is worth asking what protections for the vulnerable are being jettisoned in the act of emancipation, and progress on whose terms and at whose expense? Like Vikki Reynolds and Sekneh Hammoud-Beckett, John gravitates to ethics as a key facet of social justice. And he reminds readers that ethics permeate every moment of a dialogic exchange: social justice is enacted utterance by utterance in our professional conversations.

Chapter 3, Challenging Conversations: Deepening Personal and Professional Commitment to Culture-Infused and Socially Just Counseling Practice, makes a compelling case that issues of social justice can only be grasped by turning the mirror on one's own social location. Sandra Collins and Nancy Arthur describe the dawning realization of social inequities experienced by many practitioners as they deepen their exploration of their own privilege. They observe that the barriers to social justice that people face are not merely in external contingencies, but unacknowledged power differentials between practitioners and the persons they serve. Their conclusion, that "enacting social justice begins with relinquishing our urge to privilege our own perspectives," is a call to rigorous and sometimes painful self-examination en route to socially just practice.

# Social Justice Activism and Therapy: Tensions, Points of Connection, and Hopeful Scepticism

*Vikki Reynolds and Sekneh Hammoud-Beckett*

This writing invites a critique of the tenuous, strained, yet hopeful relationship between social justice activism and therapy (Reynolds & Hammoud-Beckett, 2012). It addresses the tensions of therapy replicating oppressive practices, and invites a critique of our practice with an aim to move us more in line with our collective ethics for justice-doing (Reynolds, 2009; Reynolds & polanco, 2012). This critique entails addressing our positioning in relation to power, privilege, and disadvantage; resisting neutrality and taking overt positions for justice-doing; naming and beginning to respond to white supremacy and colonialism in our traditions of practice; problematizing our relationship to social control and social change in our work; and resisting competition as affronts to our solidarity. A critical engagement with reflective practice will be offered (Freire, 1970; Tomm, 1985), inviting a hopeful scepticism (Kvale, 1996; Ricoeur, 1970) about our practice enacting the ethics we espouse. Our hope is to breathe life into our ethical engagement with practice, and move towards justice-doing in our work.

Our analysis occurs on the shoulders of women of color feminism (Smith, 2006), critical race theory (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995), queer theory (Butler, 1990), critical trans theory (Spade, 2011), decolonizing practice (Fanon, 1961; Lawrence & Dua, 2005; Walia, 2012, 2013), and anti-authoritarian social justice activism (Buechler, 2005; Chomsky, 2005; Shantz, 2011). Our hope is to contribute to the rich histories of scholarship and activism regarding the precarious relationship of justice-doing and the helping professions (Razack, 2002; Rodriguez, 2007; Rossiter, 2006).

Sekneh is a woman of color from a Muslim background with a family experience of migration to Australia. Vikki is a working-class woman and a Canadian-born white settler, whose people migrated to Canada from Ireland, England, and Newfoundland. The analysis that follows is the basis for all of our therapeutic work, not only work with people from oppressed locations. For example, all of our praxis addressing colonization is relevant and required in all of our work on Indigenous territories, whether we are working with Indigenous people or settlers.

We offer reflection questions in each section with the hope of unsettling our complicity and re-newing our ongoing commitment to work with intention and

accountability. We invite you to take a moment and identify a social issue you have encountered in your work that you would like to explore through a lens of justice-doing. We expect that not all questions can be readily answered, but we see such instances as an opportunity for readers to identify areas for further reflection and action.

## Addressing Power and Privilege

To enact a decolonizing anti-oppression stance we need to reflect, as Sontag (2003) says, on how the suffering of others is systemically mapped onto the privileges we hold as helping professionals. These privileges are often made invisible by the obscuring of power. Kvale (1996) warns that an investigation into our practice, and our ability to enact the ethics we espouse, might reveal transgressions we neither intended nor accepted responsibility for.

Addressing our privilege foments discomfort that is both predictable and necessary (Kumashiro, 2004) in terms of unsettling our relationships to power and opening us up to accountability. These reflexive questions, that can never be fully answered, provide a frame for beginning to address our access to power and responding accountably in relationships of power:

- What are the intersections (Crenshaw, 1995; Truth, 1851) of my own power and privilege with the locations of my disadvantage? How am I accountable for unearned privileges?
- How do I resist positioning myself in my locations of disadvantage when serving suffering others? That is, when we are in the power position of therapist, how do we resist positioning ourselves as the oppressed person in the relationship due to some other site of disadvantage? How do we get our own sites of disadvantage out of the way if they are not useful?
- How am I responding to power both moment to moment and contextually in this interaction?
- How am I resisting righteousness, posturing, and the double comfort (Heron, 2005) of naming privilege righteously, but doing nothing to mitigate it—such as naming white privilege, and then dominating the space?
- How can I invite, embrace, and hold the discomfort required to accountably address my access to power?
- Who is in solidarity to shoulder me/us/our organizations up in making space for discomfort, accountability, and repair of power relations? What ideas, practices, and lived experience helps me/us in doing this?
- How are we holding ourselves as professionals, as well as holding our teams, organizations, and professions, to account for transgressions of power? How are clients invited in safe and trustworthy enough ways to name transgressions? What structures and practices are in place to make this naming possible and useful consistently and predictably across time?

## Resisting Neutrality and Taking Overt Positions for Justice-Doing

A stance for justice-doing creates a position for therapists to respond to our work alongside suffering others (Sanders, 2007) as activists and to work for socially just structural change. In activism, it is the duty of the witness to do more than respond to suffering, and to take up the project of resisting and transforming the structures in society that create the conditions for oppression and exploitation.

This requires a critical resistance towards neutrality and objectivity (Cushman, 1995; Dyer, 2002) within the helping professions. As therapists there is a risk that we can participate in deconstructing and naming transgressions of power without taking on the social project of transforming the societies in which we live. As Maori researcher Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) says in *De-Colonizing Methodologies*, deconstruction is a useful practice, "but it does not prevent someone from dying" (p. 3).

Simultaneously, as practitioners, we must be careful and critical of how our well-intentioned activism can be used to justify and strengthen the structures that we oppose (Smith, 2006; Spade, 2011). For example, feminist activism against a rape culture (Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 1993) has been used in some contexts to shift more resources to police, nominally for women's safety, in the face of widespread cuts to feminist-based programs, such as shelters, counseling, and court advocacy. We also need to be cautious of using the rhetoric of social justice (Wade, personal communication) to engage in competition, appropriate cultural knowledges, and enact empty posturing.

These questions invite a questioning of our relationship to objectivity, neutrality, and being silent in the face of oppression:

- Despite our overt ethical stances for justice-doing, what positions are we *not* taking or are being silent about? What promotes this silence: ignorance, tiredness, discomfort, lack of moral courage, not knowing what to say and how to say it so it can be heard as critique and not attack, concern for career or advancement? Or is silence promoted by histories of being unsupported, victims of backlash, lack of allies, precarious employment, lack of safety as opposed to discomfort, lack of privilege, power, and solidarity? Conversely, when can we take up silence as resistance (Hammoud-Beckett, 2007a) to oppression? How can we discern when it is safe-enough and we are required to speak, and when we need to build more solidarity as a tactic to make effective change?
- How are the politics of neutrality and objectivity mapped onto the legacies of white supremacy and colonization in the helping professions? How are professional objectivity and neutrality connected to other sites of oppression and exclusion; such as homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and stigma against mental illness?
- How do we resist the particular discourses of professionalism that are barriers to justice-doing and maintain our required and useful connections within these disciplines?

- Harlene Anderson teaches that we invented our professions and their codes of ethics, and when they are not just it is our obligation to challenge and transform them (Everett, MacFarlane, Reynolds, & Anderson, 2013). Who is alongside us, and what organizations and communities are in solidarity with us when we challenge, resist, and transform our professional bodies?
- How do we hold these positions against neutrality and for justice-doing alongside requirements from funding bodies that side with and maintain structural oppressions?

## Naming and Responding to White Supremacy and Colonization

European and Anglo-colonialism in Canada and Australia (and elsewhere) originated in political violence against Indigenous peoples in attempts to steal and exploit Indigenous land, wealth, resources, and children and place Indigenous peoples into a class of servitude. Words such as "torture," "genocide," "racism," and "white supremacy" are omitted from the discourse used to describe this deliberate violence against Indigenous people (Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Logan, 2001; Richardson & Reynolds, 2014).

Indigenous warrior Gord Hill (2010) describes colonialism as comprised of invasion, occupation, genocide, and assimilation. "Residential schools" in Canada worked to violently assimilate the children whose families survived genocide. Between 48 percent and 70 percent of the children were sexually abused (Feldthusen, 2007). In some schools this figure was as high as 100 percent. The non-sexual physical abuse was often barbaric and indicates that the violence was systemic and deliberate, that those in charge were aware and acted with impunity (Feldthusen, 2007). In Australia, the "Stolen Generations" (Read, 1981) refers to the government kidnapping of between 1 in 10 and 1 in 3 Aboriginal children who were taken to missions or adopted to white families (Knightley, 2000).

In response to the Truth and Reconciliation process in Canada, and the "non-apology" of the federal government (Coates & Wade, 2009) that failed to take full responsibility and did not offer repair, non-Indigenous academic Paulette Regan (2010) asks what it would mean in concrete terms for the settler majority to shoulder the collective burden of the history and legacy of residential schools.

The helping professions are inextricably linked with these violent histories and current oppressions, and practice within contexts of colonization. Indigenous people are often pathologized and described by professionals as mentally ill, traumatized, and addicted, as opposed to seeing their behavior as resistance and naming that they are more often oppressed than depressed. A decolonizing ethical stance requires an inquiry into the relationship of therapy and community work and white supremacy (Akinyela, 2002; Smith, 2006). It also calls for an examination of the professions' (and professionals') participation in colonization (Gergen, 2005; Hammoud-Beckett, 2007b), what Todd and Wade (1994) name as "psycholonization" and McCarthy (1995) describes as "benevolent colonization."

Sekneh and Vikki have different migration paths and therefore connected but different accountabilities to the Indigenous peoples whose territories we live on. We struggle with how we collectively decolonize ourselves, our families, communities, and organizations from our specific migration histories. Accountability for land theft, and histories of atrocities against Indigenous people, is complex. We struggle:

- What accountabilities can we enact in order to ethically identify as more than settlers and migrants?
- As settlers and migrants, how can we embrace our nuanced experiences of identity, honoring our histories of migration and honoring our ancestors, and the precarious journeys they embarked on?
- How can we resist centering our own migration experiences, or alternately resist the paralysis of guilt? How, instead, can we intentionally center accountability, openness, and responsibility to address colonialism?

Practitioners who identify as white are further required to examine the interconnectedness of colonialism, euro-centrism (Said, 1979), and white supremacy (Said, 1993; Smith, 2007), and to resist and dismantle these oppressions. The following questions offer a frame for therapists who are non-Indigenous to begin to investigate their relationships to colonization and accountable responses to it:

- How am I positioning myself, individually and collectively, on Indigenous territories? How might I act in accord with protocols of the Indigenous communities whose land I live and work on?
- How might I hold all of my work accountable to colonialism, keeping such accountability at the forefront consistently rather than sporadically or not at all—even when working with other non-Indigenous people?
- How might we (as individual practitioners, organizations, and professions) address the colonialism entrenched in the traditions of therapeutic and community practice?
- How might we be directed by and accountable to Indigenous people in our work?
- What can we do to actually enact inclusivity (Sin & Yan, 2003) and authentic partnerships and not tokenism in including Indigenous people?
- How might we strategically name and resist colonialism in interactions with funders and governing bodies? What is our role and ethical obligation as non-Indigenous workers in resisting, dismantling, and transforming systemic oppressions that make space for our voices at tables with funders/government/academia at the expense of Indigenous people and voices?
- How are we (as practitioners, organizations, and professions) participating, overtly, covertly, unintentionally, or with ethical blindness, in the psycholonization of Indigenous people? How might we be doing this in ways that perpetrate colonialism and oppression and construct Indigenous people, families, and communities as unwell, broken, and incapable?

## Problematizing Our Relationship with Social Control and Doing Social Change Work

Social justice educator and activist Paul Kivel's (2007) excellent and troubling chapter "Social service or social change" poses foundational questions for workers and non-profit organizations regarding the ethical stance for our work. Are we taking up the project of resisting oppressions and transforming societies, or are we "serving" people who are oppressed and exploited, possibly accommodating them to oppression? As Andrea Smith (2011), a member of the Women of Color Collective says, "You can't heal your way out of patriarchy." For example, we need to see women who have experienced sexual assault individually in therapy to assist with their personal recovery and simultaneously engage the wider community in the social project of resisting and transforming a rape culture. We need to both walk alongside people who are working to change their relationships to suffering, and work with them for social change directly related to the systemic oppressions that are the root of suffering.

Practitioners who are not working in non-profit organizations or government agencies are not outside of these struggles, but also need to reflect on their role in making social change, and on the accessibility of their services. We need to be strategic about the parts of our work where funding restrains and directs us in ways that replicate the structures of inequity we are responding to and trying to dismantle. Addressing funding needs accountably requires that we navigate complex terrains. Non-profit organizations struggle with the diverse implications of funding and ethical obligations to maintain funding to keep their doors open to people who need them.

We acknowledge that we hold this critical analysis along with accountability for our community work being inextricably linked to these tensions. The following reflexive questions invite an inquiry into the ethical stance of our social service work and its connection to the project of social change and transformation of our unjust societies:

- Are we accommodating people to individual lives of suffering, or are we taking on the project of changing the social structures that promote oppression?
- Are we rigorously questioning our possible role (as workers, teams, and organizations) in maintaining social control and increasing surveillance that fall on "over policed and under protected" (Kushnick, 1999) people and communities?
- How can we establish trustworthiness that we are not acting as agents of state control and additional surveillance of our society's most disadvantaged people? (For example, how do we protect migrant people without status who need our care but who do not trust any government-funded agency not to report them to governments who attack and transgress their human rights to refuge?)
- How are we, our teams, and agencies taking on the task of resisting and transforming oppressive social structures within our organizations and government

agencies that create and uphold the suffering of the people we aim to serve? (For example, how are we working to take on rape culture, hire people from minoritized and marginalized locations?)
- Are we holding accountability to funding sources higher than accountability to the people we aim to serve? If so, how can we resist this, and what people/communities/organizations can help us get our practices more aligned with our ethics?
- How can workers and non-profit organizations participate in accountable ways with funding bodies, especially as funders may restrict critiques of governments and social policies?
- How can we, as communities of workers and non-profit organizations, stay in strained relationships of solidarity when we are set up for financial competition against each other for scarce resources? How do we decline invitations to division and competition and shoulder each other up in order to collectively take up the project of changing society and responding to the suffering of the people we work with?
- How can we sustain ourselves as workers, organizations, and movements in these messy terrains? What points of connection give us enough wiggle room to be in these spaces of capitalism and social control and maintain our ability to do dignity, and enact our collective ethics?
- While we hold onto and work for our shared vision of a just society in the future, how do we continue to enact ethics within flawed systems? How can we know we are not being co-opted or complicit? How do we resist cynicism and continue our struggles to transform the organizations and government structures we work with and in?

## Resisting Competition as an Affront to Our Solidarity

The capitalist context of our work requires that we are in competition with each other, as individual workers and organizations, for resources. Some 30 years of Western democracies' relationship to neo-liberalism and the dismantling of the social net has left people with precarious lives (Butler, 2004; Walia, 2013) and also placed workers in the context of a scarcity of resources amid an abundance of need. This scarcity of resources is of course a myth (Rosenthal, 1999), as evidenced by limited government funding of social work as opposed to seemingly limitless funding to aid corporations (Klein, 2007), militarization (Dawson, 2014), and the prison industrial complex (Davis, 1998; Rodriguez, 2007). Workers and organizations are pitted against each other like dogs fighting over bones.

As workers we are not immune to this competition, despite our explicit claims to the ethics of collaboration and solidarity. We are recruited into the ideas and practices of competition, often replicating the competitive discourse of the sporting realm, whereby the other is positioned as an opponent who can be vanquished

through domination and superior strength and skill. If our mandates and collect-ive ethics espouse the desire to change society towards justice-doing, this competi-tion is counter-productive: We know that we need each other in order to resist and transform the structural oppressions that promote people's suffering.

For example, in work against the violence of men, competition invites com-parisons and negative judgments of this work as vying for the same resources as work supporting women who have suffered men's violence. But we know we have to take on oppression on all fronts, and that work with people who use violence and people who are victimized are interconnected. Resisting and transforming a rape culture requires we work with all women, men, and gen-der-variant people suffering from and performing violence (Reynolds, 2014a). As bell hooks (2000) teaches, "Feminism is for everyone." A useful line of ques-tions might include:

- How can we resist competition and enact solidarity in our work with both peo-ple who have used violence and people who have experienced violence?
- What practices can we create to hold all of this work accountable to people who have suffered from violence (Hammoud-Beckett, 2007a)?
- How can the safety of people subjected to violence be held at the center of all of this work?

Our solidarity is required for our collective liberation. Australian feminist Elspeth Probyn (1993) addresses the challenges to feminist solidarity and the power differences that exist between white feminists and women of color femi-nists. She acknowledges the moral courage required for women of color to speak of racism, and names this act "speaking with attitude" (p. 140). This is not the act of speaking about oneself or the other, rather it is "speaking within the space between myself and another self" (p. 140). Because feminism is a movement, not an individual project, she reminds us to recognize that "without her I am nothing" (p. 163).

Here are some questions to frame an inquiry into our complicity with competi-tion and to make our solidarity more intentional and public:

- How can we hold onto a believed-in respect for the work of others, based on an understanding of our collective ethics? How can we create dignifying relation-ships of respect across organizations and domains of practice with an aim to be of use to people we aim to serve?
- How can we resist competition related to funding? How can we prioritize promoting social change, holding the needs of the people we aim to serve at the center? What collaborations or solidarity can we offer to other work-ers and organizations as we resist disrespectful competition that requires we denigrate their work and reputations, and specifically their ability to be of use?

## Conclusion

We hope that this critical investigation into our ethical stances for justice-doing in our collective work unsettles our complicity and renews our ongoing commit-ment to work with intention and accountability. We want to unsettle a sense of normalcy or "professional competency," and embrace the discomfort necessary for an ongoing invitation to a hopeful scepticism that invites us to rigorously critique the claims to ethics we hold (Reynolds, 2014b). As we have not delivered on a just society we cannot envision what doing justice would fully look like in practice (Chomsky, 2005), and we join other activists, practitioners, and community mem-bers in the hard work required to develop authentic and believable ethical stances that are both decolonizing and anti-oppressive.

We are shouldered up in this project by Arab writer Joumana Haddad (2012), who challenges patriarchy and a myriad of intersecting oppressions. In solidar-ity, we honor her acknowledgment of the multiplicity of silenced and uninvited voices, and we commit to carving out spaces for these people and voices in our classrooms, organizations, supervision, and societies, and to ongoing resistance against their erasure (Namaste, 2000) and disappearance:

> I owe all these anonymous women and men [sic] a great debt of gratitude. I keep on hearing their beautiful, hijacked voices echoing in my head, inspir-ing me and pushing me beyond my limits day after day, word after word. You deserve to hear them too … I am neither a lonely voice in the wilderness, nor an extraordinary exception. My microphone simply works, theirs is broken. But one day it will be fixed. And oh how will they roar when that day finally comes.
>
> (Haddad, 2012, p. 157)

## Dedication

For Cheryl White and David Denborough, who brought us together, and con-tinue to create spaces that inspire and challenge us in the doing and questioning of just practice in community work. For the people and voices shut out and missing from our teams, organizations, and classrooms: We acknowledge our complicity in these disappearances.

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Edited by
Cristelle Audet and David Paré

*To Casey and Liam.*
*To allies of dignity who seek the voice of others.*