

Career Practitioners' Views of Social Justice and Barriers for Practice

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Abstract

Increasing attention is being paid to the value of social justice in the field of career development. Social justice has strong historical roots in vocational psychology; however, the current literature is primarily conceptual in nature, and there are few resources that provide suggestions about how career practitioners can incorporate social justice into their practices with clients. This article orients readers to the topic of social justice and discusses various perspectives that are relevant for career development practice. Preliminary research results are reported about how Canadian career practitioners (N= 151) view social justice and their perceived barriers to incorporating social justice interventions.

People's career development is strongly influenced by the social systems that surround them. Unfortunately, for many individuals in Canada and other nations, social and political forces limit educational and employment opportunities. There are also inequities in terms of who can access professional services and in the relevancy and benefits of programs designed for culturally diverse populations (Arthur & Collins, 2005b; Bezanson et al., 2007; Arthur & Lalande, 2008).

We need to consider what career development interventions have to offer individuals who are socially or economically disadvantaged, who are underrepresented in our educational systems, who may have limited access to meaningful employment, or who remain underemployed in the labour market. It has been suggested that the term, career, has been constructed around middle and upper class values, while ignoring the differential realities and experiences of people in relation to their work lives

(Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & DeVoy, 2008). Repositioning career development practice to focus on work has been advocated (e.g., Blustein, 2006; Richardson, 1993, 2000) in order address the circumstances and needs of those who have significant barriers in their pursuit of meaningful employment.

As a guiding value, social justice is a strong foundation from which to consider the roles and responsibilities of career development practitioners. Trying to reduce career barriers through social justice is an old concept to be revisited with new emphasis (McMahon, Arthur, & Collins, 2008a). Social justice has been a fundamental value in helping people with their occupational choices since the work of Parsons in the early 1900s. Parsons (1909) advocated for youth, women, and people who were poor to help them to improve their lives through securing employment. Parsons' work was seminal in laying a foundation of theoretical and practical advances in the field of career development (Blustein, 2006; Fouad, Gerstein, & Toporek, 2006). However, it seems that we have drifted away from our roots in social justice to interventions that primarily focus on the individual without sufficiently considering the contextual and environmental forces that adversely impact people's career development (Arthur, 2005).

Although more literature on social justice in the field of career development has recently been published (e.g., Blustein, McWhirter, & Perry, 2005; Fassinger & Gallor, 2006; Irving & Malik, 2005), there are few examples to guide practitioners about ways to incorporate social justice into career development practices. To that end, we designed an exploratory study with career development practitioners to include their

views about social justice. We first provide background information on perspectives about social justice. Following this discussion, preliminary research results are presented about how career development practitioners in Canada define social justice, how they link the concept to their practices, and their perceived barriers for implementing career interventions related to social justice.

Perspectives on Social Justice

The philosophy and meaning of social justice has been debated across academic disciplines for centuries. Although social justice has resurfaced as a guiding value for career development practitioners, we have noted that in recent literature, the concept is often not defined, or the meaning of the concept is taken for granted as commonly understood. It is also problematic when multiple and contrasting meanings are suggested, as these imply quite different implications for career development practice. For the purpose of this paper, we review a selection of key perspectives about social justice that help to locate our current use of the term.

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 than others. This is because certain groups in society hold less power than others and may experience stereotyping, discrimination, or other forms of oppression. This is often the experience of non-dominant groups in Canadian society who are positioned on the basis of cultural factors such as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, language, religion, and socioeconomic status. Individuals from

these groups may struggle with access to education and work or have limited opportunities due to power differences in our society and barriers, such as economic disparities, discrimination, or other forms of oppression (Arthur & Collins, 2005a).

The concept of social justice has a long history, dating back to Plato and Aristotle (Reisch, 2002) in the 4th century B.C. Aristotle was considered to have had a conservative view of social justice, one that was primarily concerned with political distribution amongst citizens of the state (Jackson, 2005). According to Aristotle, citizens of the state included Athenian men who owned property (Reisch). Women, foreigners, and slaves were not considered to be important and were ignored in Aristotle's discussions of social justice. From this perspective of social justice, individuals should be given what they deserve, not what they need.

Hobbes, writing in the 17th century A.D., began to acknowledge the presence of different groups in society. Believing most people were barbaric in nature, Hobbes felt it was important to give power to the state or nation to ensure peace within the society, which left the power of the state in the hands of the elite (Reisch, 2002). This provided the rationalization that certain groups needed to be *maintained* for slavery, which lead to oppression of many different groups in society (Reisch). Historically then, the concept of social justice has been associated with terms such as getting what one deserves, maintenance of a social class system, and differentials in the distributions of resources and power.

In the 21st century, the concept of social justice has been used as a way to maintain the status quo, promote extreme social reforms, and justify revolutionary action. Conservatives, liberals, radical secularists, and religious fundamentalists have used the term; all claiming their agenda is one motivated by social justice (Reisch, 2002). From a liberalist viewpoint, Rawls (1971) acknowledged that individuals may want to better themselves, but he also acknowledged this must not be done at the expense of others. In other words, just as the individual has rights that must be acknowledged, the interests of the social

good must also be considered. In this way, Rawls takes more of a Marxist approach to social justice, by acknowledging that society also has a duty to the individual, which is to allow all individuals to be fully active participants of society (Marx, 1964). Rawls acknowledged the bidirectional relationship between society and the individual in social justice.

Bell (1997) addresses several of the weaknesses that are inherent in the historical definitions of social justice. Bell argues that the overriding goal of social justice is

...full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. (p.3)

In this definition Bell attempts to address oppressive social class structures, arguing for the importance of social participation and empowerment. Social justice would then emphasize more inclusive decision-making about ways to meet all people's needs, including providing for their physical and psychological safety.

More recently, writers such as Young (1990) have gone further through proposing that social justice should not only include people's basic needs, but also the opportunity for self-fulfillment. Young also acknowledges the role institutions play in allowing or preventing individuals from reaching their full human potential. According to Young,

Oppression consists in systematic institutional processes, which prevent some people from learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings, or institutionalized social processes which inhibit people's ability to play and communicate with others or to express their feelings and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen. (p. 38)

From Young's (1990) perspective, a just society would be one in which the constraints of oppression and domination are eliminated, allowing people from all

groups to develop and reach their full human potential. This would include lifting restrictions on participation in institutions such as education and employment.

Current views of social justice place increased emphasis on the importance of moving beyond acknowledgment of inequities to active intervention to challenge systems, institutions, and cultural norms that result in the oppression and marginalization of certain groups in society (Horne & Matthews, 2006). "This includes actively working to change social institutions, political and economic systems, and governmental structures that perpetuate unfair practices, structures, and policies in terms of accessibility, resource distribution, and human rights" (Fouad et al., 2006, p.1). Based on these definitions, three core components of social justice emerge: (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.

The focus on human development and potential is compatible with more recent views of career that emphasize helping people recognize and realize their potential through expression in vocational and other life roles (Young & Collin, 2000). Yet, as pointed out earlier in the discussion, there is debate about whether the concept of career represents the realities of many peoples' experience and relationships with work (Blustein, 2006).

Linking Social Justice and Career Development Practice

There is growing attention paid to the importance social justice as a guiding value for career development practice (Arthur, 2005; 2008). A key concern is that locating career problems within individuals does little to address social conditions that adversely impact people. Young (1990) builds on the emphasis placed on distribution of resources to examine the social structures that inhibit positive development. From this perspective,

...justice should refer not only to distribution, but also to the institutional conditions necessary for the

development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation. Under this conception of justice, injustice refers primarily to two forms of disabling constraints, oppression and domination. (p.39)

Conditions of oppression may be overt, such as public laws and institutional policies, or more covert in terms of well-intentioned help that does not take into consideration the differential distribution of resources and opportunities available to our clients or the reality of social barriers linked to education and employment.

According to Young (1990),

...oppression refers to the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms – in short, the normal processes of everyday life. (p. 41)

Working from this perspective challenges career development practitioners to consider how their personal and professional socialization influences their views of people's career development. This includes the nature of career issues, notions of *on track* and *off track*, indicators of success, and a multitude of possible external influences that may be relevant for viewing individuals and their circumstances. In other words, career practitioners need to consider how their worldviews may be similar or different to others and also how they may inadvertently perpetuate attitudes and actions that further disenfranchise some clients.

Young's perspective of social justice also challenges career development practitioners to not only take a broader view of people's career issues, but also to broaden the target of career interventions. Beyond facilitating personal empowerment of clients, professionals need to consider how their work inadvertently supports the status quo and be prepared to address social forces that pose as systemic barriers to people's growth and development (Arredondo & Perez, 2003; Arthur & Collins, 2005a).

It is of concern that the focus of career planning and decision-making is becoming increasingly restricted to remedial interventions (Arthur, 2005; 2008), due to funding mandates and limited resources. For example, the terms of agency funding may dictate that services be designed around short-term outcomes such as job placement of any sort, with insufficient attention given to helping individuals with plans and resources for career development to stabilize or enhance their future economic position. The unemployment and underemployment of Canadians, especially foreign trained workers, has been targeted for years in labour force planning (Dolan & Young, 2004). Yet, it will take concerted efforts to shift policies and practices that place responsibility for career planning on the individual, that emphasize *survival of the fittest* and *hiring those most like us*, to addressing multiple systemic barriers that continue to perpetuate educational and employment inequities for workers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

A key step to reaffirm the value of social justice is supporting practitioners to translate the concept into meaningful career development practices. While we can celebrate our historical roots and the contributions of social justice to the evolution of career development practice, we need to consider what our past has to offer contemporary career practices (McMahon, Arthur, & Collins, 2008a, 2008b). We believe it is important to move beyond conceptual discussions about the meaning of social justice to consider the implications for practitioner roles and responsibilities. As a point of departure, we felt that it was important to include the voices of career development practitioners in the dialogue about social justice. To that end, we conducted an exploratory study, in which career practitioners were invited to define social justice and to identify some of the barriers that they experience in implementing career development interventions related to social justice.

The Current Study

Participants were career practitioners in Canada who volunteered to participate in a larger study on the diversity and social justice competencies of car-

eer development practitioners (Arthur, Collins, Bisson, & McMahon, 2008), conducted through an on-line survey. Invitations to participate in the study were sent electronically to career development associations across Canada and confidentially distributed to members. Demographic information was collected to ascertain participants' age range, ethnicity, educational qualifications, years of experience, and setting of their career development practice. Qualitative data was collected through open-ended questions designed to help us better understand the nature of existing social justice challenges and strategies that career practitioners face in their day-to-day work. The following questions were used to determine participants' background training in social justice and their current views of the concept:

1. How familiar are you with social justice issues as they relate to career practice?
2. Have you ever attended a workshop on social justice?
3. Have you ever attended a course on social justice?
4. What does social justice in your career development practice mean to you?

Question 1 was a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from no familiarity to high familiarity. Questions 2 and 3 were formatted as yes/no categories.

The inquiry also focused on career practitioners' views of barriers towards enacting social justice practices. This information was obtained in two ways. First, a check-list of barriers, conceptually driven from a review of the literature (e.g., Helms, 2003; Kiselica & Robinson, 2001) was itemized on the survey, and participants were asked to select all items that applied to their practice.

The second way of identifying barriers to implementing social justice was through critical incidents. The critical incident technique is associated with the case study method in which the specific behaviours of people are examined through open-ended inquiry about the qualitative and subjective descriptions of people, situations, interpretations of experiences (Pedersen, 1995). In essence, critical incidents are brief descriptions of vivid events that people remember as being meaningful in their

experience (Brookfield, 1995). Critical incidents have been used extensively in cross-cultural research, including studies conducted pertaining to educational and employment experiences (e.g., Amundson, Borgen, Jordan, & Erlebach, 2004; Arthur, 2001).

In the larger study, participants were asked to describe an actual session with a client whose career issues were influenced by social justice issues (e.g., lack of resources, inequity, discrimination, etc.). Prompts were provided to guide participants to reflect on the nature of the presenting issues, how those issues were related to social justice, the interventions selected, and outcomes of the intervention. A summary of the results from these critical incidents will be reported in a subsequent manuscript (Arthur, Collins, McMahon, & Marshall, 2008). An additional prompt asked participants to explain any barriers to implementing their choice of intervention. This enabled us to compare the barriers identified through the checklist with actual barriers that were experienced in the design and implementation of career-related interventions.

Responses obtained from the open-ended question and critical incidents were reviewed using a constant comparison method of content analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The survey data was reviewed initially by one member of the research team to begin creating a taxonomy of emerging categories. New survey data was compared to this taxonomy, adding new categories when required. In the second review of the data, categories were reviewed by two other members of the research team and synthesized to reduce duplication. The results of this analysis produced key categories that portray how career practitioners view social justice and their experience of barriers that detract from social justice practices.

Results

The selected results from this portion of the study are based on 151 career practitioners who wrote about the meaning of the social justice and the barriers they face in practice. Participants were predominantly women (77%), which is reflective of gender distribution in many helping professions. The age range

Table 1: Location of Career Development Practice

Location	N
Career and Employment Centre	32
Not-for-Profit Organization	30
Public High School	19
Public University	18
Government Department	15
Private Practice	11
Public College	7
Youth Agency	5
For Profit Organization/ Business	5
Community Based Agency	3
Other	5

showed the majority of participants in the 30-50 year old bracket, with less than 10% in younger or older age ranges. Approximately 41% of the participants had completed graduate degrees, 28 % of participants were educated at the undergraduate level, 16% of participants were educated at college or diploma levels, 13% held a post graduate certificate or diploma, and approximately 3% of the participants listed high school as their highest level of education. The majority of participants (87%) identified their ethnic background as Caucasian Canadians.

The participants had a wide range of years of experience in career development practice. Approximately 27% of participants had practised for 5 years or less, 26% of participants had practiced for 6-10 years, 32% had practiced for 11-20 years, and approximately 15% of participants had been in the role of career development practitioner for more than 20 years. Table 1 shows the distribution of settings where participants were employed in the field of career development.

Familiarity With Social Justice

Sixty-seven percent of participants checked that they were familiar with social justice, 28% checked that they were unfamiliar with social justice, and the remaining percentage of participants checked the undecided response cate-

gory. With respect to prior training related to social justice, 38% of participants had attended a workshop on social justice and 27% of participants had attended a course on social justice.

The Multiple Meanings of Social Justice In Career Development Practice

From our study, it became evident that social justice holds multiple meanings for career practitioners. The responses suggest that social justice might be viewed as a larger value comprised of several related constructs. Figure 1 provides list of the top 10 main categories reflected in their definitions of social justice. The percentages in parenthesis show the proportion of participants whose responses contained the category. Selected quotes are included to illustrate how the category connects with the value of social justice.

Within the total number of responses, 96 of the practitioners mentioned specific groups of people and specific cultural influences they thought were related to social justice issues. Figure 2 provides a list of the top ten categories in participants' responses, followed by excerpts from selected participant responses to illustrate the connections with social justice.

These themes illustrate the diversity of concepts and meanings that career practitioners expressed related to social justice. Additionally, the examples from

Category	Excerpts from Definitions of Social Justice
1. Advocacy (31%)	"I think Social Justice relates to awareness of issues surrounding discrimination of various groups; helping to bring the issues to the attention of everyone; assisting in the removal of barriers; and advocating on behalf of those suffering under various forms of discrimination."
2. Equality (29%)	"Social justice is equality for all job seekers. No bias for age, religion, sex, or culture. Opening doors for new immigrants into Canada. No barriers for education and training."
3. Self Fulfillment (26%)	"Social justice, as I understand it to be, gives every individual a fair opportunity to pursue the goals one has established for himself or herself. The use of the 'fair' does not mean equal but as it relates to opportunities, should offer, depending on one's needs, the occasions to undertake steps necessary to achieve these goals."
4. Equal Opportunities (23%)	"Social justice is newcomers' ability to have access to the same opportunities as people who were born in that country. Social injustice is the country's refusal to consider newcomers' educational and work related experiences as valid or at least partly valid."
5. Inclusion (23%)	"Social justice is a way of perceiving our social milieu and a set of intelligent actions that provide a greater sense of inclusion and responsibility for each other. With in my practice social justice involves thoughtful actions that address inclusion of people who may be seen to be hindered by her/him self or by others, in contributing to their community and/or to their own well being by virtue of his or her differences..."
6. Equal Access (18%)	"Social justice refers to my clients' ability to succeed in the labour market (eg. ability to find and keep a job) and to gain access to the community supports they need to thrive."
7. Considering Contextual Influences (29%)	"A social justice perspective involves understanding the client's career concerns in the context of their life and being open to environmental factors that may be or have influenced the client's career expression. I personally have found that a dual focus on the client and the environment, once openly articulated, has been empowering for individuals. As well, I see here an overlap between career counselling and mental health counselling because often clients who are experiencing discrimination, harassment or career barriers initially present with anxiety and depression. I deliberately work in both areas so that I can integrate my interventions with what the client seems to need."
8. Client-Centred Resources (10%)	"Client centered means that I provide services that are requested in a manner that fits the clients needs and do not force him or her to jump through hoops established by some funding entity or outdated belief that the service provider knows best."
9. Education (8%)	"I think that social justice regarding career practice is two-fold it requires allowing opportunities and accommodations for those facing barriers to the Canadian workplace based on income, language, religion, lack of cultural experience and a myriad of other possible reasons. But also requires education to allow people to adapt themselves when possible and productive to a new work environment and the expectations that come with it."
10. Improving Policy (8%)	"I work with Canadian residents as well as new immigrants. For me social justice somehow equals to political issues and legislations. "Bureaucratic assumptions made when evaluating client access to resources based on clients previous decisions, levels of education, level of motivation, etc... Fair is not always about everybody getting the same, fair is about everyone getting what they need."

Figure 1. Categories identified in career practitioners' definitions of social justice.

their responses illustrate that for many individuals from identified groups, there continue to be disparities in the options and resources available for their career pathways.

Social Justice Barriers Faced By Clients

A total of 97 of the participants noted specific barriers that inhibit clients in their career development. Note that these are the barriers to social

justice faced by clients, in other words, the factors that prevent them from equal access to resources and opportunities necessary for full participation in society and career fulfilment. Later in the paper, we will explore the barriers faced by practitioners in working with their clients to promote social justice. The responses in Figure 3 are organized around 10 categories of client barriers, with the percentages in brackets used to indicate the proportion of participants who responses reflected this category.

These examples from the definitions of social justice illustrate that a number of external and internal barriers continue to limit the career development of individuals. Practitioners noted many connections between internal and external barriers. Events or conditions in the surrounding environment may be internalized negatively by clients. In turn, internal barriers such as low self-esteem or internalized racism can pose as barriers for action in trying to alleviate external barriers. These are important interconnections when considering the ways that social justice is relevant for career development.

Barriers Experienced by Career Development Practitioners

Although social justice is an appealing concept in terms of supporting people to realize their career development potential, a number of barriers have also been identified to career practitioners implementing social justice interventions. In designing the study, we generated a list of barriers that are commonly reported in the literature (e.g., Helms, 2003; Kiselica & Robinson, 2001). Career practitioners were then asked to indicate if they perceived any of these items as barriers for their practice. As indicated in Figure 4, participants perceived a lack of training, time, funding, and power as the top barriers.

We then examined career practitioners' responses in the critical incidents that detailed actual practice examples. From this material, four themes provided collaborating evidence of barriers for implementing social justice interventions. The four themes that emerged from their descriptions of their own efforts to implement social justice interventions included: lack of support from supervisors, lack of training, insufficient funding, and insufficient time to spend on social justice interventions. These themes are represented by the shaded bar graph in Figure 4. There is an overlap in the critical incident themes for four of the top six barriers.

Discussion and Implications

The results of this study indicate that, from the perspective of career practitioners, social justice is a multidimensional concept that reflects the definitional themes identified in the

Category	Excerpts from Definitions of Social Justice
1. All People (39%)	"Making sure that policy is in place, and that common practices are consistent with those policies, in order to give ALL people an equal opportunity to find meaningful employment and self-fulfillment."
2. Socio-Economic Status (39%)	"Various societal groups have different advantages and disadvantages in achieving educational and career success. Socioeconomic status obviously plays a significant role but this issue is about more than just money. SE status typically depends upon the choices made by parents re: their own education and job choices, sometimes creating a vicious cycle of "under" opportunities that is difficult to break. Intentional choice plays a role but so does the labour market and the current need for post-secondary education as opposed to years past when second education was sufficient."
3. Race (37%)	"Assisting clients who have experienced discrimination because of racial, social, psychological, economic status. It involves affirming the individuals worth and potential. Barriers may be realistic, but can be viewed as challenges rather than bars. Ultimately, each person is unique, has value and abilities to contribute to society."
4. Gender (31%)	"The issue of social justice would be in reference to low income women trying to live independently, especially after a separation or divorce. Besides the obvious costs related to searching for work, it is difficult to identify what low income women have to offer to an employer. Also, the business community is either unaware or don't care that they hire people offering low wages, and little in the way of benefits or even hours of work to provide an individual with a living wage."
5. Age (24%)	"People should have equal access to the jobs for which they are qualified. If for some reason, race, colour, age, size, etc. they are excluded without having an equal chance to prove themselves, this is not fair. If they are excluded from career assistance for any reason from our gov't funded centre, this is not acceptable. If in our minds as facilitators we have judged their ability to succeed based on these factors, we have not been appropriate..."
6. Disability (22%)	"People make career decisions based on availability of training, cost, percentage of those who become employed and the demographics involved. When looking at equity and diversity in the workplace, those are directly related to social justice. Persons with disabilities often are excluded from a lot of workplaces who do not have standards in place to accommodate needs. Those individuals would be limited in their career decision-making process. Issues of inequality greatly impact persons with disabilities for just one."
7. Immigrants (21%)	"I see social justice as a way of 'evening out' the playing field within the work domain. There are obviously many groups within Canada that experience discrimination, both in their attempts to enter the workforce, and within the workplace itself. One example is the supposed need for New Canadians to have 'Canadian experience' before they land a 'good' job; but of course, this is based on the belief that experience from other countries is somehow 'lesser' or inferior. Career practitioners need a means to help those people who face such types of discrimination."
8. Sexual Orientation (17%)	"Career practitioners have been the strongest advocates for their clients as they deal with career issues of underserved populations, including racial and ethnic minorities, those with developmental delays, those who live in poverty, new immigrants, gay, lesbian and transgendered clients."
9. Religion (15%)	"Social justice as it relates to career practice would be assisting and empowering those who may have been, or are, discriminated against, for example, based on religion, race, sexual orientation, gender etc, to be able to enter the workforce equipped to deal with and/or overcome the affects thereof. Also, advocating on behalf of clients to assist them in reaching their fullest potential and enhancing their socioeconomic status."
10. Criminal Activity (14%)	"As career practitioners we come in contact from many different ethnic respecting the diversity of our society. It requires, fundamentally, that we have compassion for others; even those who have made personal choices that we would not such as substance abuse or criminality."

Figure 2. Groups included in career practitioners' definitions of social justice.

historical and current literature. Strong emphasis was placed on the fair and equitable distribution of resources and opportunities (Bell, 1997; Constantine, Hage, Kindiachi, & Bryant, 2007; Morris, 2002), e.g., categories of equality, equal opportunities, and equal access. For participants in this study, social jus-

tice was strongly tied to perceptions that particular client populations face structural barriers in their career development. These barriers were clearly linked to the social, economic, and political systems that perpetuate oppression and marginalization within society (Arredondo & Perez, 2003; Fouad et al.,

2006; Young, 1990), e.g., public policy, lack of education, finances, and other resources. Participants identified advocacy as a core component of social justice to ameliorate oppression and marginalization within society (Horne & Mathews, 2006; Young, 1990).

The participants expanded on the notion full inclusion and participation of all members of society (Rawls, 1971; Young, 1990; Young & Collins, 2000) by identifying particular groups that face barriers to reaching their potential. From a career development perspective, it is important to note that socio-economic status was the most frequently noted cultural factor, followed closely by race and gender. These results provide support for the position that social views of culture continue to be strong influences on people's career development. In essence, culture and social justice are linked because culture provides access to resources for some people, while placing restrictions and limits on resources to people who are inside or outside of the dominant cultural group (Stead, 2004).

A report by Kerstetter (2002), based on Statistics Canada data from 1999, noted that 50% of family units in Canada held 94.4% of the wealth, leaving only 5.6% to the bottom 50% of the population. Visible minorities have reported the highest level of perceived discrimination (Statistics Canada, 2003). Single women or women parenting alone have the highest rates of poverty in Canada (Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, 2005). The focus on poverty and on groups most likely to experience poverty is a reminder to us of the issues raised by Blustein (2006) and Richardson (1993; 2000) about positioning career development theory and practice in a way that is meaningful to clients who face barriers to the very basic human need for sufficient access to education and work to sustain their lives. Practitioners in this study identified ethical practice as closely tied to meeting actual client needs.

One theme that emerged from this study that was less clear in the definitions noted earlier in the paper is the idea of consciousness raising (awareness of barriers to social justice on the part of both the practitioner and the

Category	Excerpts of Client Barriers
1. Discrimination (36%)	"Important as careers and employment opportunities may be limited based on various discriminations."
2. Poor Policy (24%)	"Client's living on institutionalized income supports/rules are often frustrated, feel powerless, live in substandard housing, eat from food banks and feel like second class citizens. They frequently proper physical and psychological/learning disability assessment, academic/computer upgrading and current professional/industry stands to compete in today's world. A national formal Social Justice group could provide objective standards and best practices to assist government bodies achieve more with their dollars and client satisfaction. Newcomers to Canada need to be included in all areas."
3. Oppression (22%)	"Working with persons with Disabilities, I often call employers and inquire about potential jobs for clients, sometimes an employer will state, no I do not want to hire any one from your organization. I believe they have a pre-conceived description of disabled individuals and they are unemployable. They may have had someone working for them in the past and had a bad experience or they just refuse to even entertain the idea of hiring a person with a disability."
4. Lack of Opportunity (15%)	"I work with very multi-barriered clients, and I believe strongly that many of my clients are denied access to potential employment because they are or have been homeless, in recovery from addictions, have a criminal record, a mental illness or a physical disability etc. I would like to see my clients given an equal opportunity to access meaningful training and employment and to find financial security and job satisfaction in a career that suits and is appropriate for them. In [province named] we provide few options for those in greatest need, and I believe it is the responsibility of a "caring society" to make such options available to all. I believe that a society should be judged by how it treats its most vulnerable members"
5. Lack of Education (12%)	"Clients are generally referred via EI or Welfare or Disability Income. The levels of past access to education/professional credentials and the current needs of the client often are key indicators to the client's current functional abilities/limitations and standard of living..."
6. Institutional Barriers (12%)	"Aspects of inequality can become hidden within institutionalized discrimination. Work and hiring practices as well as lack of opportunities for certain communities can directly relate to social justice."
7. Inequalities (10%)	"A frustrating reality that separates clients, the haves and have nots. It frustrating to work with a client who is so incredibly brilliant, talented, passionate who for financial reasons will not be able to continue or hone their talent. They get lost in the idea that they will work for a few years and come back to pursue that grad program, while knowing that ultimately they will be lost in happenstance which could be a rewarding career but we could have lost the best future doctor, lawyer, etc. It is frustrating that those people who may be able to finically (pursue their program) but due to too few positions won't ever get into their programs."
8. Lack of Finances (9%)	"I think that there are barriers related to social justice in career practice. If someone hasn't had the opportunity for education in their life due to lack of financial resources, they don't have access to higher paying jobs. If someone is truly poor, they may not have the ability to present themselves (clothes, grooming) in a favourable light to an employer."
9. Consciousness Raising (8%)	"Social justice as it relates to career practice has to do with exploring careers as not being gender or age specific nor sexual orientation or religious specific (unless it's a religious job you're looking at). Attempting to free a student from stereotypes they may have about certain types of work, for example, the trades for a woman, is an important role for the counsellor. Students needs to become aware that they have interests, skills, and values that will be a fit for a job that can give them an income, success and momentum to do their best because they feel the "fit" and want to do their best and to continue learning. Social justice related to career practice has to do with making students aware of social "themes" that confine their thinking as it relates to themselves and work."
10. Internalized Oppression (6%)	"...People's choices of education and career may be are expanded or limited, based on their education, financial situation, socio-economic status, gender, age, sexual orientation, language(s), dis/ability, visibly ethnicity (and any other factors as mentioned in your own definition of social justice). There may be rules, or unspoken rules, about who can do what in society. People may also have more choices than they BELIEVE or FEEL they have, but limit themselves because they have internalized beliefs, or unspoken rules, about what a person like themselves will be able to accomplish, or the barriers they will experience. These "rules" often come from their experiences of being excluded, harassed, bullied, etc. In career practice, we help people see their strengths, challenge or see past beliefs, learn new skills/info/perspectives, and prepare to move towards achievable goals."

client). Social justice involves "...a fundamental valuing of fairness and equity" (Constantine et al., 2007, p. 24). The term *valuing* implies more than simply knowledge; it requires a shift in attitudes, beliefs and assumptions about justice and injustice. Practitioners in this study recognized this awareness in themselves; and also noted that, for some clients, the role of the social justice practitioner may be to support shifts in client attitudes and beliefs that are a result of internalizing oppressive messages from society.

From a social justice perspective, it is important to examine our career theories and our interventions models to ensure that they reflect the needs of the chronically underserved and neglected populations in Canadian society. The results of this study confirm that there are a number of internal and external barriers to practitioners enacting social justice interventions (Helms, 2003; Kiselica & Robinson, 2001). The emphasis on consciousness raising about social justice is important when we note that only about two thirds of participants rated themselves as familiar with the concept of social justice; whereas about one third noted their lack of familiarity. These disparities in training and background knowledge about social justice were evident in participants' responses.

The resurgence of literature on social justice in the career development field appears timely as we consider the relevance of professional training for career development practitioners. It is clear that more attention needs to be paid to the structural barriers that impede people's career development and to interventions that address contextual influences in people's lives (Arthur & McMahan, 2005). However, even though career practitioners may recognise the importance of environmental and systemic influences on the lives of their clients, they often lack training about how to implement related interventions. Curriculum aimed at career practitioners typically addresses theories and models directed at the career planning and decision-making of individuals, provides an overview of barriers to career development, minimal content on systems theories, and does not sufficiently prepare students for addressing

Figure 3. Practitioners' views of client barriers to social justice in career development.

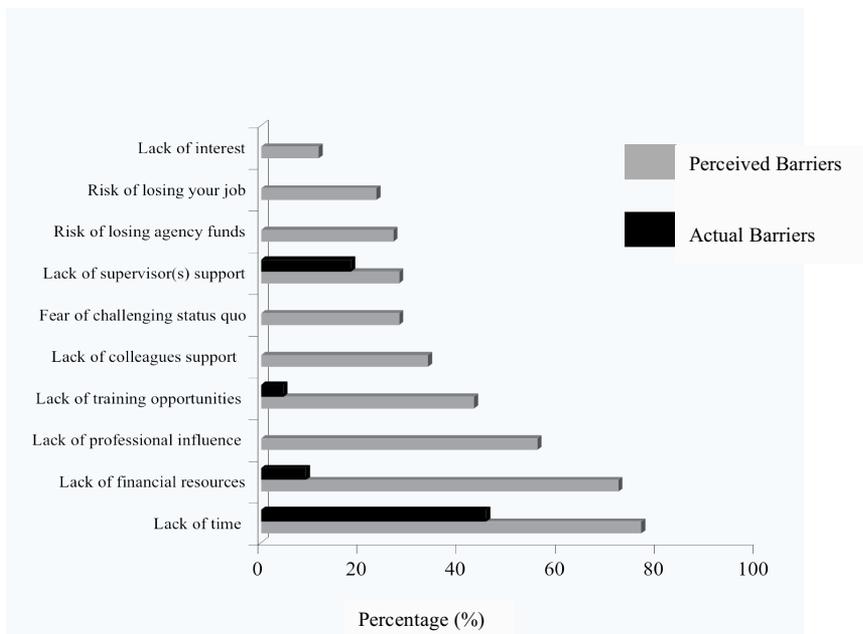


Figure 4. Perceived and actual barriers for addressing social justice in career development practices.

systemic change (McMahon, Arthur, & Collins, 2008b). Additional curriculum content to broader social and structural issues was one of the key priorities identified at a think tank on the future of career counsellor education in Canada held in November, 2006 (Burwell & Kalbfleisch, 2007).

Although we are encouraged by the positive responses of career practitioners that included specific examples of their attempts to implement social justice interventions with their clients (Arthur, Collins, McMahon, & Marshall, 2008), their responses also confirmed earlier literature about multiple barriers for engaging in social justice practices (Helms, 2003; Kiselica & Robinson, 2001). Several career practitioners in this study indicated that lack of administrative support and funding were serious obstacles to meeting the needs of clients. More alarming were accounts in which practitioners felt they would be criticized, punished, or lose their job if they were to use time at their job on interventions such as advocacy or attempting systems change. These results suggest that consciousness raising about the importance of social justice needs to extend well beyond the individual practitioner to the organizational, social-political, and professional levels where the time and money invested in career practices, which were noted as the most common barriers, are controlled. Career practitioners might also

benefit from training about how to influence the systems in which they work to garner legitimate support for roles and interventions related to social justice.

Conclusion

Our exploratory study is one of the first inquiries to take into account the perspectives of career development practitioners regarding social justice. It should be noted that this study was based on a volunteer sample and, as such, cannot be considered representative of the views of all career development practitioners in Canada. However, these preliminary results highlight the multiple meanings of social justice and point to some exciting ways that practitioners attempt to integrate social justice into their views of client issues and their ways of working with clients. In turn, it is evident that many practitioners feel restricted in the roles and responsibilities that they believe would make a difference in the lives of their clients. As we consider the meaning of social justice for people's career development, we might also consider what it will take to translate that concept into practice roles and levels of interventions, along with supportive administrative and funding structures. We hope that the orientation to social justice and selected results provided in this discussion will encourage further dialogue about the connections

between social justice and career development practice.

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Acknowledgement

Preparation of this manuscript was funded by a Standard Research Grant awarded to the first three authors from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

- NOTES -