

Assessing the Multicultural and Social Justice Competencies of Career Development Practitioners

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Abstract

The current focus on social justice in career practice necessitates identification and prioritization of specific competencies for multicultural counseling and social justice action (Blustein, 2006; Watson, 2010). The *Multicultural Cultural and Social Justice Competencies* (MCSJC) scale was used to examine (a) the importance of various competency domains and their composite factors to the profession of career development and (b) the self-assessment of competence by career practitioners on these core domains and factors. The study confirms the importance of multicultural counselling and social justice competencies to career practice and suggests that educational programs are doing a better job of facilitating awareness, which focuses on attitudes and knowledge, than the skill development required to translate this awareness into culture-infused and social justice focused working alliances with clients. In particular, training in interventions at the organizational, community, and broader systems level is needed. Suggestions for curriculum development draw on the *Culture-Infused Counseling* model that undergirded the MCSJC scale.

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Vocational psychology has traditionally played an important role in advocating for social justice (SJ; Fouad, Gerstein, & Toporek, 2006). The shifting demographics of Western society and increased systemic barriers to career success are bringing SJ to the forefront, particularly in the area of career development (Sampson, Dozier, & Colvin, 2011). Both career practitioners and researchers have conceptualized SJ in a variety of ways (Arthur, Collins, McMahon, & Marshall, 2009; Watson, 2010). Arthur and colleagues (2009) synthesized the meaning of SJ as: "(a) fair and equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, (b) direct action to ameliorate oppression and marginalization within society, and (c) full inclusion and participation of all members of society in a way that enables them to reach their potential" (p. 23). Multicultural counselling (MC) and SJ are inseparable, because clients with multiple non-dominant identities are at increased risk to experience social injustices (Arthur, 2008; Arthur & Collins, 2011; Leong, 2010). In addition, MC without a SJ perspective risks locating both problems and solutions with the individual client, instead of the contexts and systems that shape client experiences, resources, and opportunities (Sinacore et al., 2011). SJ is a human rights issue that impacts career development and career counselling, because access to and

attainment of education and work provide a central means for ensuring social equity (Fouad et al., 2006; Hargrove et al., 2003). To work competently with diverse clients, career practitioners need to be prepared to address issues of social injustice (Parra-Cardona, Kendal, & Cordova, 2005).

Current literature has focused on identifying the problems, from a SJ perspective, associated with approaches to career theory and practice. However, McWhirter, Blustein, and Perry (2005) called for a move from a denunciation approach to an annunciation approach, in which principles and processes for embracing SJ in vocational psychology are articulated. Discussions of SJ action have also been segregated from applied practice activities, which misses the important connection between the experiences of clients in the real world and counselling work (Parra-Cardona et al., 2005). Fassinger and Gallor (2006) suggested an expansion from the *scientist-practitioner* to the *scientist-practitioner-advocate* model to emphasize the inclusion of SJ roles in both pre-service and continued professional development training. The *scientist-practitioner-advocate* model necessitates increased competency of practitioners to address systemic-level change and to act as advocate, social activist, consultant, etc. (Arthur, 2008; Arthur et al., 2009; Toporek & Williams, 2006).

One question that remains unanswered is what competencies career practitioners require to sup-



port SJ action (Arthur, 2008; McMahon, Arthur, & Collins, 2008a). There has been considerable focus on the development of MC competencies over the past several decades (Collins & Arthur, 2010a, 2010b); however, the counselling psychology field is only beginning to define SJ competencies (Toporek, Gerstein, Fouad, Roysicar, & Israel, 2006; Toporek & Williams, 2006). In spite of its early roots in SJ, vocational psychology is also in the initial stages translating MC and SJ competence and competencies into practice (Arthur & Collins, 2011; Pope, 2011). Vespia, Fitzpatrick, Fouad, Kantamneni, and Chen (2010) conducted a national survey of MC competencies of US career counselors; however, the California Brief Multicultural Competence Scale (CBMCS) was not designed specifically for career practitioners and derived from earlier instruments without a specific focus on SJ (Gamst et al., 2004).

The purpose of this study was to explore what competencies career practitioners require in order to work with culturally diverse clients, who are often most impacted by systemic social injustices (Arthur & Collins, 2011; Pope, 2011). The following research questions evolved from our intent to highlight the perspectives of career practitioners themselves in this discussion: (a) *Do career practitioners view MC and SJ competences as important to career practice, and, if so, what is the relative importance they place on specific competencies?* and (b) *How do career practitioners rate their own competence in relation to MC and SJ competencies?* The third research question was intended to inform career development education, by identifying potential learning objectives: (c) *Where are the most significant gaps between what career practitioners see as important and their self-assessed compe-*

tency level? Although SJ is not new to vocational psychology (Fouad et al., 2006), practitioners in the field may be less familiar with the current emphasis on systems level analysis and change (Arthur, Collins, Marshall, & McMahon, 2013). We, therefore, added two final research questions (d) *What is the relationship between the demographic background of participants and their familiarity with and training in SJ?* and (e) *How do demographic background and SJ awareness impact perspectives on importance of MC and SJ competencies and/or personal level of competence?*

We conducted a cross-national study of career practitioners' competencies related to MC and SJ in Canada and Australia. Other components of the study have been published elsewhere (Arthur et al., 2009; Arthur et al., 2013; McMahon et al., 2008a; 2008b). As part of the broader study, the *Multicultural Cultural and Social Justice Competencies* (MCSJC) scale was developed and validated (Collins, Arthur, McMahon, & Bisson, 2014). The structure of the MCSJC scale reflects its conceptual foundations in the *Culture-Infused Counselling* (CIC) model (Collins & Arthur, 2010a, 2010b; 2010c). The three core competency domains in the CIC model form the first order factors in the MCSJC scale: (a) *Cultural Self-Awareness*: Active awareness of personal assumptions, values, and biases; (b) *Awareness of Client Cultural Identities*: Understanding the worldview of the client; and (c) *Culturally-Sensitive Working Alliance*: Collaboration on counselling goals and processes. The CIC model offers a conceptual enhancement of the Sue et al. (1982) and Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992) MC competencies framework based on: (a) an explicit focus on competencies for SJ; (b) a broader definition of culture, inclu-

sive of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, socioeconomic status, and religion; (c) an emphasis on the working alliance as a more inclusive and pantheoretical construct than the original focus on skills and techniques for bridging the worldviews of counsellor and client and translating cultural sensitivity into practice (Collins & Arthur, 2010a, 2010b); as well as (d) an explicit adaptation of the competencies to career development practice (Collins et al., 2014; Arthur & Collins, 2011). A detailed critique of previous models and rationale for the CIC model is provided elsewhere (Collins & Arthur, 2010a, 2010b). Only the Canadian data is reported in this paper. We begin with a description of the methodology and then present the results in terms of the five core research questions. The paper concludes with discussion, overall implications, and limitations of the study.

Method

Ethics approval was obtained from the three universities where the researchers are affiliated. The notice for the study provided an invitation to participate in the study and the link to the consent form and the Social Justice and Career Practice Questionnaire©. The broader survey was divided into three sections: (a) demographic information and SJ background, (b) assessment of MC and SJ competencies using the MCSJC scale, and (c) submission of critical incident scenarios. Only data from the first two sections (demographic and the MCSJC scale) are reported in this paper. The survey was conducted online, and invitations to participate were extended through both national and provincial professional organizations and career development networks.

All 180 participants were Canadians, at least 18 years of age.



Seventy-five percent were female; 25% male. The majority of participants were from Alberta (28%), British Columbia (24%), and Ontario (20%), with the remaining from maritime provinces (16%), other prairie provinces (9%), northern territories (2%), and Quebec (2%). Most participants identified as Caucasian Canadian (86%); 3% were Chinese; 2% each were Aboriginal, African/Caribbean, Hispanic, and Metis; and 1% each were Arab, South Asian, and West Asian. The participants worked for non-profit organizations (21%) and career and employment centres (20%); 11% each at government departments, public secondary or high schools, and public universities; 6% each at private practices and public colleges; 4% in for-profit organizations; 3% each in community-based agencies, youth serving agencies, and private or alternative educational institutions; and 1% other work contexts. Participants' age, years of work experience, highest level of education, and their familiarity with SJ were assessed using the ordinal scales in column 2 of Table 1. In some cases, two or more values were collapsed to create statistically sound categories for the multivariate analyses. As a general rule, for each independent variable, the difference between lowest frequency and highest frequency did not exceed the lowest frequency. See column 3 of Table 1 for the frequency distributions and percentages for independent variables and corresponding values meeting this criteria. For example, the age categories of *29 years or less* and *30 to 39 years* were collapsed, because neither of these age ranges on their own met the inclusion criteria. Gender was eliminated from the analyses because the distributions were skewed.

Participants were also asked to select personal experiences of dis-

Table 1

Frequency Distribution for Demographic Variables Meeting Criteria for Inclusion in Multivariate Analyses of Variance

Independent Variable	Original Values	Final Values ^b	Frequency	Percent
Age	29 years or less	39 years or younger	57	32.4
	30 to 39 years			
	40 to 49 years	48	27.3	
	50 to 59 years	50 years or older	71	40.3
	60 to 69 years			
	70 or more years			
Years of experience	0 to 2 years	10 or fewer years	103	58.2
	3 to 5 years			
	6 to 10 years			
	11 to 20 years	11 or more years	74	41.8
	more than 20 years			
Highest level of education	High school	College degree or less	38	21.5
	Certificate or diploma			
	College degree	Undergrad with or without an post-grad diploma or certificate	70	39.5
	University undergrad			
Post-grad certificate or diploma				
	Masters degree	Masters or doctoral degree	69	39.0
	PhD or other doctoral degree			
Familiarity with social justice ^c	Very unfamiliar	Unfamiliar	55	33.7
	Somewhat unfamiliar			
	Somewhat familiar	Familiar	108	66.3
	Very familiar			
Personal experience(s) of discrimination	Age, ethnic or cultural group,	No discrimination	37	20.4
	gender, immigration status,	1 type of discrimination	52	28.7
	language, physical or psychological disability,	2 types of discrimination	37	20.4
	religion, sexual orientation, or social class	3 or more types of discrimination	55	30.4
Number of barriers to social justice practice	Fear of challenging status quo, lack of financial resources/ interest/ influence or power/ time/ training opportunities/support from colleagues/supervisors, risk of losing funding/of losing job, other...	No barriers	67	37.0
		1 to 4 barriers	67	37.0
		5 or more barriers	47	26.0

^aOnly independent variables in which the difference between lowest frequency value and the largest did not exceed the frequency of the lowest were used for the MANOVAs. ^bIn some cases, two or more values on a particular independent variable were collapsed to create workable categories for further analyses. ^cThe category of 'Undecided' was eliminated from further analyses.

crimination from a checklist, based on the self-selected demographics of age, ethnicity, gender, immigration status, language, physical or psychological disability, religion, sexual orientation, and social class. In addition, they identified barriers to engaging in SJ practice from the following list, derived from on a review of current literature: fear of challenging status quo, lack of financial resources, lack of interest, lack of influence or power, lack of time, lack of training opportunities, lack of support from colleagues, lack of support from supervisors, risk of losing funding, risk of losing job, or other. For each of these variables, the responses were transformed into categorical data, using the guideline noted above to cluster the frequencies into categories (see

column 3 of Table 1). Categorical data was required to conduct the multivariate analyses. In addition, we assumed that neither the number of bases for discrimination nor barriers encountered were continuous variables. Individuals with multiple nondominant identities, for example, are more vulnerable to cultural oppression; however, this relationship is assumed to be complex, idiosyncratic, contextualized, and, therefore, nonlinear (Collins, 2010a, 2010b).

Frequencies and means were calculated and, because all variables were now categorical rather than continuous, statistically significant relationships among demographic variables were assessed using Pearson chi-squares. The independent variables of gender and



SJ training failed the inclusion test and were eliminated from the MANOVAs. The frequency distribution for SJ training was 18% with no previous exposure to SJ, 35% with attendance at either a workshop or a course, and 47% with attendance at both a workshop and a course. The introduction to the survey acknowledged that SJ may be a new concept to some practitioners and provided the following conceptual framework, to assist participants in interpreting what exposure to SJ might mean, how it might differ from other forms of multicultural or diversity training, and what their own exposure to SJ training had been:

Before you begin, we would like to explain what we mean by the term social justice as it relates to career practice. In a just society, opportunities, resources, and services are distributed equally and fairly. However, in most societies, some individuals or groups have greater access to educational, economic, and career success. This is because certain groups in society hold less power than others and may experience stereotyping, discrimination, or other forms of oppression. In this study, we recognize non-dominant (minority) groups by cultural factors such as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, language, religion, and socioeconomic status. Career development clients from these groups may struggle with access to education and work or with reaching their full potential because of social justice issues. Social justice is a human rights issue and career practitioners have a role to play in ensuring social equity.

One of the unique features of the MCSJC instrument was that it contained two scales for each item: The first was designed to assess the importance of the item to the profession and the second to assess personal competency level. The inclusion of the Importance rating was intended to engage participants in determining direction for the profession, rather than simply lining their responses up against assumed professional standards. At the time of the data collection, the MCSJC scale consisted of 82 self-report statements, organized according to attitudes (20 items), knowledge (25 items), and skills (37 items). Each item was clearly worded as a learning objective, beginning with an active verb that reflected either an attitude, knowledge, or skill competency (AKS), drawing on Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of learning objectives, for example: Attitudes Q1: *Believe* in the equal worth of all people; Knowledge Q2: *Explain* how belonging to particular groups can lead to certain privileges in society; and Skills Q5: *Empower* clients to influence external factors affecting career development. The items were each rated on 5-point Likert scales (1 = *very low*, 2 = *moderately low*, 3 = *average*, 4 = *moderately high*, and 5 = *very high*) for both *Importance to Career Practice*, "to assess your personal perspective on the *importance* of SJ to career development practice generally," and *Current Competency Level*, "indicates the degree to which you personally feel *competent*."

The AKS foundation of the MCSJC instrument was intended to address the conceptual ambiguity of other MC assessment tools (Collins et al., 2014; Constantine et al., 2002). Most instruments draw on the original competency frameworks of Sue et al. (1982; 1992), but they do not reflect the evolution of this foundational model from a one-di-

dimensional model (1982) to a three-by-three matrix of core competencies by AKS in the 1992 revision, nor do they carefully differentiate competency statements as AKS, making it difficult to compare outcomes across instruments or to link them accurately to conceptual frameworks (see, for example, Gamst et al., 2004; Kim, Cartwright, Asay, & D'Andrea, 2003; Ponterotto, Gretchen, Utsey, Rieger, & Austin, 2002; Worthington, Soth-McNett, & Moreno, 2007). What is important is that the AKS competencies are seen as components of larger constructs or themes that reflect the conceptual models they are built upon.

Based on factor analyses of both the importance and the competence data (see Collins et al., 2014), the number of items in the MCSJC instrument was reduced and clustered according to the factor structure in Table 2. Descriptive statistics were run to confirm the assumption of normal distribution for all factors that made up the MCSJC scale for both *Importance* and *Competence* dependent variable scores. Skewness and kurtosis values between +1 and -1 were required, and outliers were removed from the analysis, based on Box's M tests. For the Importance scale, no participants were removed from the *Cultural self-awareness factors*. The *Awareness of client cultural identities* domain had 6, 2, 2, 2, 3, and 1 participant responses removed from each of the factors respectively. The *Culturally-sensitive working alliance* domain had 1, 0, 1, 1, 2, and 2 removed. No participant scores were removed from the *Competence* scale. Mean scores for each factor were used in the MANOVAs reported in this study. Tests of internal consistency were run on the *Importance* scale and the *Competence* scale; Cronbach's Alpha values of .91 and .94 respectively suggested



Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Importance and Competence Scores on Each Factor

Domain/Factor ^c	Importance			Competence			R ^b
	M ^a	SD	N	M	SD	N	
<i>Cultural self-awareness</i>							
Professional responsibility	4.36	.69	178	3.63	.79	168	.34*
Personal/professional privilege	4.33	.56	145	3.69	.71	140	.40*
<i>Awareness of client cultural identities</i>							
Equality of all people	4.80	.37	179	4.3	.70	171	.45*
Diverse values and resources	4.73	.42	176	4.26	.66	170	.41*
Impact of discrimination	4.40	.66	176	3.97	.73	167	.40*
Barriers and facilitators of social justice	4.38	.66	115	3.24	.88	113	-
Impact of cultural factors	4.37	.68	137	3.73	.79	139	.32*
Systemic perpetuation of inequities	4.35	.73	141	3.55	.83	139	.36*
<i>Culturally-sensitive working alliance</i>							
Commitment to client empowerment	4.60	.54	176	3.96	.76	168	.35*
Social injustice impact assessment	4.41	.56	114	3.31	.86	112	-
Expanded professional roles	4.27	.61	115	3.26	.86	114	-
Assessment, design, & evaluation of social justice interventions	4.20	.69	143	3.22	.87	136	-
Implementation of systems interventions	4.07	.83	115	2.97	.94	113	.25*
Raising social justice awareness	4.06	.88	114	2.82	.98	112	.26*

^aM = Mean. SD = Standard deviation. N = number. R = Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient.

^bOnly statistically significant R scores are shown; **p* < .001.

^cThe factors have been ordered based on the mean score for *Importance* of the factor.

strong internal reliability of these measures.

Results

Research Questions 1 and 2: Importance of MC and SJ Competencies and Competence Assessment

Table 2 provides descriptive statistics for each factor across *Importance* and *Competence* scales. Participants rated all 14 factors between *moderately high* and *very high* in *Importance*, confirming that career practitioners sensed the need for and importance of multicultural and SJ competence. Means for the *Competence* on each factor showed a greater range between *average* to *moderately high*. The participants clearly viewed multicultural and SJ competency as important to career development practice; however, they saw themselves as not fully competent with respect to many of the core factors. A weighted mean was calculated for each of the three core domains. For both *Importance* and *Competence* scales, the weighted means were highest for the second domain, *Awareness of client cultural identities* (4.52 and 3.89 respectively); the first domain, *Cultural self-awareness*, received the next

highest ratings (4.34 and 3.65 respectively); and the last domain, *Culturally-sensitive working alliance*, the lowest ratings (4.29 and 3.31 respectively). The standard deviations were higher for *Competence* than for *Importance* scores, indicating a greater range of ratings on personal competence scores.

Participants placed the most importance on attitudes, knowledge, and skills related to understanding the cultural identities, experiences, and context of clients' lives (Domain 2: *Awareness of client cultural identities*); they also perceived themselves as best prepared as practitioners in this area (*moderately high* on the self-assessment of competence). The specific competencies included: (a) Attitudes (5 items), such as awareness of the impact of discrimination and other forms of systemic oppression, foundational values like respect for diversity, and belief in the equality and worth of all people; (b) Knowledge (2 items) related to the impact of cultural factors on career decision-making, and the organizational, community, and broader systems that perpetuate inequities; and (c) Skills (2 items) in identifying barriers and facilitators to accessing resources, services, and opportunities. See Collins et al. (2014) for a full listing of the items

in the MCSJC scale.

Participants rated themselves within the *moderately high* range in terms of awareness of their own cultural identities (*Cultural self-awareness* domain). This domain was also weighted towards attitudinal competencies: (a) Attitudes (4 items) focused on professional responsibility to challenge inequities and promote SJ, as well as practitioners' own personal and professional experiences of privilege; (b) Knowledge (3 items) focused on understanding the relationship of SJ and career, as well as the privileging of particular groups in society; and (c) Skills (1 item) involved self-assessment of competence for SJ activities.

The *Culturally-sensitive working alliance* domain had the greatest range of means on rating of both *Importance* and *Competence*. This is also the domain in which the percentage of MCSJC items shifts from a stronger emphasis on attitudes and knowledge competencies to applied practice skills competencies. The 21 items included: (a) Attitudes (2) both related to commitment to client empowerment, which received the highest competence rating; (b) Knowledge (5) focused predominantly on the assessment, design, and evaluation of SJ interventions; and (c) Skills (14) ranging from raising SJ awareness and advocacy to implementation of systemic interventions. Career practitioners placed the least importance and felt less personally competent in the skills competencies, with many rating at *average* competence (mid range on the 5-point Likert scale).

Research Question 3: Gaps Between Importance and Competence

A gap score was calculated for each of the three core domains



using the discrepancy between weighted means for the *Importance* and *Competence* scales to suggest general trends in training needs (Repetto, Ferrer-Sama, & Manzano, 2008). The gaps scores were lowest for *Awareness of client cultural identities* (.63) and *Cultural self-awareness* (.69); *Culturally-sensitive working alliance* had the highest gap score (.98). The last column in Table 2 provides Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients between the *Importance* and *Competence* ratings on each of the factors. The pattern of factors with statistically significant correlations reflected the gap scores across the three core domains in the CIC model. There was a significant correlation for both factors in the *Cultural self-awareness* domain and for all but one factor in the *Awareness of client cultural identities* domain, indicating a closer relationship between assessment of importance and perception of personal competence in these areas. It is noteworthy that this one factor - barriers and facilitators of SJ - was composed of the only two skills items in the second domain. For the *Culturally-sensitive working alliance domain*, only half of the factors (3 out of 6) showed significant correlation between the importance and the competence ratings. The standard deviations were also generally highest in this domain, reflecting the wider range of responses, particularly in the self-assessment of personal competence.

Research Question 4: Demographic Background and SJ Familiarity and Training

The older the participants, the more experience they had as a career development practitioners (Pearson's chi-square = 34.152, degrees of freedom = .000). In addition, both older participants and those with more experience had

higher levels of education (16.753, .002; 13.682, .002 respectively). Level of SJ training was also significantly related to familiarity with the concept of SJ (10.887, .028) and level of education (8.227, .016). More education meant increased familiarity with the concept of SJ. However, those participants with graduate education were more likely to have completed specific SJ training through either a course or a workshop; those with college or less or undergraduate education were more likely to have completed both a course and a workshop. There was also a significant relationship between participants' own experience of discrimination and the number of barriers to implementing SJ in practice that they encountered (23.095, .001). Those with experiences of discrimination based on multiple cultural factors also experienced more barriers to implementing SJ in their own practices.

Research Question 5: Relationship of Demographics and SJ Awareness to Importance and Competence

A total of 14 MANOVAs, using Wilk's Lambda, were conducted using the six independent variables in Table 1, across both importance and competence measures. The data from these analyses are summarized in Tables 3 and 4. There were many more relationships between the characteristics or backgrounds of participants (e.g., independent variables) and their self-assessment of *Competence* on the various factors in the MCSJC scale than on their rating of the *Importance* of these factors to the discipline. Where significant main effects were observed and more than two values existed for the independent variable, Tukey post hoc tests were performed.

In Table 3 related to *Importance* ratings, significant interactions occurred most often between highest level of education and the various MCSJC factors. Specifically, the mean for the category *college degree or less* was significantly lower than that for the category *masters or doctoral degree*. This observation is consistent with the analyses of independent variables above that showed a relationship between level of education and familiarity with SJ. Familiarity with SJ interacted significantly with the only factor in the second domain with no significant correlation between the scales: *barriers and facilitators of social justice*. The experience of personal discrimination interacted significantly with *implementation of systems intervention*; specifically, the mean for *one type of discrimination* was significantly higher than that for *two types of discrimination*.

For the assessment of personal *Competence* (see Table 4), there were more factors positively associated with increased practitioner age and experience than with education. For age, all post hoc tests identified statistically significant differences between participants in the *39 years or younger* and both/either those in *40 to 49 years* and *50 years or more*. In each post hoc test, the means for *college degree or less* was significantly lower than for *masters or doctoral degree*. It is important to note the number of significant interactions between SJ familiarity and factors in all three domains of the MCSJC scale. Increased familiarity was associated with a higher sense of personal competence on each factor. Two other interactions are worth noting in the competency assessment. Participants who had experienced personal discrimination based on two cultural factors rated their competence in *client empowerment* lower than both those with no experience of discrim-



Table 3

Multivariate Analyses of Variance on Importance Factors

Domain/Factor ^a	Level of Education	Social Justice Familiarity	Experience of Discrimination
<i>Cultural self-awareness</i>			
Professional responsibility			
Personal/professional privilege	F(2,86)=5.71** η ² =0.117		
<i>Awareness of client cultural identities</i>			
Impact of cultural factors		F(1,84)=6.36* η ² =0.070	
Barriers and facilitators of social justice			
Impact of discrimination			
Systemic perpetuation of inequities	F(2,86)=3.87* η ² =0.083		
Diverse values and resources			
Equality of all people	F(2,86)=3.53* η ² =0.076		
<i>Culturally-sensitive working alliance</i>			
Implementation of systems interventions			F(3,87)=2.79* η ² =0.088
Assessment, design, & evaluation of social justice interventions			
Raising social justice awareness			
Expanded professional roles	F(2,86)=3.10* η ² =0.067		
Social injustice impact assessment	F(2,8)=3.56* η ² =0.076		
Commitment to client empowerment			

^aNo statistically significant interactions were found for the following independent variables: age, experience, social justice training, or barriers encountered. **p* < .05; ***p* < .01.

Table 4

Multivariate Analyses of Variance on Competence Factors

Domain/Factor ^a	Age	Experience	Education	Social Justice Familiarity	Discrimination	Barriers
<i>Cultural self-awareness</i>						
Professional responsibility	F(2,99)=7.52*** η ² =0.132					
Personal/professional privilege			F(2,99)=3.27* η ² =0.062	F(1,95)=0.40** η ² =0.090		
<i>Awareness of client cultural identities</i>						
Impact of cultural factors		F(1,100)=8.30** η ² =0.077		F(1,95)=7.12** η ² =0.070		
Barriers and facilitators of social justice				F(1,95)=12.05*** η ² =0.113		
Impact of discrimination	F(2,99)=4.58** η ² =0.085					
Systemic perpetuation of inequities	F(2,99)=3.4* η ² =0.064	F(1,100)=5.84* η ² =0.055	F(2,99)=3.36* η ² =0.064	F(1,95)=14.32*** η ² =0.131		
Diverse values and resources	F(2,99)=3.75* η ² =0.070					
Equality of all people						
<i>Culturally-sensitive working alliance</i>						
Implementation of systems interventions		F(1,100)=3.99* η ² =0.038		F(1,95)=8.59** η ² =0.038		
Assessment, design, & evaluation of social justice interventions		F(1,100)=4.55* η ² =0.043		F(1,95)=13.82*** η ² =0.127		
Raising social justice awareness				F(1,95)=11.36*** η ² =0.107		
Expanded professional roles				F(1,95)=13.73*** η ² =0.126		
Social injustice impact assessment			F(2,99)=4.19* η ² =0.078	F(1,95)=8.24** η ² =0.080		F(2,100)=4.71* η ² =0.086
Commitment to client empowerment	F(2,99)=7.01*** η ² =0.124	F(1,100)=5.83* η ² =0.055			F(3,99)=4.87** η ² =0.129	

^aNo statistically significant interactions were found for social justice training. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01. ****p* < .001

ination and those more experience of discrimination. Finally, participants who noted 1 to 4 barriers to engaging in SJ practice rated their competence on *social justice impact assessment* significantly higher than those with 5 or more barriers.

Discussion

One of the central questions raised in the vocational psychology literature is what SJ competencies do career practitioners require (Arthur & Collins, 2011; Pope, 2011). The high to moderately high ratings of factors in the MCSJC scale confirms that (a) career practitioners view SJ competencies as central to their practice and (b) each of the factors assessed in this study reflects a core SJ competency. The results also indicated that practitioners have not yet attained the level of competency they believe is important.

The relatively high proportion of attitudinal competencies in the *Awareness of client cultural identities and Cultural self-awareness* domains may be related to the higher self-rated competency of participants. Although traditionally, the focus in education programs has been on knowledge acquisition (Pope-Davis, Breaux, & Liu, 1997), there now tends to be more emphasis on awareness competencies, specifically targeting change in attitudes, beliefs, worldviews (Cates & Schaeffle, 2009; Pieterse, 2009). Less attention has been paid to the enhancement of multicultural and SJ skills (Cates & Schaeffle, 2009; Pieterse, 2009), which factor more prominently in the *Culturally-sensitive working alliance* domain. It appears that educational programs are providing a foundation in multicultural and SJ awareness for career practitioners (Cates & Schaeffle, 2009; Pieterse, 2009); however, practitioners are not exiting those



programs with a solid set of applied practice skills for developing effective working alliances and engaging in career development processes with culturally diverse clients or those whose challenges are impacted by systemic oppression (Fassinger & Gallor, 2006; Toporek & Williams, 2006).

It was in this third domain, *Culturally-sensitive working alliance*, that there were fewer significant correlations between the *Importance* and the *Competence* ratings. In the CIC model (Collins & Arthur, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c), it is within a culturally-sensitive working alliance between counsellor and client that the following critical processes are possible: cultural inquiry and bridging of worldviews, client self-identification in relation to non-dominant cultural identities, shared understanding and/or consciousness raising in relation to the systemic factors that potentially impact client wellbeing, collaborative exploration of the salience of cultural and SJ factors to case conceptualization and intervention planning, and agreement on the career goals and processes (including level of intervention targeted). Cultural influences are increasingly recognized as foundational to career practice (Leong, 2010). Culture and context are both shaped and made meaningful through interaction (Knapik & Miloti, 2006), as co-constructions between counsellor and client (Pare, 2008; Young & Lalande, 2011). It is in the context of the working alliance that cultural identities and cultural contexts emerge, are defined, and become salient. The very meaning of work and career are culture and context-bound (Arthur & Collins, 2011; Blustein, 2006).

In the *Culturally-sensitive working alliance* domain, practitioners move from a predominant focus on attitudes and knowledge to ap-

plied practice skills in MC and SJ. It is in this *how to* of multicultural and SJ work that career practitioners had the largest gaps between what they see as important and their own personal competence. As noted above, applied practice skills generally have received less focus in educational programs than attitude and knowledge competencies (Cates & Schaeffle, 2009; Pieterse, 2009). The lower overall ratings on *Importance* and *Competence* in this domain are not surprising; yet, they are of concern.

Wells, Delgado-Romero, and Shelton (2010) reviewed the *Career Development Quarterly*, *Journal of Career Assessment*, *Journal of Career Development*, and *Journal of Vocational Behavior* to analyze racial and ethnic characteristics of participants in research studies and noted an increase in representation of nondominant ethnic groups in 2000 to 2007 compared to 1990 to 1999. There has also been an increase in specific intervention strategies for career practice with clients of various ethnic backgrounds, ages, genders, sexual orientations, abilities, religions, and social classes; however, these tend to focus on micro level interventions with individual clients rather than change in the organizations, communities, or broader systems that impact the career development of these clients (Arthur, 2008; Arthur et al., 2009; Arthur & McMahon, 2005). The dominant vocational theories and practice models have been developed without sufficient attention to client-counsellor cultural differences or contextual factors influencing both career goals and change processes (Vespia et al., 2010), with the most glaring gaps in the area of SJ action (Toporek et al., 2006; Toporek & Williams, 2006). The available literature in this area is also primarily conceptual in nature rather than focusing on specific

skills for incorporating SJ into practice (Arthur et al., 2009).

It was interesting to note the characteristics or backgrounds of participants (e.g., independent variables) exhibited more interactions overall with their self-assessment of *Competence* on the various MCSJC scale factors than with their rating of the *Importance* of these factors to the discipline. A logical explanation for this difference is that perceived competence is more directly connected to the individual, as person and professional, than to prioritization of the competencies for the profession overall. Higher level of education most frequently interacted with participants' views of the *Importance* of multicultural and SJ competencies to the profession of career development. However, practitioner age and experiences interacted with more factors on the *Competence* scale than level of education. One possible explanation for this observation is that the educational experiences of practitioners raise their consciousness of the importance of multicultural and SJ competencies (Cates & Schaeffle, 2009; Pieterse, 2009), but their actual practice experience either enables the development or supports the mastery of these competencies (Vespia et al., 2010). Other studies have shown a relationship between general counselling and MC competence (Constantine, 2002); it stands to reason that general counselling competence would increase with both age and experience. Vespia and colleagues also noted a small to moderate correlation between both amount of training and years of counselling experience and self-reported competence, although they used a different assessment tool that did not explicitly target SJ competence. In their regression analysis, both dependent variables contributed to the variance, but only years of experience accounted for



unique variance, and the overall effect size was small. More notably, in the current study, the highest number of interactions was noted between SJ familiarity and the *Competence* factors. Those most familiar with the concept rated themselves as more competent. Intuitively, this makes a great deal of sense, because it would be difficult to self-assess as competent in an area where one lacked conceptual familiarity. SJ familiarity offers a potentially robust independent variable, integrating experience or/and education, that warrants exploration in future studies.

Implications and Conclusions

Similar to Vespia and colleagues (2010), we were unable to find other studies that explicitly assessed the self-perceived multicultural competence of career practitioners. What this study adds is a more explicit focus on SJ competencies, using the MCSJC scale, and a comparative analysis of practitioners' ratings of the importance of the factors with self-assessed competence level. It is clear that practitioners view SJ competencies as important to career practice, supporting the broader range of competency assessment in this study.

Vespia and colleagues (2010) concluded that career counsellors rated themselves as *above average* in cultural competence. Career practitioners in this study rated themselves as *average to moderately high*, depending on the factor. Structuring the MCSJC instrument according to the CIC model (Collins & Arthur, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c) enabled career practitioners to provide information on both the core competency domains for multicultural and SJ career practice, as well as differentiation among specific competencies (factors) clearly identified as attitudes, knowledge, or skills. This

increased conceptual clarity, enables the recommendation that pre- and post-service training opportunities be developed that move beyond increasing awareness of counsellor and client cultural identities (which mainly involve attitude and knowledge competencies) to focus on the development of specific MC and SJ practice skills, in the context of a culturally-sensitive working alliance.

This study offers explicit learning objectives that could form the foundation for curriculum development focused on applied practices skills for MC and SJ. The complete conceptual foundations and full description of the items that compose the MCSJC factors are provided elsewhere (Collins et al., 2014). Career practitioners rated themselves increasing lower in competence as they moved down this list of competencies:

- Engage clients in self-exploration and assessment of the impact of social injustices on health and wellbeing.
- Engage in prevention, consciousness-raising, consultation, community capacity building, advocacy and other professional roles that target SJ issues.
- Describe how to ethically assess, design, implement, and evaluate change strategies for communities, organizations, and broader social, economic, and political systems.
- Implement interventions that target communities, organizations, and broader social, economic, and political systems.
- Advocate for the promotion of SJ through research, professional organizations, and media.

There was a stronger relationship to competence for both age and counselling experience in this study. Vespia and colleagues (2010)

assessed, more specifically, experience working with cultural diverse clientele, concluding that one of the ways to increase the efficacy of education is to include more experiential or applied practice learning activities that engage students directly in skill development. Our study supports this conclusion through the call for more applied practice skills training. Unfortunately, there is no standardized curriculum for enhancing student competency for SJ practice in counselling psychology, generally, or in the area of career development, specifically (Singh et al., 2010). There is growing agreement, however, that experiential and practice-based learning is essential (Arthur & Collins, 2005; Hodge et al., 2011). The lack of relationship of level of education in this study to perceived competence may reflect the nature of current educational models. There is evidence that the traditional single course model is much less effective than infusing competencies related to MC and SJ throughout the curriculum, particularly into applied practice experiences (Arthur & Collins, 2005; Dickson & Jepsen, 2007).

Targeted learning experiences, based on various demographic variables, are not clearly indicated through this study. However, the lower overall ratings on both *Importance* and *Competence* for the *Culturally-sensitive working alliance* domain may suggest the need to educate practitioners about the relevance of these competencies to their practice. Other data, from the broader research project in which this study is embedded, suggests that practitioners face multiple barriers in implementing SJ interventions, many of which are related to organizational or other system restraints, organizational philosophies, or lack of human or financial supports (Arthur et al., 2009). It may



be important to the advancement of a SJ agenda in career development to invest energy in educating career organizations, funding agencies, and universities about the centrality of SJ, not only to case conceptualization but to multilevel systemic interventions.

There are a number of potential limitations to this study. The lower than anticipated number of responses to the online survey limited the statistical analyses, particularly because of fewer responses to factors associated with the *Culturally-sensitive working alliance* domain (Collins et al., 2014). The lack of ethnic diversity in this study is also a limitation: 97% of participants were Caucasian. It may be that practitioners from nondominant ethnic groups differ in terms of familiarity with and understanding of issues of SJ, which may, in turn, impact ratings of both importance and competence in relation to SJ competencies. The skewed frequencies on gender limited further examination of the impact of this independent variable. Although the inclusion of the *Importance* scale is one of the strengths of this study, in that it engaged career practitioners themselves in providing input on what is important to career practice, combining this measure with the assessment of *Competence* on the same questionnaire may have skewed the responses on the competence measure. There was no measure of social desirability included, and practitioners may have been inclined to overestimate their competence (Constantine & Ladany, 2000; Gamst et al., 2004; Vespia et al., 2010), particularly if they have just stated that an item was important to the profession. None-the-less, career practitioners in this study clearly indicated only moderate competence on many factors. The gap scores should be considered as exploratory, and further investiga-

tions are needed to draw conclusions (Repetto et al., 2008). All self-report instruments have potentially limited accuracy as measure of competence, in contrast to behavioural measures (Constantine, 2002). In fact, the study by Vespia et al. (2010) showed a discrepancy between participants' self-rated competence and external assessment of their competence, based on analysis of their responses to open-ended questions. However, neither of these studies provided a comparison of self-assessed competence to actual behaviour (Constantine & Ladany, 2000).

This study advanced the call within the field of career development to bring the focus on SJ back to the forefront (Arthur, 2013, McWhirter et al., 2005). It also supported the argument that SJ activities must be directly connected to applied practice (Parra-Cardona et al., 2005), and provided support for the recommendation that this connection be built from the outset in pre-service training to ensure competence in multicultural and SJ applied practice skills. Fassinger and Gallor's (2006) *scientist-practitioner-advocate* model is an appropriate fit for the range of competencies that career practitioners identified as important in this study. The conceptual foundations of the MCSJC scale (Collins et al., 2014) within the CIC model, which was developed primarily as a framework for curriculum design within counsellor education (Collins & Arthur, 2010a, 2010b, 2010b), increases the ease of translation of the outcomes of this study to specific learning objectives that may form priorities for multicultural and SJ curriculum. We invite both career practitioners and educators to consider the outcomes of this study in terms of priorities for curriculum and program design, as well as continued competency development.

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