, the literature review underscores the complexities and challenges inherent in incorporating social justice into counselling practice and calls for continued reflection, dialogue, and action to address these constraints effectively.

### **Applied Practices**

The discussion of applied practices in reference to the literature review focuses on practical recommendations for integrating social justice principles into counselling practice. These applied practices emphasize the importance of cultural competence, advocacy for marginalized populations, and challenging oppressive systems within therapeutic settings. By implementing strategies such as ongoing education on social justice issues, fostering a culturally responsive therapeutic environment, and actively engaging in advocacy efforts, counsellors can enhance their ability to address systemic inequities and promote social change. The applied practices outlined in this project serve as a guide for counsellors to translate theoretical knowledge into tangible actions that support the well-being and empowerment of clients from diverse backgrounds.

### ***Recommendations for Practice***

The study findings from the literature review offer valuable insights that can be applied to counselling practice to promote social justice and equity. One key recommendation is to

prioritize ongoing education and training on social justice issues to enhance counsellors' cultural competence and awareness of systemic inequalities (Cohen et al., 2022a; Cohen et al., 2022b; Chang, 2022). Educational institutions must be accountable for the lack of action in addressing inequalities and the downstream impacts that this oversight ensues. By incorporating findings that emphasize the ethical imperative for counsellors to advocate for social justice and address oppressive structures within therapy (Ansloos et al., 2019; CCPA, 2020), counsellors can actively engage in self-reflection and professional development to better support marginalized clients and challenge discriminatory practices. Additionally, the study findings suggest the importance of collaboration with community organizations and advocacy groups to amplify the impact of counselling interventions (Buchanan & Wiklund, 2020; Banks et al., 2019). By aligning with these recommendations and integrating them into practice, counsellors can create more inclusive and empowering therapeutic environments that promote social change and advance social justice principles in their work.

The ethical considerations directly linked to future regulatory bodies, such as counselling associations or licensing boards, like the British Columbia Association of Clinical Counsellors (BCACC) or the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) are crucial in guiding practice as a counsellor. These ethical considerations encompass adherence to professional codes of ethics, standards of practice, and guidelines set forth by regulatory bodies to ensure the delivery of ethical and competent counselling services. By aligning with the ethical principles outlined by these regulatory bodies, counsellors can uphold the values of social justice, cultural competence, and advocacy within their counselling practice. These considerations may include maintaining client confidentiality, respecting client autonomy, promoting client well-being, and advocating for social change while upholding professional

boundaries and ethical standards (CCPA, 2020). By integrating these ethical considerations into counselling practice, counsellors can better navigate complex ethical dilemmas, promote client empowerment, and contribute to the broader ethical framework of the counselling profession as guided by these regulatory bodies.

### ***Recommendations for Future Research***

Recommendations for future research revolve around exploring several avenues to deepen understanding and expand knowledge on the intersection of social justice and counselling practice. One potential direction for further research is to investigate the effectiveness of specific interventions or strategies aimed at integrating social justice principles into counselling practice and promoting equity for marginalized populations (Constatine et al., 2007; Cohen et al., 2022a). Future studies could focus on evaluating the impact of training programs, supervision models, or advocacy initiatives on counsellors' ability to address systemic injustices and advocate for social change within therapy sessions.

Additionally, researchers must prioritize the experiences and perspectives of clients from diverse backgrounds to gain insight into their perceptions of social justice in counselling and the effectiveness of culturally responsive practices (Ansloos et al., 2019; Cohen et al., 2022b). The research needs to shift from the standard white bearer as the one conducting the research and make space for the voices less heard. By centering the voices of marginalized individuals in research—doing the research—future studies can provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of clients and inform the development of more inclusive and empowering counselling approaches. Furthermore, future researchers could investigate the role of organizational policies, institutional structures, and systemic barriers in shaping the implementation of social justice in counselling practice (van Der Merwe, 2018; Evans & Russell-

Mayhew, 2020). By examining the broader context in which counselling services are delivered, researchers can identify opportunities for systemic change, advocate for policy reforms, and address structural inequalities that impact both counsellors and clients (Banks et al., 2019).

Overall, future research in this area should aim to build upon the framework, findings, and implications of the literature review by delving deeper into the practical applications of social justice in counselling, exploring the perspectives of diverse stakeholders, and addressing systemic challenges to promote equity and social change within the field of counselling. Exploring the long-term effects of integrating social justice principles into counselling practice, including examining sustainability and potential barriers to implementation. By conducting follow-up studies or longitudinal research, researchers can assess the lasting impact of social justice initiatives on client well-being, counsellor advocacy efforts, and systemic change within the field of counselling.

The next logical step in the line of research on social justice in counselling practice is to focus on the implementation and evaluation of specific interventions and strategies aimed at promoting social justice within therapy sessions. Building upon the foundational work of the literature review, future research could involve developing and testing innovative counselling approaches that explicitly integrate social justice principles, cultural responsiveness, and advocacy skills into clinical practice. Collaboration with community organizations, existing liberation projects, advocacy groups, and interdisciplinary stakeholders to develop comprehensive, multi-level interventions that address systemic barriers to mental health care access, promote social justice advocacy, and advance equity in the counselling profession are all steps in the next direction (DeBlaere et al., 2019). By engaging in community research models, collaborative research partnerships, and participatory action research, researchers can co-create

interventions that are responsive to the needs and priorities of diverse communities and contribute to transformative change at individual, organizational, and societal levels. Moreover, the next steps in this line of research is to move beyond theoretical frameworks and conceptual discussions to implement and evaluate practical interventions that embody the principles of social justice in counselling practice. Although many practitioners and organizations are doing this work in socially just and active ways, there remains a gap and not all practitioners align with that, even though it is clearly outlined in the codes of ethics. The work is happening, but it needs to be happening more often, making social justice practices and activist work the mainstream. By taking this proactive and action-oriented approach, researchers can contribute to the ongoing evolution of the counselling profession towards greater inclusivity, equity, and social impact.

### **Reflections on Personal Learning**

In reflecting on the personal learning journey throughout this study on the manifestation of social justice in counselling practice, I have gained a deeper appreciation for the transformative potential of integrating social justice principles into therapeutic work. Engaging with the literature, exploring the complexities of power dynamics, and grappling with the ethical imperatives of advocacy and activism within counselling has been both enlightening and challenging. I have come to recognize the absolute necessity of reflexivity, cultural humility, and ongoing self-examination in navigating the intersections of social justice and mental health care. This journey has not only expanded my understanding of the role counsellors can play in promoting equity and justice but has also sparked a personal commitment to continue learning, growing, and advocating for systemic and social change within the counselling profession. Moving forward, I am inspired to apply these insights to my practice, embracing a more

intentional and socially conscious approach to therapy that honors the diverse experiences and voices of those I serve.

There have been times throughout this process where I questioned my capstone topic. The vastness of the research question and the moving parts that surround it were overwhelming at times to comprehend. Writing and researching a project on the manifestation of social justice in counselling practice during a time of considerable political and societal unrest across the globe caused me to question the purpose of this project, at times feeling trivial in comparison to the unjust situations happening concurrently. The autonomy and access to reproductive and abortion healthcare across the border in the United States continue to be criminalized, with abortion ban restrictions that continue to harm people who can become pregnant (Heisler et al., 2023). Trans and gender non-conforming folx rights are being stripped away, attempting to be eradicated by some, resulting in violence and life-threatening danger for those who identify as such (Nierenberg, 2023) —not only in North America, but around the world. Swaths of hatred spewing groups advocating to dismantle LGBTQIA+ rights and education in the school systems across so-called Canada have been occurring, spreading misinformation and fear (Council of Canadians, 2023).

And then, there has been significant grappling with the human rights atrocities and ongoing genocide being committed in Palestine, Congo, Armenia, and Sudan (Migrants' Rights Network, 2023; Amnesty International, 2024). The legacies of colonialism that continue to systematically harm oppressed peoples and the failure of global powers to cease the continued horrors has been deeply disturbing to witness. Showing up for clients amid global humanitarian crises and supporting them and myself through shared anxiety, outrage, fatigue, sadness, and heaviness has clarified that these are all appropriate reactions to colonial violence (Rosales

Meza, 2023). Although facing the ongoing destruction colonialism leaves in its path is at times, overwhelming, it further supports the rally cry toward decolonizing and queering our practice and lives to shift the paradigm toward collective liberation.

### **Final Overview and Closing Thoughts**

This capstone project on social justice and its manifestation in counselling practice offers a comprehensive exploration of the intersection between social justice principles and therapeutic interventions. The study delves into the complexities of integrating social justice into counselling practice, beginning with its implementation through counsellor education, highlighting the ethical imperative for counsellors to address systemic injustices through decolonizing and queering practice, alongside the ethical code counsellors are required to practice. Outlining counselling implications for therapists as activists, understanding the role as such, and how filling this role acts as strategic resistance to oppression, while also meeting with the challenges and criticisms that come with it were all addressed in the literature review. Moving from practice to action, while oftentimes seemingly philosophical in nature, the literature review uncovered ways to bridge the world of therapy to social justice in actionable ways via individual, community, and systemic action. The issue of both therapist and client burnout were broached, and how we can best create a more sustainable existence, while walking alongside our clients with social justice at the forefront.

The problem addressed in this study revolves around the disconnect between social justice principles and counselling practice, emphasizing the need for counsellors to move beyond theoretical understanding to practical implementation of social justice in their work. By bridging this gap, counsellors can enhance the therapeutic process, empower ourselves to create change and resist harmful practices, and contribute to the broader pursuit of social equity and justice.

The importance of this study lies in its potential to transform the field of counselling by offering a roadmap for counsellors to navigate the complexities of social justice, advocate for social change, and create more inclusive and empowering therapeutic relationships. By illuminating the ways in which social justice manifests in counselling practice and providing practical recommendations for integrating social justice principles into therapy, this study paves the way for a more equitable and socially just future within the counselling profession.

The take-home message of this capstone project on the manifestation of social justice in counselling practice is that counsellors have a vital role to play in advancing social justice, advocating for marginalized populations, and dismantling oppressive systems within therapy sessions. By embracing the ethical imperative of social justice, counsellors can create more inclusive, empowering, and equitable therapeutic relationships that promote healing, resilience, and social change. Through a commitment to integrating social justice principles into counselling practice, from a decolonizing and queering lens, counsellors can contribute to a more just and compassionate society, where all individuals can thrive and access culturally responsive mental health care.

The results of the capstone project build upon previous research by providing a deeper understanding of how counsellors can effectively integrate social justice principles into their therapeutic work. By synthesizing existing scholarship, theoretical frameworks, and academic studies, this project highlights the importance of acknowledging and dismantling power dynamics, advocating for fairness and justice, and walking alongside clients as accomplices or co-conspirators in solidarity to foster a socially just therapeutic practice. In relation to previous research, the review underscores the transformative potential of incorporating social justice into counselling practice, not only in terms of individual client outcomes but also in terms of broader

societal impact. By emphasizing the ethical obligation toward social justice, the study aligns with and extends existing literature that calls for counsellors to be activists, advocates, and agents of change within their communities and professional spheres. Further to this, the project offers practical implications for therapists as activists, encouraging counsellors to move from holding social justice principles in their practice to taking concrete actions that challenge systemic injustices and promote equity. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, this study contributes to the ongoing dialogue within the counselling profession about the role of counsellors in advancing social justice and addressing the root causes of societal inequities.

Finally, this capstone project serves to enrich and expand upon previous research by providing a nuanced exploration of the ways in which social justice manifests in counselling practice and offering actionable recommendations for counsellors to engage in advocacy, activism, and social change efforts. By grounding the literature review in the context of existing research and practice, this study contributes to the ongoing evolution of the counselling profession towards a more socially just and ethically responsible approach to therapy, in solidarity.

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Appendix A

Advocacy Flow Chart (Banks et al., 2019, p. 25).

