

The Presence of Social Justice Principles Within Professional and Ethical Guidelines in International Psychology

LAURA ANNE WINTER, University of Manchester, UK

ABSTRACT *The ethical guidelines produced by organisations such as the American Psychological Association help establish the identity of, and to some extent publicly represent, psychological professions. This paper examines guidelines from the USA and the UK with reference to the way in which they engage with “social justice” values and practice. Specifically, the codes of the American Psychological Association, and the British Psychological Society, and the standards of the (UK’s) Health and Care Professions Council are discussed. While the professional and ethical codes, standards and guidelines of these two countries do reflect some level of engagement with social justice, the American Psychological Association appears to be further ahead than its UK counterparts in embracing a social justice perspective. Additionally, the limited engagement with social justice in such documents, particularly in the UK, raises questions in relation to the identity of the profession of psychology and whether or not that identity even features social justice. The article concludes that if social justice is a priority for psychology then, as a starting point, the aspirational elements of such ethical guidelines should be amended to reflect such a commitment. Copyright © 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

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It is relevant to consider the presence of social justice principles in professional and ethical guidelines for the psychology profession for two reasons: firstly, because social justice is necessarily tied up with ethical issues in psychology; and secondly, because professional and ethical guidelines significantly contribute to defining the identity and scope of a profession and its boundaries. This is achieved not only through enforceable standards contained within ethical codes but also through aspirational statements and descriptions of the professions.

This article focuses on psychology as that is my professional background and focus; I would consider that the analysis and points raised, however, would equally apply to the codes and frameworks of ethics and professional practice in psychotherapy (and counselling).

Brady-Amoon, Makhija, Dixit, and Dator (2012) stated that the social justice commitment of psychology is evident in the profession’s public documents, and refer to the American

Psychological Association's (APA) *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (APA, 2010), hereafter referred to as "the APA Code", as evidence. Nevertheless they simply assert this statement without a detailed analysis of this Code. Furthermore, their statement refers solely to the psychology profession in the USA, rather than internationally. Given that previous literature has also focused predominantly on the psychology profession in the USA, there is a need to widen our perspective on this issue. In order to do this I contrast the APA's Code with the professional and ethical guidelines underpinning the psychology profession in the UK. In doing so I argue that, while the APA has made a good start in acknowledging social justice values and action in its ethical Code, in the UK the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) have often included only implicit references to social justice within their documents and guidelines. Given these international differences, I conclude that, as psychologists, we need to engage in further discussion, comparison and collaboration around the inclusion of social justice within professional and ethical guidelines, and that if psychologists are interested in social justice, as a minimum, the aspirational elements of ethical codes should be amended to reflect this. I also reflect upon the potential difficulties involved in including social justice within the "enforceable" elements of a professional or ethical code.

I have chosen to discuss the UK psychological profession partly because of my familiarity with these codes as a UK psychologist and in part because of earlier literature about the potential differences between the US and UK counselling psychology professions in relation to social justice (Cutts, 2013).

SOCIAL JUSTICE IN PSYCHOLOGY

Here I introduce the concept of social justice in order to provide some grounding for the following discussions, and to demonstrate the relevance of social justice to the profession of psychology. Additionally, I aim to demonstrate the first of my two rationales for considering the presence of social justice principles within professional and ethical guidelines in psychology. Specifically, I argue that it is relevant to look at the presence of social justice within these documents because social justice inevitably relates to ethical issues in psychology.

Social justice is a concept which is talked about across numerous disciplines and professions, including politics, philosophy, human geography, sociology, social work, counselling, and education. Within the counselling profession it has been defined as "the idea that society gives individuals and groups fair treatment and an equal share of benefits, resources, and opportunities" (Chung & Bemak, 2012, p. 26). It has often been said that social justice is a challenging term to define (Pieterse, Evans, Risner-Butner, Collins, & Mason, 2009; Singh et al., 2010). Nevertheless, four principles of social justice have been highlighted: equity, access, participation, and harmony (Crethar, Torres Rivera & Nash, 2008). Equity refers to the fair distribution of rights, responsibilities, and resources. Access refers to the need for all members of society to access services, resources, information, power, knowledge, etc. Participation has been used to capture the idea that each individual has the right to participate in and be consulted on decisions which impact upon their lives. Finally, harmony describes: "a principle of societal balance whereby the needs of individuals ultimately produce results that create the best possible outcomes for society as a whole while simultaneously societal actions take into account the needs of individuals and minority groups" (Crethar et al., 2008, p. 272).

At this point it is important to acknowledge that there may be cultural variations in definitions of social justice. This matters because how a person understands social justice will impact upon their analysis of this topic and the conclusions I draw. Secondly, how social justice is defined will impact upon how it is incorporated into professional and ethical guidelines. If, as I argue, social justice is important to psychology, international ethical guidelines should be amended to reflect this, and therefore cultural variations of social justice need to be considered.

The reader may take the four principles of social justice outlined previously as my understanding of social justice, and note that my analysis of the UK and US documents was viewed through this lens. With regard to the second issue noted above, within this paper I argue that if social justice is important to psychology then international ethical and professional documents should be amended to reflect this, not that a single code should be written to cover the profession internationally. Nor am I arguing that social justice action should be a mandated part of the work of psychologists internationally. Instead, I argue that an international perspective and a consideration of social justice across national boundaries might aid the development of psychological professions and our communication across these boundaries. Therefore, different psychology professions might incorporate social justice within their professional and ethical documents in slightly different ways.

I now return to my introduction of the concept of social justice in psychology which is considered in a growing body of literature. For example, Vasquez (2012) stated that “[o]ur discipline of psychology has broad relevance to social issues and social justice” (p. 337). With particular reference to the emphasis that the APA places on social justice, Vasquez argued that social justice is part of the identity of the profession and, therefore, is a professional responsibility. Other authors have also written of social justice values and a commitment to social justice action being an ethical obligation of psychologists (e.g., Vera & Speight, 2003). Indeed, Speight and Vera stated that “a commitment to social justice stems from an essential dedication to ethics” (2004, p. 113). Elsewhere, Kakkad (2005) wrote: “Psychologists must subsequently recognize and own their professional responsibility in contributing to the local, national, and international debate on social justice issues and actively participate in efforts to challenge the structural underpinnings of inequality” (p. 294).

Psychologists are concerned with psychological wellbeing, mental distress, and human welfare, and typically aim is to increase wellbeing and decrease distress. Given the various interrelationships between wellbeing and justice, for example, the negative impacts of oppression and injustice on individuals’ psychological functioning and wellbeing, issues of justice are paramount in our profession (Prilleltensky, 2013). It has been suggested that mainstream psychology, through its emphasis on locating both the source of distress and the possible “cure” of to this distress in the individual, while neglecting to consider the possible social and political explanations and solutions, has maintained the unfavourable status quo in society (Speight & Vera, 2004).

On the issue of social justice as a professional responsibility, there have been a number of critiques of the social justice movement in the mental health professions. Such arguments focus around the idea that it is an unwelcome and unjustified invasion of politics into therapy and, furthermore, that the term “social justice” is “a euphemism for left-wing political activism” (Hunsaker, 2011, p. 337). Hunsaker’s argument is that discussion of social justice issues originates from left-wing academics and is then imposed unfairly on practitioners, becoming a mandated element of practice with which therapists of a right-wing persuasion might disagree.

Hunsaker asserted that the belief that social justice is tied up with ethics is disingenuous, but does not offer an argument for this view. While I would agree that it is important for practising therapists to understand and welcome the social justice agenda, and not have it imposed on them, it does seem that social justice is necessarily tied up with ethics in psychology.

THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL GUIDELINES

Having introduced the concept of social justice and made the case for the first of my two rationales for considering the presence of social justice in psychological ethical codes, I now move on to discuss the role and function of professional and ethical guidelines. I argue that it is important to consider the presence of social justice within such guidelines, given their public nature. I aim to demonstrate that professional and ethical guidelines contribute to defining the identity of a profession.

Numerous reasons are cited for the existence of professional and ethical guidelines and codes. According to Pettifor (2004), the literature suggests that ethical codes have two main purposes: namely, to promote optimal behaviour through encouraging reflection and decision-making within a moral framework; and to regulate professional behaviour. Sinclair, Poizner, Gilmour-Barrett, and Randall (1987) suggested that such codes help to establish a group as a profession, to support and guide individual professionals, to help meet the responsibilities of being a profession, and to provide a statement of moral principle. Thus ethical guidelines not only help regulate professional behaviour but also guide professionals in their behaviour and help to establish a group of individuals as a profession, with a “public declaration of commitment to goals or values” (Sinclair et al., 1987, p. 2). The functions of establishing a group as a profession and capturing this public declaration indicate that at least some part of the role of a profession’s ethical guidelines relates to establishing and defining the scope and identity of a profession.

Leach and Harbin’s (1997) comparison of the ethical codes of psychology professions in 24 countries involved analysis of the overlap between each country’s ethical code and the *APA Code*. They found that all of the principles in the *APA Code* were found in four other countries’ codes, while only one country’s ethical code (China) bore no resemblance to the *APA Code*. They also found that 10 of the standards in the *APA Code* “began to approach a universal ethical standard (above 75%)” (Leach & Harbin, 1997, p. 187). These included standards regarding privacy, confidentiality, boundaries of competence, avoiding harm, exploitative relationships, supervision of subordinates, fees and financial arrangements, avoidance of false or deceptive statements, informed consent to therapy, and informed consent to research. They also found that relatively few countries included a statement in their ethics code about human differences and respecting individual diversity. While the findings of this research may no longer be completely accurate given that codes will have been updated since 1997, they demonstrate that ethical codes vary across countries. Leach and Harbin (1997) suggest that the inclusion of specific standards at specific locations may reflect the specific culture and nature of the psychology profession in that country, adding weight to the idea discussed above that an ethical code may in some way capture the identity of the profession it represents.

It is therefore useful to look to these guidelines and how they vary as an indicator both of the psychology profession and its identity, and the specific culture of that profession. However, professional ethics need to be separated from ethics in general, and specifically from philosophical ethics; the former referring to standards and principles for professional conduct

and acceptable practice, and the latter to a “theoretical and moral consideration of what is thought to be ‘good’, ‘right’, or ‘worthy’” (Pack-Brown, Thomas, & Seymour, 2008, p. 296). Hunsaker (2011) argued that there is a worrying level of engagement with social justice ideas in professional associations, describing this as “institutional complicity with the social justice movement” (p. 326). Nevertheless, given the discussions above regarding the importance of social justice to a profession which is concerned with wellness, we can see that social justice should be an important concern for psychologists. We therefore need to consider how this is represented in our ethical codes and professional guidelines, given the public nature of these documents and their contribution to defining the identity of the psychology profession.

Assuming that the reader is persuaded of the importance of addressing social justice within professional ethical codes, a further issue arises. International ethical codes in psychology vary in the extent to which they describe *enforceable* elements of the profession, that is to say the extent to which standards noted within an ethical code are *mandatory requirements* of a professional psychologist, and in the extent to which they describe *aspirational* elements of a profession, that is to say standards which are *recommended*, but if a professional does not meet them there will be no disciplinary proceedings or other action. As will become clear in my analysis of the ethical guidelines of the UK and US psychology professions, this is an important distinction.

Numerous discussions in the social justice literature in psychology explore the potential gap between social justice rhetoric and action (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997; Sherman, 1984). It may be challenging to mandate social justice action within the enforceable elements of a profession’s ethical guidelines; however, for the purposes of my argument, I review both the enforceable and aspirational elements of the professional and ethical guidelines, as both elements might illuminate the profession’s relationship with social justice. While it may transpire that incorporating social justice within enforceable standards is too difficult, there may be scope to consider increasing the presence of social justice within the aspirational elements of a code or guidelines. Given the public nature of these documents, all elements of professional and ethical guidelines are important and contribute to the identity of a profession, not only the enforceable standards.

WHY AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE?

I have hopefully established both the relevance of social justice issues to psychologists and the need for considering their presence within our ethical codes. This leads us to question why an international perspective is important. As van de Vijver (2013) noted, psychology has over the past 40 years become increasingly international, due in part to globalisation and other external dynamics, and, in part, due to internal dynamics within psychology, including the increased prevalence of international conferences. The argument for an “international psychology” largely focuses on the need to internationalise theory and practices to ensure that they are culturally appropriate and globally applicable (van de Vijver, 2013). Voices from the US psychology profession have argued that internationalisation of psychology is important to ensure that isolationist views are discouraged, and theories or beliefs based only in Western (i.e. North American) values are countered (Leong & Ponterotto, 2003). As discussed above, there is an argument that ethics, and therefore ethical guidelines, are culturally bound and determined, i.e. that they are relative rather than universal (Knapp & VandeCreek, 2007). However, a strong

argument for considering ethical guidelines for psychologists on an international level is that such guidelines can give to weight to non-partisan and non-political scrutiny of psychologists' behaviour. For example, this could be useful in cases like the APA Ethical Committee's failure to hold Dr John Leso, the psychologist involved in work at Guantánamo Bay, to account for his involvement in torture. With some international agreement on ethical standards, another national – or international – psychological association might hold the APA to account for its actions – or inactions. I do not necessarily mean holding account in the sense of disciplinary action, but, rather, highlighting the conflict between a code's aspirational principles and the actions of a psychologist.

The *Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists* (International Union of Psychological Science, 2008) seems to have been developed for reasons similar to those described above (Pettifor, 2004). However, in comparison to the APA's *Code* and other national ethical guidelines, the *Universal Declaration* has not been widely referenced in national discussions of ethics. For example, within the UK, it is not included in the reading material for training courses on ethical issues for psychologists. I think, therefore, that in addition to increasing the visibility of this document, we need to consider existing national professional and ethical guidelines specifically in relation to social justice, in order to facilitate discussions around the social justice values and work of psychologists internationally.

A NORTH AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE: THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION'S *ETHICAL PRINCIPLES OF PSYCHOLOGISTS AND CODE OF CONDUCT*

Initially I take the APA as an example case of a psychology profession, primarily because of its size and because the fact that a number of other international psychology professions have taken the *APA Code* as the starting point from which to devise their own ethical codes (Leach & Harbin, 1997). The *APA Code* is structured into the "Preamble", "General Principles" and "Ethical Standards", and, while the latter section details enforceable standards by which psychologists must abide, the first two sections reflect aspirational principles.

The APA has stated that these aspirational principles are to "guide and inspire psychologists towards the *very highest* ethical ideals" (APA, 2010, p.3, emphasis added), and it is within these aspirational principles that there are most reference to issues of social justice. Most notably, within the General Principles section, Principle D, "Justice", states that psychologists "recognize that fairness and justice entitle all persons to access to and benefit from the contributions of psychology and to equal quality in the processes, procedures, and services being conducted by psychologists" (APA, 2010, p. 3). This speaks clearly of justice, though appears limited to its application to psychological services rather than a wider, societal level. Additionally, Principle B, "Fidelity and Responsibility", highlights that psychologists should be "aware of their professional and scientific responsibilities to society and to the specific communities in which they work" (APA, 2010, p. 3).

I would also suggest that social justice values are present within the Preamble of the *Code*; for example, "psychologists are committed to increasing scientific and professional knowledge of behavior and people's understanding of themselves and others and to the use of such knowledge *to improve the condition of individuals, organizations, and society*" (APA, 2010, p. 3, emphasis added). This indicates that psychologists should use their knowledge to work toward improving

the condition of society. Taken together with the principle of Justice, which as we have seen refers to equality, we might interpret the idea of psychologists being involved in social improvement as a broadly egalitarian act. This, therefore, may fit with the ideas of social justice discussed above in terms of using psychological knowledge to contribute to improving the level of justice and equality in society.

It appears, therefore, that the APA is suggesting that psychologists should be aware of their responsibilities and committed to improving society in some way. This, however, is limited to awareness and commitment, not action. Nevertheless, the *Code* does go somewhat further as it also states that psychologists should “strive to contribute a portion of their time for little or no compensation or personal advantage” (APA, 2010, p. 3), thereby suggesting that psychologists should engage in *pro bono* work. Furthermore, the Preamble also states that psychologists “perform many roles, such as researcher, educator, diagnostician, therapist, supervisor, consultant, administrator, social interventionist, and expert witness” (APA, 2010, p. 3). This explicitly states that psychologists take many roles including the role of “social interventionist” – though, unfortunately, this role is not explicitly defined, so it is unclear whether the APA is suggesting that psychologists should engage in social justice interventionist action. Interestingly, the *Code* does not use the word “advocate”, although advocacy has a large presence in the social justice literature, which suggests that this is one way in which psychologists might act on their social justice values (Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant, 2007).

The Preamble goes on to state that “psychologists respect and protect civil and human rights and the central importance of freedom of inquiry and expression in research, teaching, and publication” (APA, 2010, p. 3). This is of particular interest when considering the place of social justice in psychology. The various articles contained within the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (United Nations, 1948) speak of equal rights to participate in government and decision making (Article 21); equal rights to work and to just working conditions, and equal pay for equal work (Article 23); the right to an adequate standard of living including food, clothing, housing and medical care (Article 25); and equal rights to education (Article 26). All of these issues are matters of social justice and, according to the Preamble of the APA’s *Ethical Code* (2010), psychologists should respect and protect these rights as part of their role. This appears to be a strong statement about the commitment of the US psychology profession’s commitment to social justice – though it is unclear how a psychologist might work to “protect” human rights in practice.

While some ideas of social justice are contained within the APA *Code* (2010), we must remember that these are aspirational principles only. It is difficult to say whether the presence of such sentiments indicate that social justice is part of the identity of the US psychology profession. Wise (2005) highlighted a relevant issue relating to a subtle, yet important change between the APA’s 1992 and 2002 *Code of Ethics*; specifically, the “General Principle of Social Responsibility” was removed. This principle stated that psychologists should take a “proactive stance in the development and promulgation of more humane law and social policy” (Wise, 2005, p. 93). She reflected on the way in which the wording of the 1992 and 2002 ethical codes shifted, so that the resulting 2002 *Code* (which was only briefly updated to become the 2010 *Code* discussed above) takes away this aspirational call to psychologists to mitigate the causes of human suffering through their work.

I stated at the beginning of this paper that Brady-Amoon et al. (2012) have commented that the APA *Code* demonstrates that the profession has a commitment to social justice. It appears that the APA *Code* does indeed go some way to incorporating both social justice values and an indication

of social justice action within its ethical *Code*. However, this is purely aspirational in nature, and therefore places no requirement on the individual psychologist to act on social justice values. As noted above, it is not my argument that ethical codes should require and dictate that psychologists should engage in social justice action, given the problems associated with such a requirement. However, I am more critical than Brady-Amoon et al. (2012) in my analysis of the APA *Code*, specifically that these aspirational principles are more limited and put less emphasis on working towards social justice than the previous APA *Ethical Code* (1992). Nevertheless, as will be seen below, the APA *Code* does perhaps indicate a greater engagement with social justice issues and a larger role of social justice in the identity of psychologists than the UK professional and ethical guidelines.

A BRITISH PERSPECTIVE: THE BRITISH PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY AND THE HEALTH AND CARE PROFESSIONS COUNCIL

In the UK, two relevant bodies, one regulatory and one professional, produce guidelines and ethical principles. Practitioner psychologists in the UK are regulated by, and required to register with, the HCPC. The BPS is also relevant as it is the professional body which represents psychologists and provides information to the public. I therefore consider both the BPS's *Generic Professional Practice Guidelines* (2008) and *Code of Ethics and Conduct* (2009) (hereafter "the BPS *Code*"), and the HCPC's *Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics* (2008) and its *Standards of Proficiency for Practitioner Psychologists* (2012).

The BPS *Code* (2009) is structured around four ethical principles: respect, competence, responsibility, and integrity, which are cited to be the main areas of ethical responsibility for UK psychologists. A preliminary glance at the *Code* shows a number of differences between it and the APA *Code*. Firstly, one would search in vain for references to "justice" in the BPS *Code*, which raises the question of the place of justice in the identity of UK psychology and psychologists. Furthermore, in contrast to the APA *Code*, there is no comparable statement about the human rights responsibilities of UK psychologists. Nevertheless, the document does state that the UN *Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) was consulted in its preparation. Within each of the four ethical principles is a statement of values and, within these, a number of specific standards that are most similar to the APA *Code*'s "Ethical standards". However, given that the BPS does not have a regulatory role, these are not enforceable, particularly as psychologists are not required to be a member of the BPS.

Within some of the statements of values relating to each of these ethical principles, the BPS *Code* does hint at, if not explicitly address, social justice issues. For example, in relation to "respect": "Psychologists value the dignity and worth of all persons, with sensitivity to the dynamics of perceived authority or influence over clients, and with particular regard to people's rights including those of privacy and self" (BPS, 2009, p. 10). This alludes to a consideration of the power imbalance in the therapeutic relationship but does not appear to consider the need for a broader consideration of power in society (Crethar et al., 2008; Thatcher, 2006). The statement of values within the section on "responsibility" considers psychologists' responsibilities, not just in relation to individual clients, but also to the general public: "including the avoidance of harm and the prevention of misuse or abuse of their contributions to society" (BPS, 2009, p. 18). However, as with the APA requirement for "awareness" of their responsibility to society, this value statement does not go that one step further in detailing what that responsibility entails. Finally, within the

statement of values relating to “integrity”, “fairness” is referred to (p. 21). The political philosopher most associated with social justice, Rawls (1971), defined justice as fairness in social institutions, implying a very strong link between the two concepts. However, the fairness referred to in the BPS *Code* seems to relate less to fairness or equality in society and wider issues, and more to issues around honesty and accuracy in one’s presentation as a psychologist.

The aims of the BPS’s *Generic Professional Practice Guidelines* (2008) include the aim “to define good psychological practice for all psychologists” (p. 1) and “to strengthen the identity of psychologists” (p. 1) in the UK. Therefore, we might expect that, if social justice is an issue of concern for psychological practice and the identity of the profession, there would be mention of such issues in this document. An earlier version of the BPS *Code* was criticised for “failing to address some of the most important aspects of work as a psychologist” (Thatcher, 2006, p. 4), specifically the issue of power and the social nature of individuals’ distress. Similar to the issues Thatcher noted with the ethical *Code*, the guidelines refer to issues of power and control; however, these discussions are focused solely on the level of the individual. Indeed, these guidelines contain no discussion of the wider role of the psychologist or any other explicit engagement with issues of social justice. In comparison to the APA *Code*, the BPS documents provide very little evidence of an engagement with social justice issues: the documents are “less aspirational and more professionally based” (Thatcher, 2006, p. 4). It is interesting to note that even within the section on professional issues, social justice values and practice do not feature, perhaps indicating that social justice values and work are not considered a part of UK psychological practice.

It is also important to consider the HCPC’s *Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics* (2008) and its *Standards of Proficiency for Practitioner Psychologists* (2012). The former document sets out 14 standards of conduct, performance, and ethics for professionals. Again, this may be considered a professional rather than an aspirational document and relates primarily to enforceable standards of behaviour. Within this, reference is made to not allowing views about sexuality, disability, race, culture, age, sex, religion, beliefs, or social or economic status to impact upon the services provided. While this indicates the importance of a non-judgemental and non-discriminatory approach, it says nothing about any requirements to challenge discrimination or oppression on these grounds, as might be suggested by a social justice approach (Goodman et al., 2004). The statement reflects the sentiment “don’t increase social injustice” rather than “promote social justice”. The standards also refer to behaving with honesty and integrity but do not outline what is meant by either of these terms, or to what they might apply.

The HCPC’s *Standards of Proficiency* (2012) (hereafter “SoP”), which outline the standards to which a registered UK psychologist must adhere, vary to some degree across the disciplines of applied psychology. Nevertheless, a significant number apply to all disciplines and it is these on which I focus, with only some reference to discipline-specific SoPs. I have found only a few instances of SoPs that can be considered to relate to matters of social justice. For example, psychologists must: “understand the need to respect, and so far as possible uphold, the rights, dignity, values and autonomy of every service user including their role in the diagnostic and therapeutic process and in maintaining health and wellbeing” (HCPC, 2012, p. 6).

As with the BPS *Code*, this indicates an emphasis on self-determination, echoing some of the values discussed in the social justice literature (Cutts, 2013). Furthermore, all branches of registered psychologists have a SoP which refers to some degree to the recognition and appropriate management of power dynamics in therapy. This is once more limited to power dynamics on the level of the individual relationship, rather than in a broader sense. All

psychologists must “practise in a non-discriminatory manner” (p. 7); however, there is no reference to challenging discrimination. A number of SoPs refer to the influence of the social context and the need to adapt practice in certain circumstances, reflecting a social justice awareness of inequality and social and political issues. However, again there is no reference to any need for psychologists to work to promote equality in society. Only clinical psychologists are required to “understand social approaches such as those informed by community, critical and social constructivist perspectives” (HCPC, 2012, p. 27).

This analysis shows scant reference to social justice issues in the BPS and HCPC professional and ethical documents in comparison to the APA *Code* in the USA. Furthermore, in the UK documents, there appears to be no reference to psychologists engaging in social justice work. To the extent to which the UK documents represent the identity of the UK psychological profession, social justice does not appear to feature in this identity. Therefore, while I might argue that the APA does not go far enough, the UK psychology profession appears to be even further from embracing social justice values and action.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have reflected on the references to social justice values and work within the ethical and professional guidelines of psychological professions in two nations. This analysis has found a number of differences between the US and UK documents with regard to social justice, in that the APA documents more clearly articulate a commitment to social justice values. Nevertheless, given the ethical nature of social justice, one might question why there is not a more explicit social justice presence within the APA *Code* itself. There may be difficulties around incorporating these ideas into the ‘enforceable’ elements of the APA *Code*, or indeed the HCPC SoPs. Nevertheless, even the ‘aspirational’ elements of the APA *Code* and the professional documents of the BPS either do not incorporate much reference to social justice values (the BPS) or engage with such values to a relatively small extent, particularly in comparison to previous versions of their guidelines.

In summary, while the professional and ethical guidelines of the two countries studied reflect some level of engagement with issues of social justice, there are differences between their guidelines. Given the potential for professional and ethical guidelines to contribute to the public identity of a profession, this raises questions about the identity of psychology internationally in relation to social justice. If, as I suggested above, social justice is, or ought to be, a priority for psychology and part of the identity of the profession, then professional and ethical guidelines should be amended to reflect this. Given the potential issues with the enforceable elements of a code, amending the aspirational elements of such documents would surely be appropriate if they indeed represent the “*very highest ethical ideals*” (APA, 2010, p.3, emphasis added).

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Laura Anne Winter is a HCPC Registered Counselling Psychologist and a BPS Chartered Psychologist. She currently works as a Lecturer in Counselling Psychology at the University of Manchester and as a Counselling Psychologist in an NHS Complex Primary Care Psychology Service in South Manchester.