Embracing Cultural Responsivity and Social Justice

Re-Shaping Professional Identity in Counselling Psychology

SANDRA COLLINS

COUNSELLING CONCEPTS
VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA
Embracing Cultural Responsivity and Social Justice Copyright © 2018 by Sandra Collins. All Rights Reserved.
Welcome to what I hope will be an enlightening and challenging learning experience for you as you work through this e-book. I encourage you to read all of this preface, because it provides you with an overview of the e-book that highlights its uniqueness, from both a content and process perspective. This e-book has been designed to be read in a less linear way than traditional print books. The content centres around a model I am proposing for culturally responsive and socially just (CRSJ) counselling practice. Although this is, in part, an edited collection, the content has been more deeply integrated across all contributions than most edited collections in the sense that the contributors have been invited to interact with and illustrate various aspects of the model in their writing.

The CRSJ counselling model builds upon earlier work in mapping out competencies for multicultural counselling (Collins & Arthur, 2005, 2010a, 2010b). My vision of multicultural counselling and social justice has evolved over the past decade through my study of the professional literature, my collaborative research into multicultural counselling and social justice principles and practices (Collins, Arthur, Bisson, & McMahon, 2015; Collins, Arthur, Brown, & Kennedy, 2015; Collins, Arthur, McMahon, & Bisson, 2014), my experiences as a counsellor educator in the Master of Counselling program at Athabasca University, and my engagement with my own clients. In this e-book, I synthesize my personal and professional learning into a model that reflects my current understanding of what it is that counsellors require in terms of competencies to be able to engage with clients, with organizations, and with systems in a way that is culturally responsive and socially just.

Perhaps more importantly, this e-book is also the product of a detailed analysis of over 20 case studies by colleagues across Canada, some of which appear in this e-book and some of which
are published elsewhere. In this sense, the CRSJ counselling model reflects the integrated thinking of a collection of highly experienced academic and professional colleagues and their reflections on what they have learned from clients from a wide diversity of cultural backgrounds. What impressed me in the case studies I reviewed was the balance between cultural competency and cultural humility illustrated by each of these authors. We all bring some level of expertise in culture and social justice to our writing. However, the longer we work with clients with complex and diverse cultural backgrounds, the more we realize there is much to learn from them, and the more we come to honour and respect their strengths and resiliency. I have found this to be particularly true with clients who have multiple nondominant cultural identities.

The Metaphor of the Colour Wheel

You will notice that the cover of the book is illustrated with a series of paintbrushes arranged into what artists refer to as the colour wheel. The colour wheel is designed based on the three primary colours: blue, red, and yellow. By combining pairs of primary colours for the book cover, I created green, violet, and orange (the secondary colours). Then I mixed adjacent colours together to create even more variety (tertiary colours). It is this incremental blending of colour that creates the almost unlimited variety of hues we enjoy in the natural world. As an artist myself, I see the world through a spectrum of colours, and what brings life to my own
work is the way in colours work with each other in a painting to create an overall effect that is more than the sum of the individual components. This provides a beautiful metaphor for life, culture, and the diversity of human experience and expressions of cultural identity. Take the painting below, for example, in which I captured my reflections on my adventures in Istanbul in 2013.

![Flavours of Istanbul](image)

*Flavours of Istanbul © Collins, 2013*

The basic principles of colour theory are applied in two ways in this painting. In some parts of the painting, analogous colours (those that sit next to each other on the colour wheel and derive from similar starting places in the mixing of colours) create the harmonious, softer blends. However, the painting would lack energy or liveliness without what artists refer to as combinations of complementary colours (those opposite each other on the colour wheel like green and red, or orange and blue). The orange
bowl, for example, is enhanced by its closeness to the blue of the tile patterns, its opposite. In the same way, culture offers both a sense of belonging and comfort and an opportunity for growth, interest, and energy.

Colour in this e-book is used as a broad metaphor for the various dimensions of culture that will be explored: age, ethnicity, ability, gender, gender identity, social class, sexual orientation, and religion. Notably, the colour wheel is also a symbol for intersectionality, which is a major theme throughout this e-book. Just as the colour orange changes its appearance when it is set beside blue or combined with yellow, each dimension of cultural identity must be explored and understood in relation to other dimensions. So, you won’t find a series of chapters in this book that focus sequentially on each dimension of culture; rather, the focus is on the lived experiences of counsellors and clients at the intersections of multiple dimensions of culture within each individual and in the various relationships between counsellors and clients as cultural beings.

Metaphorically speaking, human beings often seek out analogous colours when they need comfort, safety, and reassurance. This is why you find soft blends of blue and green in your massage therapist’s office or, perhaps more importantly, in a colour-smart dentist’s waiting room. Unfortunately, this tendency towards homogeneity also contributes to a moving away from difference for some people in relation to certain aspects of cultural diversity. What is lost in this process is the brilliance of colour and the opportunity for learning that arises from embracing and welcoming diversity. Consider the monochromatic version of my painting below.
The detailed designs are still visible in the painting; however, from my perspective, the life is gone from the images. As an artist, I am known for the colourfulness of my paintings. As an educator, I bring my focus on colour into this e-book by inviting you to move out of your comfort zones, to be open to seeing the world around you differently, and to lean into cultural diversity as you would a colourful painting on your kitchen wall that calls forth energy, passion, and curiosity. I hope that, by the time you finish working your way through the e-book, you are both more confident with, and invitational toward, human diversity in all its complex forms.
This e-book is organized into eight parts.

- In Part I, I posit that multicultural counselling and social justice are inextricably intertwined and both are central to competent and ethical practice with all clients. I introduce the CRSJ counselling model, which is designed to provide both conceptual foundations and applied practice guidelines for working with all clients in a way that honours their multiple, intersecting cultural identities. Both counsellor and client are assumed to be complex cultural beings, making the client–counsellor relationship an intersection of cultural identities and contexts. I also position the discussion of cultural responsivity in the context of social justice. Historically, the counselling psychology profession has evolved an identity that is primarily individualist in nature. In other words, our ways of conceptualizing client problems, negotiating goals for the counselling process, and intervening to effect change have been focused on intrapsychic processes within the client (i.e., changes in thoughts and beliefs, emotions, or behaviours). In recent years, however, there has been a dramatic shift in professional attention to the contexts of clients lives as both sources of injustice that lead to challenges in client health and well-being and as potential targets for therapeutic and social change. Throughout this e-book, I advocate for a change in professional identity to embrace fully the values and practice principles associated with a broader social justice agenda for counselling and psychology.

In the next six parts of the e-book, I introduce the core domains
in the CRSJ counselling model. Each part begins with a chapter in which I examine the conceptual and practice principles associated with that domain.

- In Part II, I invite you into conscious awareness and active exploration of your own complex cultural identities as a foundation for fully embracing understanding of, respect for, and cultural sensitivity toward, your clients' multiple and intersecting cultural identities and relationalities.

- In Part III, I argue that applying a social justice lens to counselling necessitates careful attention to the social determinants of health that impact client well-being, and in particular, client experiences of social injustice. I introduce the concept of social location as a way of understanding how privilege and marginalization within society plays out within the counselling relationship and influences conceptualization of client presenting concerns.

- In Part IV, I revisit professional identity in counselling psychology and invite careful consideration of what the profession would look like if we fully embraced an anti-oppressive stance in our values, ethics, and practice principles. I introduce what I see as supportive metatheoretical and theoretical lenses that offer the possibility of fully embracing cultural responsivity and social justice in practice.

- In Part V, I begin to bring the themes of cultural responsivity and socially justice more fully into the counselling process by positioning the relationship between counsellor and client as transformative through foundational processes of connection, cultural inquiry, mutual cultural empathy, and constructive collaboration.

- In Part VI, I introduce the concept of multicultural case conceptualization as a foundation for goal setting and intervention planning, with a particular focus on the importance of applying a contextualized, systemic lens that takes into account client views of health and healing. By
examining both the locus of control and the locus of change that optimize client outcomes, I invite consideration of multiple levels of intervention.

• In Part VII, I make the case that fostering culturally responsive and socially just change processes requires counsellors to step outside the traditional boundaries of counsellor roles and responsibilities to target change at the systems level, with, or on behalf of, clients.

In the last part of the e-book, I pull together what I have learned from writing this e-book and provide some suggestions for continued competency development.

• In Part VIII, the final chapter of the e-book, I revisit the concept of cultural humility as a foundation for cultural competency. I make the argument that the doing of social justice requires each of us as practitioners, as well as the professions of counselling and psychology, to embrace a change agenda that extends beyond the boundaries of our offices, our conference rooms, or our universities in support of a just society. I reflect further on what it means to adopt a social justice identity as an educator, researcher, and practitioner of counselling psychology.

A Diversity of Voice

Throughout each of Parts II to VII of the e-book, I introduce you to some of my valued colleagues who will speak to various issues and concepts related to the CRSJ counselling model. My hope is to increase the diversity of voices and perspectives in the e-book, as
well as to introduce you to some of the people who are living, practicing, teaching, researching, and writing in these areas. The contributions from these writers range from several paragraphs, to several pages, to full chapters. Each provides a valuable contribution to the overall learning process I intend for this e-book. In some cases, these additional writers have focused in on a particular concept in the CRSJ counselling model in which they are particularly interested; often, they provide personal reflections or stories from their interactions with individual clients or their engagement in systems level change processes. In other cases, my colleagues have written longer conceptual pieces, shared client stories that exemplify the competencies in the CRSJ counselling model, or developed examples of organizational, community, or broader systems level interventions.

I deliberately steered contributors away from writing a chapter on counselling members of a particular population in order to avoid overgeneralizations and stereotyping. Instead, I invited them to focus on stories of specific clients, with multiple, intersecting, contextualized cultural identities and to bring into the mix their own personal cultural identities and contexts, where appropriate. The intent is to demonstrate the basic premise of the CRSJ counselling model that cultural identities and social locations must be assessed and navigated with each new client, based on their particular presenting concerns and taking into account the specific contexts of their lives. I also asked contributors to pay particular attention to counselling as a relational practice and to the co-construction of culturally responsive and socially just counselling goals and change processes with clients.

Some of these contributions are embedded within the conceptual chapters I have written, and others are presented as stand-alone chapters. For detailed author biographies, see the About the Contributors section. These contributions have been placed within the specific part of the e-book that corresponds to the core domain of the CRSJ counselling model that each piece emphasizes, although most also include competencies from other
domains of the model. The intent is to encourage you to move back and forth between the conceptual, theoretical ideas and the applied practice examples that are designed to bring these concepts to life. In this sense I hope to address not only the what of CRSJ counselling, but also the how.

You will notice that many of the contributing writers take a position that is values-based. As practicing counsellors, researchers, and counsellor educators, we are choosing to model for our students and others the importance of taking a stance and expressing a personal and professional voice that reflects thoughtful and critical integration of our own learning and of the current professional literature. What I like most about many of these contributions is that writers took up the challenge to bring their whole selves to their writing honestly and transparently. You will see some of them struggle with their own assumptions and biases, reflect on how relative privilege and marginalization impacts their work, talk about what they have learned from their clients, and illustrate their counselling process and other professional roles in ways that are genuine, challenging, thoughtful, and sometimes a bit messy. Although all of these client stories are fictional or composites to ensure anonymity, these stories come to life as the writers speak from their hearts as well as from their minds.

I have also been privileged in this work to include many writers who embody diverse nondominant cultural identities, and who, as a result, understand from the inside out issues of relative marginalization in society. You will notice that many position themselves along various dimensions of cultural identity in their writing. As I will argue throughout the e-book, culture is complex, fluid, and contextualized. It is impossible to avoid identity labels altogether if we want to talk in a meaningful way about how culture is infused into counselling, but I encourage you not to place the writers or the stories of clients in permanent or immovable boxes based on the self-identifiers they have chosen at the moment of their writing.
Gender-Neutral Language

You will notice that throughout the e-book I use gender-neutral language wherever possible and appropriate. In some cases, the contributors, or the clients with whom they engage, identify as cisgender or transgender and choose a particular singular or plural, gendered or gender-neutral pronoun. Unless the person being referenced has explicitly identified as male or female, I default to gender-neutral language by using they and them. Most dictionaries now recognize the third person plural as an acceptable use for third person singular in instances where gender is not known or is actively eschewed. For example, a client may express a particular need, which we then refer to as their need, and we invite them to expand on it further. Failure to use gender-neutral language or to address a person by their preferred pronoun is considered a form of microaggression in counselling (Singh & Dickey, 2017). Although I follow the professional writing standards of the American Psychological Association (2010) wherever possible, I diverge whenever equity and justice may be compromised.
Enhanced Glossary

In most publications, the glossary is intended as a supplementary resource. In this e-book, however, it is a core component of the content. Each of the key terms in the CRSJ counselling model is defined in detail in the Enhanced Glossary. It is in the glossary that I ground these ideas in the context of formative and current research and writing within counselling and psychology, as well as other health disciplines (where applicable). Developing the glossary has enabled me to ensure that the concepts introduced throughout the e-book are used in a congruent manner, and it has freed each author up to write about their ideas without having to redefine each key concept in their writing. For this reason, you should not read any of the chapters without reviewing the relevant definitions of the key concepts found in the glossary, because that will result in an incomplete picture. So please integrate reading the glossary into your study of the e-book. I also hope that the glossary will provide a stand-alone resource for readers that reflects current thinking in relation to various concepts in the multicultural and social justice literature.
I have carefully considered my research and experience related to how best to support the development of professional competence through the design and the learning processes employed throughout this work. For instance, the use of e-book format, itself, is deliberate from a pedagogical perspective, because it enables me to provide a more conceptually integrated, interactive, and accessible learning experience.

- The CRSJ counselling model presented in Chapter 1 is organized into six domains, and each contains a number of core competencies. Within each of these competencies, I have articulated corresponding key concepts and specific learning outcomes. My intent is to make it easy for readers to track their competency development and for instructors to build curriculum around these competencies, key concepts, and learning outcomes.

- You will notice that there is no index. Because of the ability to embed active hyperlinks, the CRSJ counselling model in Chapter 1 functions more effectively than a traditional index to support tracking various ideas or concepts throughout the e-book. From any of the learning objectives in the CRSJ counselling model, you can link directly to a glossary definition of the key concept(s) addressed. Then, a list of key concept links you to the specific chapters in the e-book that illustrate, exemplify, or further explain that key term.
• A table is provided at the beginning of each chapter with the specific key concepts that are highlighted in the chapter. You can click on any of these key concepts to go to the section of the chapter where it is exemplified or explained. Depending on the device you are using, the text may start at exactly the right place, or you may be taken to the relevant page. In the latter case, you will need to scan quickly for the content on that page that is related to the key concept. Wherever possible, client stories are designed to provide applied practice examples of each construct.

• As you read each chapter, you will also notice that certain direct links are provided to the glossary as key concepts are used throughout the chapter. Click on the concept, and the link takes you to the definition of the term. A comprehensive reference list is provided for the glossary at the end of the e-book. This allowed writers to minimize the citations in the individual chapters, and makes the chapters more readable by avoiding redundancy in defining and positioning key ideas, and brings forth author voices more clearly.

• Each of the contributing writers has attempted to enliven their writing by including personal and professional stories, multimedia links, learning activities, questions for reflection, direct links to relevant resources, or other learning tools. We intend these resources to encourage you to engage both cognitively and affectively with the materials to foster growth in your own personal and professional attitudes and beliefs. We also hope to encourage the development of competencies that extend beyond attitudes and knowledge to the fostering of applied practice skills.

I encourage you to break with tradition, and resist the urge to read through this e-book only sequentially, chapter-by-chapter. The CRSJ counselling model, the core competencies, and the multicultural and social justice constructs are purposefully interconnected throughout. I encourage you to engage your
curiosity and to explore ideas or principles that interest you in a nonlinear fashion. Read some theoretical material, then check out where it fits into the CRSJ counselling model in Chapter 1, and follow the links to see how this concept or principle is applied in one or more case scenarios or other applied practice examples.

I also recognize that, as a reader, you bring your expertise in both your cultural identities and social locations and in your competency for culturally responsive and socially just counselling practice. I encourage you to engage in thoughtful self-assessment relative to the CRSJ counselling model and to set your own learning goals. It up to you, as the learner, to focus on the resources and activities that support your continued competency development.

A Living, Evolving, Collaborative Work

Although, for most of my career, I have focused my own research, writing, and teaching on multicultural counselling, and more recently, on the emergent emphasis on social justice in counselling, I do not consider myself an expert on either of these topics. I am curious, passionate, committed, and excited about how cultural responsivity and social justice play out within the profession; however, I entered the writing of this e-book as a learner, an explorer, a listener, and a collaborator. Although I did the detailed work of merging ideas and transforming them into the CRSJ counselling model, I do not lay claim to the ideas themselves. I have been touched and influenced by many others along the way.

It has been a great privilege to write this e-book and to integrate
the writing of so many of my colleagues, supervisees, students, and mentors. It is my hope that you will engage with these ideas as an active contributor to our shared appreciation for culture and social justice. This e-book is not intended to offer a final or definitive or universal perspective, but I do hope that it will challenge, inspire, and motivate you to carefully consider your professional values and identity and to embrace a vision for social change in which we collectively address the systemic challenges that bring many clients into our offices in the first place.

The beauty of an e-book is that the book itself can evolve and grow over time. Because of the endless combinations and permutations of cultural identities, social locations, and contexts of peoples' lives, there are many other voices that could contribute to our shared understanding of cultural responsivity and social justice in counselling practice. I invite those of you reading this e-book to contact me directly if you have a story to tell that could enhance this work. I hope to continue to add to this edited collection over time.

CRSJ Counselling:
Teaching and Learning
Guide

As a counsellor educator, one of the gaps in resources I have noted over the years is in the tools for teaching and learning about cultural responsivity and social justice in counselling. To address
this gap, I have built a collection of learning activities and resources that I use in my own graduate teaching. These activities are designed to engage learners actively in the learning process. There is considerable evidence that experiential learning, practice-based learning, interactive and multimedia tools, and other processes that invite constructivist learning are most effective in supporting competency development (Collins, Arthur, Brown, 2013a, 2013b). In part, this is because they draw on more than simply processes of knowledge acquisition. They invite learners into emotional, attitudinal, and sensory engagement with the phenomena, concepts, or practices, and they challenge learners to engage in higher order cognitive and other skills development and application. The Culturally Responsive and Socially Just Counselling: A Teaching and Learning Resource (Collins, 2018) provides a series of learning activities and resources organized according to the domains and competencies in the CRSJ counselling model. This resource is open source, which means that counsellor educations, trainers, or practitioners can link to, copy, import, or otherwise repurpose any of the content within their courses. I encourage all readers of the e-book to take advantage of this additional resource. I will link to particular sections of the teaching and learning guide within some of the conceptual chapters.

Reflections from the E-Book Editor

I am deeply grateful to my editor for her very important contributor to this e-book. Chris Fox has been much more than a
copy editor in the creation of this work. She has been a second set of eyes on the content, including and importantly, my own writing. She brought a wealth of experience in social justice and activism that informed her lens on the writing. She has challenged me when I have uncritically inserted assumptions or assertions into my own writing that required further examination and reconsideration. She has also extended my ideas by raising additional considerations or inviting elaboration.

There is increased attention in counselling to the way in which our use of language, both written and spoken, is influenced by and mirrors dominant discourses in society. Because Chris has a Ph.D. in English, her attention to the subtleties of language use has greatly enhanced my own writing and given me a stronger appreciation for the way in which language use is tied so intimately to dominant cultural norms and social stratification. In addition, she is not a counsellor or psychologist, so she helped me to avoid psychobabble, wherever possible, and to position my thinking in a broader interdisciplinary context. You can read her biography and access contact information in the About the Contributors section in the back of the e-book.

Adding My Voice to CRSJ Counselling

By Chris Fox

Editing this e-book has been a deeply gratifying experience for me. It has been a unique opportunity to bring all my selves into my work: my editing self that wants to help by making the words on the page or screen convey exactly what the author intended, and in a grammatically and stylistically correct way; my lesbian feminist activist self that
cares about creating more inclusive societies in Canada; and my political working class self that was taught an awareness of being both less and more privileged than others in the world. I am grateful to have been involved in bringing something good to life.

Although my doctorate focused on Canadian queer women’s literature, I have had a lifelong interest in psychology, worked as a lay counsellor for the Community Homophile Association of Toronto in the early 1970s, and been enriched by engaging in psychotherapy. More recently, I completed a doctorate and taught academic writing and literature at several universities. Sandra’s CRSJ model of counselling was a good fit for me, not only because it is congruent with my social perspectives and my interests, but also because, as a former student and teacher, it pleased me to help make the e-book student-friendly. I’ve also enjoyed reading about how qualified, experienced counsellors apply the CRSJ counselling model in their practices. I have learned so much, personally, through editing this work that I encourage you to read it as closely as I have and to bring its insights into your own life as well as into your work.

I also want to say how much I appreciate Sandra for allowing me to respond fully to the various levels at play in the work. This enhanced my editing experience immeasurably and gave me a sense of inclusion that is beyond the ordinary for an editor; naturally, this also increased my care for the final product. It is unusual to discuss the editing process openly with readers, as we have in this final document, and I appreciate that transparency as well. I see CRSJ counselling in action even at this level. Sandra’s and my author–editor relationship has benefitted from the respect we each
References


