
Feminist Thought and Guidelines for Ethical Psychological Practice With Self-Identifying Women and Girls

Pensée féministe et lignes directrices pour une pratique éthique de la psychologie auprès de personnes qui s'identifient comme des femmes et des filles

Tiffany A. Beks

University of Calgary

Anusha Kassan

University of British Columbia

April Dyrda

University of Calgary

Daniel Elleker

Nanaimo, British Columbia

ABSTRACT

Several iterations of guidelines for ethical psychological practice with those who self-identify as women and girls have been developed in the field of Canadian psychology and are designed to offer practitioners direction concerning their ethical responsibilities and competencies. But to be responsive to the varied and changing experiences of women and girls within the Canadian context, these guidelines require regular revision. This article discusses avenues for evolving inclusive counselling and psychotherapy practice with women and girls in Canada. While the primary focus is on implications for counselling and psychotherapy practice, the need for ethical texts and guidelines to reflect gender diversity is underscored. Drawing from literature on feminist thought and its applications, this article offers recommendations for ethical and socially just counselling and psychotherapy practice. Additionally, this article is intended to reignite conversation about how future iterations of ethical guidelines may evolve to be more responsive to the current status of those who self-identify as women and girls.

RÉSUMÉ

Plusieurs itérations de lignes directrices pour une pratique éthique de la psychologie auprès de personnes qui s'identifient comme des femmes et des filles ont été élaborées dans le domaine de la psychologie au Canada afin de fournir aux professionnels une orientation quant à leurs responsabilités et compétences éthiques. Toutefois, pour

répondre aux expériences variées et changeantes des femmes et des filles dans le contexte canadien, ces lignes directrices doivent être révisées régulièrement. Cet article propose différentes pistes pour une pratique évolutive et inclusive du counseling et de la psychothérapie auprès des femmes et des filles au Canada. Si l'objectif premier reste les répercussions sur la pratique de counseling et de psychothérapie, l'article souligne la nécessité de rédiger des textes et des lignes directrices éthiques pour refléter la diversité de genre. Puisant dans la littérature sur la pensée féministe, la recherche et ses applications, il formule des recommandations pour une pratique éthique et socialement juste du counseling et de la psychothérapie. De plus, cet article vise à relancer la discussion sur l'évolution possible des prochaines versions des lignes directrices éthiques pour mieux répondre à la situation actuelle des personnes qui s'identifient comme des femmes et des filles.

Although there have been substantial gains in advancing issues of women's equality and social justice in Canada and internationally, women and girls continue to face inequities and injustices in all domains of society (Statistics Canada, 2017). Historically, the basic assumptions and practice of professional psychology have distorted and misrepresented the experiences of women in ways that largely have reinforced rather than challenge existing social inequities between women and men (Nutt, 2013; Serlin & Criswell, 2015; Tummala-Narra, 2013). The Canadian Psychological Association's (CPA) *Guidelines for Ethical Psychological Practice With Women* (referred to hereafter as the CPA's guidelines; CPA, 2007) were developed in Canada to offer direction for psychologists in regards to their ethical responsibilities and competencies relevant to their practice with women. These guidelines were revised in 2017 (CPA, 2017b) to align with the most recent edition of the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* (CPA, 2017a). However, we argue that the CPA's current guidelines warrant revision to reflect the changing contexts and experiences of women and girls in Canadian society, including those pertaining to sexism and sexual violence in workplace settings, racism in health care settings, and colonialism in education systems. By providing a detailed review of the current status of feminism and social justice and recommendations for practice that align more directly with that status, we hope to stimulate further discussion about the inclusion of socially just and equitable standards as they apply to counselling and psychotherapy within a Canadian context.

We begin this article by providing an explanation of how we conceptualize women and girls. Next, we offer a background on social justice and feminism as distinct and worthy considerations within professional psychology, with a particular emphasis on the practice of counselling and psychotherapy. We then offer recommendations that expand the potential for feminist thought to contribute meaningfully to counselling and psychotherapy practice within a Canadian context. Furthermore, the CPA's Section on Women and Psychology (SWAP; CPA, 2021) recently proposed a call for greater inclusion of diverse perspectives related

to girls and women in Canadian psychology, and as such, we hope that this article will contribute further to the discussion about how to provide ethical, competent, and responsive care to people who have lived experiences of the socio-cultural effects and influences of being socialized as women and girls.

Conceptualizing Women and Girls

It is important to note that the primary focus of our discussion in this article is on considerations for the practice of counselling and psychotherapy in Canada with those who self-identify as women and girls. This may also serve to reinvigorate discussions about refining ethical guidelines to shift away from separate, gender-focused guidelines in order to move toward a broader reflection of gender diversity. Specifically, the CPA's (2017b) guidelines are framed regarding "practice with women" (p. 4), and hence they illuminate the inherently problematic nature of gender/sex binary constructions that may contribute to gendered distortions and oppression (Chang et al., 2018; Morris et al., 2020). The gender/sex binary has particular social justice implications for self-identified transgender, gender-nonconforming, gender-fluid, and intersex persons, including (but not limited to) the potential for misgendering or mislabelling people or for conflating gender with sexual identity (dickey & Singh, 2017; Knutson et al., 2019; Mizock & Lundquist, 2016; Morris et al., 2020). While we acknowledge the inherently problematic nature of gender/sex binary constructions, we also recognize that we still have to grapple with and navigate these terms in order to move the field of counselling, psychotherapy, and psychology and its associated guidelines forward. Hence, it is critical that we conceptualize women and girls in a manner that is sufficiently inclusive and that eschews the reinforcement of a gender/sex binary (Brooker & Loshak, 2020; Chang et al., 2018; Enns et al., 2015; Mizock & Lundquist, 2016; Morris et al., 2020). Moreover, in broadening our understanding of what it means to be a woman or a girl, feminist thought has the potential to exert a positive influence on the lives of cisgender, transgender, gender non-binary, and intersex women and girls (Brown, 2001/2018; Chan & Erby, 2018; Nash, 2019).

Therefore, in this article, we conceptualize women and girls as being those persons who self-identify as cisgender, transgender, gender non-binary, and intersex women and girls. Importantly, the above-mentioned conceptualization dovetails into the overarching focus of our review and recommendations—that is, how we can work with people to consider and address the ways that the socio-political influences and conditions surrounding the socialization of women and girls have affected and influenced their lives. In keeping with the principles and dividends of feminist thought and applications, we recognize that these considerations and practices can help more people than those who self-identify specifically as women and girls (Brown, 2001/2018; Chan & Erby, 2018; O'Neil, 2015).

Adopting a Social Justice Approach

The Politics of Social Justice in Canada

Broadly defined, social justice can be understood as a commitment to fairness and equitable treatment (Kennedy & Arthur, 2014; Sinacore & Ginsberg, 2015). The goal of social justice in its most basic form is to ensure that all individuals and groups have equal opportunities to participate in society and to “reach their personal, social, academic, and career potential” (Kennedy & Arthur, 2014, p. 188). With the recent 150th anniversary of the colonial formation of Canada as a nation-state, Canadian national identity remains recognized as socially progressive, ranking sixth on the 2021 Social Progress Index (Social Progress Imperative, n.d.). This theme of social justice relates to the construction of Canadian national identity through foreign policy, beginning with the emergence of a vision of Canada as a peacekeeping and arbiter nation dedicated to respect for international law and for multilateral institutions (e.g., the United Nations) and to reforms that opened Canada’s immigration system beginning in the 1960s (Cros, 2015; L. A. Winter, 2015). While social justice has played a role in the economic and political environment of Canada since the country’s entry into the industrial world (L. A. Winter, 2015), the persistent and adverse impacts of colonial, racist, and exclusionary policies and governance (e.g., discriminatory treatment of minoritized communities) have reaffirmed the importance and relevance of social justice at a national level (Brodie, 2018; Prince, 2018).

Many Canadians endorse a view of Canada as a “tolerant and welcoming society” (Gomá, 2020, p. 82), as does the Canadian federal government, with frequent reference to themes of democracy, of human rights protection, and of diversity and inclusion through official policies of multiculturalism and bilingualism (Thobani, 2018; E. Winter, 2014). In 2015, Canada’s prime minister, Justin Trudeau, generated considerable international media attention by appointing women to a number of ministerial positions, claiming he had done so “because it’s 2015” (Ditchburn, 2015). National and political rhetoric also tends to promote a view of Canada as a progressive nation to both domestic and international audiences (Gomá, 2020).

Contrary to this popular position, feminist, Indigenous, and anti-racist perspectives have challenged and critiqued the dominant discourse on Canadian identity, arguing that it serves to obscure and/or conceal the country’s “foundation on settler colonialism and racialized hierarchies of citizenship” (Gomá, 2020, p. 82; see also Thobani, 2018). Given that these critiques should be central to considerations of social justice, greater attention to the diverse experiences of marginalized populations—such as those of girls and women—is needed (Vasquez & Vasquez, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2017). Moreover, ethical psychological practice should take into consideration the complex and diverse contexts within which women and girls live (Vasquez & Vasquez, 2017).

Social Justice and Counselling Psychology

Among professional psychologists in Canada, increased support of and commitment to social justice values and social action has emerged in recent years (Arthur, 2018b; Kennedy & Arthur, 2014; Sinacore & Ginsberg, 2015), as evidenced by the initiation of a committee on human rights and social justice in psychology (CPA, n.d.), the integration of social justice principles into standards of practice (Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association [CCPA], 2021), and the emergence of social justice pedagogy in counselling psychology academic programs (Wada et al., 2020). While conversations about social justice within psychology have become more prominent, this position is not without opposition or critique (Goodman & Gorski, 2015; Kennedy & Arthur, 2014; Settles et al., 2020; Wada et al., 2020). Kennedy and Arthur (2014) point out that counselling psychologists may hesitate to adopt a social justice practice because of its more liberal and socialist political ideals, which may conflict with psychologists who hold more conservative political stances. Settles et al. (2020) assert that psychologists may question the validity and rigour of social justice research and practice when juxtaposed with positivist and post-positivist traditions in psychology. In addition, social justice as a movement within counselling psychology emerged as a response to mainstream psychology with an original purpose of training individuals from dominant backgrounds in multicultural awareness (Goodman & Gorski, 2015). Hence, some authors argue that the social justice movement has emerged from Western ways of knowing and has not been sufficiently inclusive of Indigenous world views and non-dominant ways of knowing (Ansloos et al., 2019; Goodman & Gorski, 2015; Wada et al., 2020). As such, advocating for social justice and social change remains controversial in the profession and has yet to be universally accepted as a key ethical aspiration for the profession (Kennedy & Arthur, 2014; Settles et al., 2020; Steele et al., 2014; Wada et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, a strong argument can be made for the place of social justice within the practice of counselling psychology (Arthur, 2018b; Collins, 2018; Prilleltensky & Huygens, 2014; Sinacore & Ginsberg, 2015). Principally, social justice stems from a commitment and dedication to ethics, which remains an essential component of the practice of psychology (Barnett, 2019; Collins, 2018; Sinacore & Ginsberg, 2015). According to the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* (CPA, 2017a), psychologists have an ethical responsibility to “demonstrate appropriate respect for the knowledge, insight, experience, areas of expertise, and cultural perspectives and values of others, including those that are different from their own” (p. 12). With this understanding, it becomes clear that at the root of this profession is a commitment to contribute to society from which a pledge to the values of social justice follows naturally (Arthur, 2018b; Collins, 2018; Prilleltensky & Huygens, 2014; Wada et al., 2020). While social justice work may continue to be controversial, it is critical to ensuring progression and integrity within the field (Arthur, 2018b; Sinacore, 2018; Wada et al.,

2020). This social justice commitment also extends to the practice of counselling and psychotherapy in Canada, as seen in the recently revised *Standards of Practice* put forth by the CCPA (2021) and in scholarly writing in the area (see Collins, 2018; Gazzola et al., 2016; Shepard et al., 2016).

The emergence of social action as a focus of counselling psychology means that social justice has become an important consideration not only for practice but also for practice guidelines (American Psychological Association [APA], 2018; Arthur, 2018b; CCPA, 2021; Enns et al., 2015; Vasquez & Vasquez, 2017). This necessitates a critical examination of practices and values within the field of counselling psychology, particularly among processes that serve to maintain existing systems of oppression (Arthur, 2018b; CCPA, 2021; Enns et al., 2015). Importantly, an examination of current standards must go beyond professional obedience and focus on the pursuit of social change by challenging the status quo of both broader society and the profession of counselling psychology itself (CCPA, 2021; Enns et al., 2015). To succeed in this endeavour, these aspirations must be reflected within the guidelines designed to achieve such standards, which not only inform counselling and psychotherapy practice directly but also contribute significantly to shaping and defining its identity as a profession (Arthur, 2018b; L. A. Winter, 2015). Given the practice-guiding and regulatory nature of such guidelines, practitioners are tasked with the duty of considering how to enact these ethically informed documents so that they reflect a commitment to social change (Enns et al., 2015). Likewise, incorporating a social justice perspective within the field of counselling psychology would encourage practitioners to focus on the needs of women and girls (Vasquez & Vasquez, 2017).

A Case for Women and Girls

In the 1970s, feminism emerged as a distinct force within professional psychology in North America and stood at the forefront of a social justice movement that fundamentally challenged the validity of the androcentric foundations and bias apparent in psychological theory, research, practice, and professional codes of ethics (Enns et al., 2015; Vasquez & Vasquez, 2017). Feminist psychology has often been characterized as a perspective and approach to understanding and working with women and girls, aiming to counterbalance the distortions inherent in male-dominated psychological theory by foregrounding and placing equal moral value on the lives and experiences of women relative to men (Brown, 2001/2018; Conlin, 2017). The legacy of the feminist influence in professional identity is reflected in the establishment of specific organizational sections pertaining to women and girls under the CPA's Section on Women and Psychology (CPA, 2021) and the APA's Society for the Psychology of Women (APA, 2021).

Women and girls continue to live in contexts across all domains of society in Canada and globally that contribute to mental health difficulties, including unrealistic depictions of women and girls in media images (Balantekin et al., 2017),

intimate partner and gender-based violence (Ahmad, 2019; Heidinger, 2021; Jaffray, 2021; Savage, 2021), caregiver burden (Glauber, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2017; Wade et al., 2021), sexism in the workplace and in broader society (Bock et al., 2017), and sexual assault in post-secondary and employment settings (Quick & McFadyen, 2017; Rosenthal et al., 2016; Watkins et al., 2017). Importantly, feminist thought continues to have great potential to inform the development of professional codes of ethics and their associated guidelines that respond to the harmful origins and effects of these contexts and experiences (Enns et al., 2015; Vasquez & Vasquez, 2017). As such, it is imperative that professional ethical guidelines reflect a capacity to engage in meaningful and contextually appropriate ways with the diverse experiences of women and girls in therapy, counselling, consulting, formal assessment, education, and research (Arthur, 2018b). To this end, concerted efforts have been made in North America since the 1970s to develop guidelines for ethical psychological practice with women and girls, especially as related to the practice of therapy and counselling, in both Canada and the United States (APA, 2018; CPA, 2017b). In Canada, the *Guidelines for Ethical Psychological Practice With Women* (CPA, 2017b) have been designed to be used as an adjunct to the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* (CPA, 2000, 2017a).

The 1975 International Women's Year Conference (IWYC), held in conjunction with the official United Nations conference in Mexico City, brought women together at local, regional, and national levels to discuss current and emerging issues facing women in society (Fraser, 1999). The IWYC resulted in a list of 14 goals to eliminate sex-based discrimination and inequality in education, civil rights, employment, and health (Fraser, 1999). Following the recommendations put forth by the IWYC, the leadership of the CPA first publicly acknowledged the need to address oppressive and discriminatory professional activities adversely affecting women, mainly concerning the provision of counselling (CPA, 2007; Wand, 1977). The early work of members from CPA's Task Force on the Status of Women in Canadian Psychology led to the production of a report addressing ways for practice, education, and research to contribute more effectively to improvements in the status of women in Canada (Wand, 1977). This report contributed substantially to the development and eventual approval of the *Guidelines for Therapy and Counselling With Women* (CPA, 1980). These guidelines were replaced by the CPA's (2007) *Guidelines for Ethical Psychological Practice With Women* and were revised in 2017 to align with the principles and ethical decision-making model outlined in the fourth edition of the CPA's (2017a) code of ethics.

The newest version of the CPA's (2017a) code of ethics addresses issues of diversity, multiculturalism, and globalization by offering increased flexibility in the process of making ethical decisions. Sinclair (2016) proposed specific amendments to the third edition of the CPA's (2000) code of ethics, emphasizing the importance of clients' emotional reactions, the role of virtue, and the psychologist's personal and cultural contexts, thereby validating the importance

of self-reflection in ethical decision-making. Furthermore, Canadian society is increasingly diverse (Government of Canada, 2020; Sinacore & Ginsberg, 2015), which necessitates the development of approaches to ethical decision-making that integrate multicultural considerations (Arthur, 2018b; CCPA, 2021). This most recent iteration of the code of ethics, therefore, emphasizes issues framed regarding social justice (Sinclair, 2016).

Although the CPA's (2017a) revised code of ethics allows for a more direct linkage between professional practice and the diverse and globalized Canadian population, more detailed consideration for the needs of groups who are more susceptible to vulnerability (e.g., women and girls) must be reflected in practice guidelines (Arthur, 2018b; Enns et al., 2015). Primarily influenced by Western ethical principles, the CPA's (2017a) code of ethics continues to privilege Western ethics and values (e.g., individualism) over feminist influences (Arthur, 2018b; Sinclair, 2016). While the CPA's (2017b) guidelines for practice with women were written to reflect changes made to the CPA's (2017a) code of ethics, those guidelines require further revision to reflect the changing contexts and experiences of women and girls in society (Lafrance & Wigginton, 2019; Statistics Canada, 2017) as well as the proliferation of feminist thought, research, and practice and its applications to the professional practice of counselling and psychotherapy in Canada (Enns et al., 2015; Kassan, 2018).

It is also important to note that Canadian practitioners are privy to the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association's (CCPA, 2020) code of ethics, a set of practice guidelines for directing ethical conduct among professional counsellors. The CCPA's code of ethics endorses the basic principles of beneficence, fidelity, benevolence, autonomy, justice, and societal interest. In addition, the CCPA's (2021) standards of practice make explicit the need for respecting inclusivity, diversity, and intersectionality. According to the standards of practice, counsellors and therapists should continuously develop and advance their "awareness, sensitivity, and competence with respect to diversity (between groups) and difference (within groups)," which includes ongoing education about and awareness of "client identities, identification, and historical and current contexts" (p. 28). While the values and directives espoused in the CCPA's code of ethics and standards of practice are proactive in honouring clients' perspectives and remaining abreast of the ethical issues that can emerge in counselling relationships, a distinct set of guidelines for working with women and girls within counselling and psychotherapy settings has yet to be developed by the CCPA. In the absence of such a document, it is plausible that Canadian psychologists who work as professional counsellors refer to the CPA guidelines to guide ethical practice with women and girls. As such, the importance of updating guidelines for counselling and psychotherapy practitioners specific to practice with women and girls cannot be understated.

(Re)considering Ethics Through a Feminist Lens

Historically, ethics have persisted as the standard by which ethical dilemmas are negotiated in Western society (Morse & Blume, 2013; National Latina/o Psychological Association [NLPA], 2018). While this conceptualization is predicated on the ideal that all people are essentially equal, Gilligan's (1982) exploration of women's development fuelled the critique that common understandings of ethics have marginalized feminist perspectives and perpetuated the status quo. Although Gilligan presented these critiques 40 years ago, these points still hold true today (Arthur, 2018b; Jaggar, 1992; Morse & Blume, 2013). Jaggar (1992) acknowledged five notable exclusions of Western ethical conceptualizations, including (a) a lack of concern for women's issues and interests, (b) the trivialization of issues originating in the private world (e.g., child care, housework), (c) the implication that women are morally inferior to men, (d) the overemphasis on culturally "masculine" traits (e.g., independence, autonomy, reason) relative to "feminine" traits (e.g., interdependence, emotion, connection) and differential evaluation of gendered traits, and (e) the privileging of a traditionally "masculine" way of moral reasoning that emphasizes rules, universality, and impartiality over more "feminine" ways of reasoning that emphasize relationships, particularity, and partiality. Additional authors have highlighted how guidelines in professional psychology have been developed primarily within a Eurocentric context (e.g., emphasizing individualism and personal autonomy) while failing to integrate the values and principles of cultural world views that foreground relational and collective ethics (Morse & Blume, 2013; NLPA, 2018).

In response to this critique, feminist perspectives may infuse the rational-evaluative conceptualization common in Western ethics (CPA, 2017a) with the emotional and intuitive influences of ethical decision-making emphasized in feminist theory (Arthur, 2018b; CPA, 2017b). Rather than assume the position of distanced objectivity characteristic of Western ethics, proponents of distinctly feminist or feminine approaches to ethics view such a detached stance not only as impracticable but also as undesirable (Brown, 2001/2018; Ganote & Longo, 2015). In stepping away from a typical psychological lens focused on the generalized other or individual, feminist thought acknowledges that each person is situated differently along the lines of intersecting identities and experiences (e.g., socio-economic status, cultural identity, sexual orientation), resulting in varying degrees of privilege and power (Kassan, 2018; Lavell, 2018; Laverty & Knapik, 2018).

Through an appreciation of the disproportionate burden of oppression that many women experience due not only to their gender but also to other minoritized aspects of identity (Brown, 2001/2018; Conlin, 2017), we invite a more nuanced understanding of how gendered oppression may affect the lives of

women and girls. While a detailed discussion of intersectionality is beyond the scope of this article, we encourage readers to refer to Crenshaw (1991, 2014) for a thorough dialogue and examination. Arguably, developing an intersectional understanding of the subordination of women and girls increases the capacity of practitioners to conceptualize and to respond effectively to the complexity, diversity, and contextuality of women's experiences of marginalization and oppression (Conlin, 2017; Kassan, 2018; Laverty & Knapik, 2018). This subjection has sparked the development of a feminist approach to ethics that seeks to address as well as resist those actions and/or practices that perpetuate the subordination of women (Arthur, 2018b; Brown, 2001/2018; Jaggar, 1992). Furthermore, a feminist approach to ethics aims to develop alternatives for such actions and/or practices that are identified as morally desirable, thereby enhancing the seriousness and significance with which women's lives and experiences are viewed (Brown, 2001/2018; Jaggar, 1992; Laverty & Knapik, 2018).

The value of applying emerging feminist perspectives to ethical decision-making in counselling and psychotherapy practice has been well argued, resulting in many contributions to the evolution of the discipline. These contributions include a reconceptualization of distress as resistance to social contexts and conditions (Conlin, 2017), a commitment to shifting restrictive gender roles (Brown, 2001/2018), an emphasis on intersectionality (Arthur, 2018b), and attention to egalitarian relationships and power-sharing (Kassan, 2018). Nevertheless, points of contention remain within feminist thought and within the CPA's code of ethics and guidelines, namely, the epistemological foundations that underlie these policy documents. While the guidelines (CPA, 2007) were originally reformulated partly to adhere to standards for policy review (Church et al., 2006) and were later revised to align with the CPA's (2017a) code of ethics, the current guidelines (CPA, 2017b) should be revised to address properly the changing contexts in which women and girls live, including the emerging concerns specific to women and to groups of women in Canadian society. It is our perspective that these guidelines would benefit from greater inclusion of insights and advances generated from contemporary feminist thought, research, and practice and from the integration of a diversity of perspectives. In an attempt to keep pace with the push for social justice that has been increasingly present in the public sphere and that has gained traction more recently within the field of psychology (Arthur, 2018b; CCPA, 2021; Collins, 2018; Prilleltensky & Huygens, 2014; Sinacore & Ginsberg, 2015; Vasquez & Vasquez, 2017; Wada et al., 2020), we offer the following review. We hope that not only Canadian counselling and psychotherapy practitioners but also the profession as a whole will see this as an opportunity to take a critical lens to their own ethical guidelines and to consider ways in which feminism and social justice values may be integrated better into our practice guidelines.

Guidelines for Ethical Psychological Practice With Women

The most recent version of the CPA's (2017b) guidelines was designed to serve as an adjunct to the 4th edition of the CPA's (2017a) code of ethics. To this end, the guidelines suggest that awareness of and knowledge about issues affecting the lives of women are necessary preconditions for ethical psychological practice with women, which "should be non-sexist, empowering, and recognize the realities of women's lives" (p. 3). With the goal of helping practitioners meet these objectives, specific components of these guidelines are described in relation to the four ethical principles upon which the 2017 edition of the code of ethics has been constructed, with examples provided of how these principles and guidelines can be applied to psychological practice with women and girls.

The CPA's (2017a) code of ethics puts forth "respect for the dignity of persons and peoples" as the first principle in the ethical code. In doing so, the CPA encourages psychologists to

strive to develop and maintain constructive and collaborative relationships that reflect the fundamental principle of respect for dignity. Respect for the dignity of persons is the most fundamental and universally found ethical principle across disciplines, and includes the concepts of equal inherent worth, non-discrimination, moral rights, and distributive, social, and natural justice. (p. 11)

In keeping with the first principle, the CPA's (2017b) guidelines direct psychologists to provide non-sexist, sensitive psychological services that are "responsive to the complex and varied contexts of Canadian women's lives" (p. 2). This involves recognizing that, in addition to gender-based discrimination, many women experience discrimination for belonging to one or more additional marginalized groups. The guidelines make an explicit connection between the experience of "multiple discriminations and oppressions" (p. 3) and a greater risk of psychological distress. As such, these guidelines urge psychologists to remain acutely aware of how the intersection of gender and other forms of diversity can "increase the power imbalance in the professional relationship" (p. 3) between client and therapist.

The CPA (2017a) identifies "responsible caring" as the second overarching principle of the ethical code. Through its standards, the CPA calls upon psychologists to

demonstrate an active concern for the well-being and best interests of the individuals and groups (e.g., couples, families, groups, communities, peoples) with whom they relate in their role as psychologists. This concern includes both those directly involved and those indirectly involved in their activities. (p. 18)

In alignment with this principle, psychologists are advised to take the necessary steps to appreciate fully how women's experiences are influenced by the intersection of gender with "culture, nationality, ethnicity, race, religion, gender identification, relationship status, sexual orientation, physical or mental abilities, age, socioeconomic status, as well as by other personal characteristics, conditions, or statuses" (CPA, 2017b, p. 4). This includes an appreciation for how specific living conditions and contexts affect life satisfaction, socialization, life roles, and well-being (CPA, 2017b). As such, these guidelines represent a departure from a pathology-focused conceptualization of psychological distress in women toward a view of women's lived experience where psychological distress is understood primarily as a response to the oppressive contexts in which they live.

The third principle of the CPA's (2017a) code of ethics is "integrity in relationships." Psychologists are urged to ensure that

the relationships formed by psychologists in the course of their work, regardless of the communication modality used, and regardless of whether they are with identifiable individuals or groups or with the public at large, embody explicit and implicit mutual expectations of integrity that are vital to the advancement of scientific knowledge and to the maintenance of public confidence in the discipline of psychology. (p. 25)

In keeping with the overarching values of this principle, the CPA's (2017b) guidelines direct psychologists to increase their knowledge and understanding of women's concerns related to trust and authority. This involves acknowledging personal biases and social influences that shape the professional orientations, interactions, and practices of Canadian psychologists and a commitment to being "as self-aware, objective, and unbiased as possible" (p. 4).

"Responsibility to society" is the fourth principle in the CPA's (2017a) code of ethics. Under this principle, the CPA reminds Canadian psychologists that

psychology functions as a discipline within the context of human society. Psychologists, both in their work and as private citizens, have responsibilities to the societies in which they live or work and to the welfare of all human beings in those societies. (p. 31)

In keeping with this principle, the CPA's (2017b) guidelines encourage psychologists to move beyond the avoidance of harm and toward "accept[ing] the responsibility to do what they can to change societal laws and structures that discriminate or lead to oppressions of women" (p. 5). Canadian psychologists are challenged to move beyond their traditional roles to advance the welfare of women in society more generally and to "choose the most appropriate and

beneficial use of their time and talents to help meet this collective responsibility” (CPA, 2017b, p. 5).

Recommendations for Counselling and Psychotherapy Practice

As part of our review of the CPA’s (2017b) guidelines and of contemporary feminist thought, we offer the following recommendations for the practice of counselling and psychotherapy with women and girls in Canada. The first recommendation pertains to broadening the range of feminist ideas and influences that inform counselling and psychotherapy practice with women and girls. An expanded understanding of the experience of women and girls among practitioners of counselling and psychotherapy and of the use of inclusive language and discourse to reflect this understanding are needed. Furthermore, we recommend a strengthened commitment to integrating culturally relevant and contextual understandings of resilience and to enhancing the cultural sensitivity and awareness of practitioners. Likewise, counselling and psychotherapy practice should reflect a move toward an active stance in addressing social justice issues. In addition, counselling and psychotherapy professionals should conduct research that is guided by feminist epistemologies and that promotes gender-fair research. Finally, it is recommended that the evolving ethical guidelines in Canada should integrate a diversity of perspectives. By incorporating these emerging feminist ideas into practice and the guidelines that inform said practice, practitioners will be better equipped to serve the interests and needs of women and girls.

Broaden the Range of Feminist Ideas and Influence

While feminism refers to a plurality of theoretical perspectives, a lack of a unitary perspective does not imply the absence of a coherent vision (Brown, 2001/2018; Vasquez & Vasquez, 2017). In other words, there is no single way to be a feminist counsellor or psychotherapist (Conlin, 2017). Just as our understanding and experience of feminism in practice varies, we must also recognize and validate the different ways in which oppression may be experienced (Arthur, 2018a; Prilleltensky & Huygens, 2014). To understand the needs and concerns of clients, practitioners are encouraged to keep an open mind in terms of how they approach their practice and continue to develop their competencies, knowledge, and skills (Arthur, 2018a; Collins, 2018; Enns et al., 2015). We recommend that future iterations of practice guidelines both consider and address the variety of ways in which women and girls experience oppression (Enns et al., 2015; Kassin, 2018; Laverty & Knapik, 2018). This may involve the inclusion of guidelines that raise conscientiousness about the availability of services and fee schedules and that ensure that psychologists volunteer their skills to make services more accessible to those in need. Finally, it is critical that we point out that guidelines should not serve as a substitute for appropriate education and training in culturally

sensitive, anti-oppressive, and socially just counselling and psychotherapy. As such, it is important that future versions of the CPA's guidelines not only reflect appropriately the changing and diverse contexts within which women and girls live but also aspire to be used in concert with culturally and socially responsive pedagogy, education, and training.

Expand Understanding of Experience

Currently, the attention given to intersectionality in the CPA's (2017b) guidelines warrants greater depth and scope. It is important for practitioners to recognize that an exclusive focus on gender in feminist thought risks overlooking the other dimensions of diversity that exist among women and girls (Kassan, 2018; Vasquez & Vasquez, 2017). Future practice guidelines should expand concerns for gender to a consideration of concerns across the lifespan, various identities, and social locations (Enns et al., 2015). This includes an emphasis on encouraging active awareness of issues about the intersection of gender with areas such as race, ethnicity, age, socio-economic status, ability, gender identification, and sexual orientation (Nash, 2019). Importantly, more in-depth discussions are needed regarding how empowering women and girls may vary across cultural contexts (Laverty & Knapik, 2018).

Use Inclusive Language and Discourse

The CPA's (2017b) current guidelines use limiting verbiage with respect to gender, and such discourse serves to maintain gender/sex binaries. Given the growing body of feminist literature in this area (dickey & Singh, 2017; Morris et al., 2020), it is crucial that more nuanced discussions regarding gender diversity be incorporated into future guidelines. In much the same way as there is no single unitary definition of feminism, feminist thought and its application to professional ethics in counselling and psychotherapy should be informed by a plurality of feminist theories (Brown, 2001/2018; Vasquez & Vasquez, 2017). As feminists, we adopt the perspective that it is essential for a diversity of voices to inform practice and theory and to maintain the vitality and relevance of feminism in the professional and ethical conduct of practitioners (Enns et al., 2015). Such diversity of voices, which includes all aspects of identity and diversity, would serve as a strength rather than as a weakness, given that feminism continues to contribute in substantive ways to the practice of counselling and psychotherapy and to social and political transformation in Canadian society (Arthur, 2018b; Kassan, 2018; Prilleltensky & Huygens, 2014; Sinacore & Ginsberg, 2015).

In addition to being conscientious of the language used with clients, inclusive psychotherapy requires practitioners to attend to the ways in which they present themselves (Arthur, 2018a; Morris et al., 2020). A safe space can be created by communicating with clients using the client's gender identity and chosen gender pronouns and ensuring that the space in which they practise conveys affirmation,

inclusion, and respect for the client (dickey & Singh, 2017; Morris et al., 2020). Equipping practitioners with language that is non-discriminatory and that is reflective of emerging feminist thought is likely to set the stage for more gender-responsive and, in turn, ethical counselling and psychotherapy practice (Mizock & Lundquist, 2016; Morris et al., 2020). This would allow practitioners to recognize more fully how gender expectations and language can have an oppressive effect on the well-being of persons from a diversity of gender identifications and social locations (Brooker & Loshak, 2020; Knutson et al., 2019). Hence, future iterations of the CPA's guidelines could include guidance for how to ensure that gender diverse identities and varied experiences are recognized. By making this information and guidance readily available to all practitioners and by requiring practitioners to become involved in education and training on topics such as transgender issues, therapeutic missteps and oppressive interactions may be avoided (Mizock & Lundquist, 2016; Morris et al., 2020).

Integrate Culturally Relevant Understandings of Resilience

Part of reframing an understanding of clients' distress involves moving away from pathologizing persons due to their experiences of oppression and moving toward embracing contextual and culturally relevant perspectives about strength, resilience, and psychological distress (Brown, 2001/2018; Lavell, 2018). There are notable consequences to adopting an overly pathologizing and problem-focused approach to assessment and therapy, such as the possibility of overlooking the vast potential of women and girls to tap into both internal and external resources when faced with adversity and the use of biased techniques and practices that can lead to harm (Laverty & Knapik, 2018; Morris et al., 2020; Prilleltensky & Huygens, 2014; Vasquez & Vasquez, 2017). Thus, part of being an ethical practitioner involves paying close attention to the resilience of women and girls who utilize these services, especially if such strengths are not apparent or recognized by clients (Brown, 2001/2018; Laverty & Knapik, 2018). Guidelines reflecting an application of emerging feminist thought need to place a particular emphasis on the roles of strength and resilience in the lives of women and girls and to provide practitioners with ways in which to help their clients capitalize on such strengths (Enns et al., 2015). It is therefore seen as fundamental that future iterations of the CPA's guidelines emphasize not only the obligation of practitioners to be knowledgeable about the challenges faced by women and girls but also the strengths and social contexts associated with positive outcomes.

Enhance Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness

Practitioners must always be critical and conscientious of how their notions of mental health and well-being are steeped in philosophies of individualism and patriarchy (Arthur, 2018a; Sinacore & Ginsberg, 2015). Practitioners are encouraged to move beyond a critical consideration of their own biases in

assessment and diagnosis in order to develop more nuanced understandings of the many ways that gender and other identities may influence the presentation of client concerns and particular client needs (Morris et al., 2020; Vasquez & Vasquez, 2017). For example, the knowledge that women may be more likely to internalize problems (Knoll & MacLennan, 2017) and to experience the expression of symptoms differently than men (Brown, 2001/2018) would make it unethical for practitioners to conduct and interpret assessments in the same manner with all persons, regardless of gender (APA, 2018; Enns et al., 2015). Furthermore, attending to discourse around culturally sanctioned behaviours for persons of particular genders is an important consideration in making clinical decisions (Budge & Moradi, 2018; Morris et al., 2020). Finally, practitioners must acknowledge that they bring their own identities to the counselling space (Arthur, 2018a; Collins, 2018). It is recommended that practitioners learn how and when to prioritize the intercultural relationship between client and therapist in order to navigate cultural tensions generated by multiple, intersecting identities in the counselling space, particularly when the therapist holds multiple, intersecting dominant cultural identities and social locations (Arthur, 2018a). While an in-depth discussion of this clinical process is beyond the scope of this article, Arthur (2018a) and Collins (2018) offer detailed guidelines on how to navigate client–counsellor intercultural relationships. In addition to addressing the cultural alliance, practitioners must rely on their self-awareness and their reflexive stance in order to examine how they may hold traditional or stereotypical views about women and girls and to develop strategies to avoid bringing such biases into their work (Budge & Moradi, 2018; Lavery & Knapik, 2018). Such a process entails not only a personal exploration but also a critical analysis of all aspects of practitioner training in which individualism and patriarchy may be perpetuated (Prilleltensky & Huygens, 2014). As such, it is critical that going forward the CPA's guidelines make an effort to bring cultural competence to the forefront in order to reflect the importance of cultural sensitivity and reflexivity in practice, assessment, and research and to avoid reinforcing the status quo.

Move Toward a Stance of Social Justice

In keeping with the ethical principle that practitioners must be able to facilitate client identity exploration, particularly when clients are oppressed (Enns et al., 2015; Morris et al., 2020), practitioners must also recognize the role of consciousness-raising in assisting clients to reflect on their gender identity, their roles, and the oppressive attitudes, thoughts, and behaviours that influence their daily lives (Budge & Moradi, 2018). Practitioners are encouraged to support clients in recognizing oppression and discrimination in order to advance increasingly authentic ways of understanding their lived experiences, thereby allowing themselves to take an active stance against systemic forms of oppression (Kassan,

2018). Furthermore, and congruent with the CPA's (2017a) code of ethics and the CCPA's (2021) standards of practice, practitioners should engage in advocacy and combat individual and systemic oppression in assessment, therapy and counselling, and beyond (Arthur, 2018b). In line with the increased emphasis on social justice in Canadian psychology (Collins, 2018; Sinacore & Ginsberg, 2015; Wada et al., 2020), future iterations of the CPA's guidelines should include concrete suggestions about how practitioners can move toward a more active, ethical stance in their work with women and girls. By making social justice a priority of practice and by attending to issues of oppression within the profession as well as within society at large, practitioners are better equipped to assist clients who are facing oppression in their lives (Arthur, 2018b; Collins, 2018; Prilleltensky & Huygens, 2014).

Conduct Research Guided by Feminist Epistemologies

When conducting research involving women and girls, practitioners should demonstrate a commitment to social accountability (Green et al., 2019; Nash, 2019). Part of this process involves researching in ways that empower research participants (Green et al., 2019). While the CPA's (2017b) guidelines for ethical psychological practice with women make mention of the need to appraise the applicability of research findings to women through a critical lens, no specific alternative approaches or research methodologies are suggested. Hence, it is recommended that researchers in the field of counselling and psychotherapy remain open and receptive to using alternative methodologies (e.g., participatory action research) that foreground the lived experiences of persons involved in the research, the capacity of participants to enact self-led change in their lives and communities, and the possibility for an overarching feminist epistemology to inform research that creates change for its participants and for the broader community involved (Green et al., 2019; Nash, 2019).

Practitioners and researchers may contribute to and perpetuate oppression through failing to represent accurately and sensitively those participating in their research (Awad et al., 2016; Bonevski et al., 2014; Green et al., 2019; Renert et al., 2013). By focusing on lived experience and inclusivity, practitioners can begin to orient themselves toward an approach that gives genuine voice to persons participating in research and that contributes to research that benefits and promotes more directly the welfare of persons who tend to experience disproportionate oppression in society (Awad et al., 2016; Bonevski et al., 2014; Nash, 2019; Renert et al., 2013). A set of guidelines that reflects the ethical need for practitioners to conduct research in ways that are sensitive to the implications of their research for participants and that highlights the voices and experiences of women and girls would make significant contributions to an understanding of the psychological health and well-being of these individuals.

Integrate Diverse Feminist Perspectives

For emerging feminist thought to influence counselling and psychotherapy practice in optimal ways, it is important that multiple and diverse voices and experiences be integrated into the development of practice guidelines (Enns et al., 2015; Vasquez & Vasquez, 2017; Nash, 2019). Doing so not only requires the inclusion of multiple and intersecting social identities but also calls for the integration of a range of professionals (e.g., scholars, clinical supervisors, and practitioners) in the development of these guidelines (Enns et al., 2015). In addition, engaging professionals from across various levels of developmental and practical settings (e.g., students, recent graduates, and experienced professionals) will serve to inform guidelines in a way that reflects a diversity of perspectives appropriately (Arthur, 2018b; Enns et al., 2015). Therefore, a set of Canadian guidelines that addresses the range of concerns faced by women and girls and that involves a committee of professionals and community members who represent the diversity of women in counselling, psychotherapy, and society would provide an opportunity for otherwise overlooked groups to have a voice. Finally, while our discussion has focused on improving the existing guidelines for women and girls, it is our hope that the professions of counselling, psychology, and psychotherapy will continue to shift away from the tradition of separate guidelines for specific genders toward a set of guidelines that speaks to gender diversity more fully. We recognize the benefit of holding space for those who identify as women and girls, but at the same time we believe that to appreciate the nuances and complexities of gender fully, it is necessary to hold interdisciplinary conversations among people of all genders.

Conclusion

Feminist thought offers valuable contributions to counselling and psychotherapy that have great potential to augment ethical practice, especially in regards to work with women and girls. Practising in ways that are sensitive and responsive to gender has far-reaching implications for the full participation of persons facing oppression and for the equitable distribution of the benefits of counselling and psychotherapy practice to those requiring these services. Specific areas of the CPA's (2017b) current guidelines warrant reconsideration to address existing sources of discrimination and oppression embedded in psychological theory, assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and research in order to align more closely with our aspirations for said guidelines to reflect emerging feminist thought. Although this article has been presented through the lens of ethical counselling and psychotherapy practice with women and girls in Canada, we believe that these considerations are of universal relevance. Through this article, we hope to have stimulated a broader discussion about alternative perspectives in the ways we construct a public response to the gendered oppression of women that is progressive, feminist, and

culturally inclusive. Doing so invites consideration for the ways that practitioners may engage more fully with ethical systems and guidelines in their complexity and conduct themselves in professional practice, including their public engagement with social and community issues and the training of student practitioners.

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About the Authors

Tiffany A. Beks, M.Sc., is a registered psychologist in Alberta and a Ph.D. candidate in counselling psychology at the University of Calgary's Werklund School of Education. Her research interests include socio-cultural contexts surrounding traumatic events encountered in military and first responder service and, more broadly, the phenomenon of institutional betrayal in social and health sectors. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4995-9944>

Anusha Kassan, Ph.D., R.Psych., is an associate professor with a high-impact position in child and youth mental health in the school and applied child psychology program at the University of British Columbia. Her program of research is influenced by her own bicultural identity and is informed by a social justice lens. She is presently studying the impact of immigration across different communities. She is also conducting teaching and learning research and is investigating multicultural and social justice competencies in professional psychology. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7614-9034>

April J. Dyrda, M.Sc., is a registered provisional psychologist currently practising in Calgary, and she received her master's degree in counselling psychology from the University of Calgary. Her research and professional interests are centred on the investigation of how individuals can best approach and navigate change or transition in their career paths and workplaces.

Daniel Elleker, M.A., is an independent scholar and consultant in sexual diversity, identity, gender and resilience. Daniel's research and/or scholarly interests include sexual identity development and immigration. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6150-7388>

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Tiffany A. Beks, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary, 2500 University Drive N., Calgary, Alberta, T2N 1N4. Email: tiffany.beks@ucalgary.ca