

Evaluating the Confronting Hegemonic Ideas Speaker Series: Implications for the Education of Counsellors and Psychologists in Training

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Abstract

The Confronting Hegemonic Ideas Speaker Series was proposed to increase academic and professional engagement with ideological diversity for counsellors and psychologists in training. A survey was sent to all 329 attendees of the seven talks in the Speaker Series, and feedback/evaluation surveys were received from over 30% of attendees. Evaluation ratings were extremely positive, and narrative feedback was also generally favourable. Based on the number of individuals in attendance and their variability across current vocation, gender, nationality, race, and ethnicity, it appears that the Speaker Series was successful in widely increasing awareness of heterodox viewpoints and research typically ignored or ostracized in counsellor and psychologist training programs. With this promising evaluation data, it is recommended that other training programs implement similar speaker series for the education and training of counsellors and psychologists.

Keywords: speaker series, confronting hegemonic ideas, counsellor education, psychologist education, counsellors-in-training, psychologists-in-training



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Coursework related to diversity and multiculturalism is a requirement for both counsellor and psychologist training programs (e.g., Canadian Psychological Association [CPA], 2011; Robertson & Borgen, 2002), which includes variability in age, gender, culture and ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, physical and psychological ability, socioeconomic status, lifestyle, and family patterns. In addition, counsellor educators and psychology faculty have an ethical obligation to foster awareness of emerging therapists' personal values and how to avoid imposing those values on their clients (e.g., Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association [CCPA], 2020; CPA, 2017).

Defining and Understanding Ideological Diversity

The negative impact of racial and ethnic biases on therapeutic relationships and therapeutic outcomes is widely recognized (MacDougall & Arthur, 2007; Owen et al., 2014; Vasquez, 2007) and is a common focus of multicultural competence training (Collins & Arthur, 2008; Tao et al., 2015). However, research supports that other biases, including sociopolitical and gender biases, tend to exert an even stronger impact on interpersonal and therapeutic relationships (Connor et al., 2023; Haidt et al., 2003; Stahre, 2023). Despite this, standards for accredited education and training programs do not formally mandate being culturally responsive to ideological diversity (e.g., note the absence of ideological diversity mentioned in CPA, 2011; Robertson & Borgen, 2002).

Ideology can be defined as “a comprehensive framework that comprises one’s values, ideals, and attitudes about society and provides a lens to understand social and political arrangements...form[ed] as a result of dynamic interaction with the social world based on one’s identities, thoughts, and experiences” (Johnson & Peacock, 2020, p. 56). Ideological diversity can be defined as the practice of promoting a range of perspectives (including sociopolitical ones), backgrounds, and personal experiences to answer questions within a broader spirit of intellectual humility, empathy, trust, and curiosity through utilizing respectful debate and constructive disagreement (see Heterodox Academy, 2023; Silander et al., 2020). Some argue that ideological diversity and sociopolitical values are not only a neglected aspect of multiculturally-competent practice but one of the most important factors for therapeutic interventions to be truly client-centred because sociopolitical values are often central to a client’s personality and identity (Redding, 2020).

The lack of attention to ideological diversity in education and training standards may be reflective of the seeming homogeneity of ideology amongst the vast majority of counsellor educators, psychology faculty, and mental health professionals. Indeed, it has been found that counsellors lean strongly liberal in their political beliefs, with only 20-25% of counsellors holding conservative viewpoints or political ideologies (Norton & Tan, 2019; Steele et al., 2014). One study found that 84% of psychology professors identify as liberal with only 8% as conservative (Gross & Simmons, 2014), and another found that social psychologists were overwhelmingly liberal (95%) when it came to social issues (Inbar & Lammers, 2012).

However, according to a survey of voting intentions in Canada prior to the 2025 election, 34% of Canadians reported intention to vote for the federal Conservative Party of Canada, with 33.7% of votes in the 2021 Canadian federal election cast for the Conservative Party (Leger, 2022). In the 2025 federal election, the actual number of conservative voters increased, with approximately 42% of votes cast for the Conservative Party (Leake et al., 2025). These voting behaviours and intentions are not limited to individuals of European descent (i.e., racially White). In Canada, polling estimates had 31% of decided Indigenous and

35% of decided Filipino-Canadian voters intending to vote for the Conservative party in the 2025 election (Pollara Strategic Insights, 2023). Pre-election polling data also indicated that more than half of the two largest racialized groups in Canada (56% of South Asians, 55% of East Asians) supported the Conservative Party of Canada (Mainstreet Research, 2025). Some of these voters preferred the Conservative Party of Canada due to their harder line stance on reducing immigration, noting that racialized Canadians (45%) are more likely than White Canadians (36%) to believe that Canada is accepting too many immigrants from visible minority groups (EnviroNics Institute for Survey Research, 2024). This contrasts with mental health professionals being decisively and strongly pro-immigration (e.g., Alfaro & Bui, 2017; CPA and Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2018). This data signifies a divide, and a growing one, between the majority of counsellors and psychologists (who are still predominantly White) and a notable and growing segment of the racialized and ethnic minoritized population of the U.S. and Canada. The predominant sociopolitical ideology among counsellors and psychologists is not reflective of the general public's political ideology, and the sociopolitical diversity of the general population in Canada remains largely underrepresented in its counsellors and psychologists.

Impact of Ideological Homogeneity

The ideological leanings of the therapy professions in Canada could be contributing to disproportionately ignoring, downplaying, or maligning perspectives that counter hegemonic narratives and perspectives in professional counselling and psychology. For example, the ideological filter of the therapy professions might explain why many seem unaware that the dominant paradigm of social justice adopted is premised on a particular model of social justice and is connected to particular theories (Thrift & Sugarman, 2019). However, alternative models of social justice exist (e.g., Fraser, 2009) and have been advocated for by some counsellor educators and psychologists (e.g., Thrift & Sugarman, 2019). This includes those that can still be considered social justice but often not recognized as such under current hegemonic norms in counselling and psychology, such as the classic liberal view of social justice (Hall & Shera, 2020), and conservative social justice (Tetlock & Mitchell, 1993; Thyer, 2010).

The ideological leanings of the therapy professions would not be of concern if it was not for scientific confirmation of their negative impact, as outlined below. There is direct and indirect evidence, and both quantitative and qualitative evidence. The following is a small sampling of research and scholarship on the ways in which ideological homogeneity negatively impacts counsellor educators, psychology faculty, students, researchers, therapists and ultimately clients.

Educators and Students

Recent surveys confirm that psychology as a field (in terms of educators and students) is overwhelmingly left-leaning, with liberal professors outnumbering conservatives by a margin as high as 15 to one (Redding, 2023b; Frisby et al., 2023), creating structural barriers for those with divergent sociopolitical beliefs. Moreover, upon entering training programs, Jussim (2012) outlines 14 types of oft-invisible privilege bestowed upon faculty and students in counselling and psychology programs who are ideologically liberal, including the safety of sharing political views with colleagues without fear of retribution. More recent evidence demonstrates that psychologists themselves report willingness to discriminate against conservative colleagues in publishing, hiring, and grant review, reinforcing concerns that ideological privilege remains deeply embedded in the profession (Honeycutt & Jussim, 2022; Redding, 2023b).

In training programs, a lack of ideological diversity may result in an unintentional silencing of valid alternative viewpoints, which minimizes opportunities for students to discuss and deeply understand important topics related to the field and to the clients it serves (e.g., those related to race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and politics; Zhou & Zhou, 2022). These are important for the development of critical thinking skills. As well, students who question or ask to clarify politically divisive topics may experience negative treatment from faculty and other students (Giordano et al., 2018; Inbar & Lammers, 2012). For example, one study found that politically conservative counselling students have reported lower levels of psychological safety and less perceived appreciation of differences from their counselling programs than did politically liberal students, implying that the political values of the majority may be influencing the acceptability of alternative viewpoints in their programs (Giordano et al., 2018). These findings are consistent with reports of widespread self-censorship and suppression of dissenting perspectives in psychology training contexts (Frisby et al., 2023; Maranto et al., 2023).

A study by Inbar and Lammers (2012) found that social psychologists reported that they would be somewhat inclined to discriminate against conservative colleagues in reviewing their research, in reviewing their grant applications, and when making hiring decisions, which could also apply to their treatment of students. Another study found that doctoral students in psychology reported extreme uncertainty and discomfort about whether it was okay to bring up political climate in their clinical supervision (McCarthy et al., 2022). Further, political similarity between student and supervisor was shown in one study to impact the supervision experiences of doctoral students in psychology, in that supervisees who believe that their political beliefs are like their supervisors report a stronger supervisory alliance which, in turn, is associated with a whole host of positive training outcomes, including greater skills development and overall well-being compared to supervisees who may not believe they have similar beliefs as their supervisors (McCarthy et al., 2022).

If students are not admitted to counsellor or psychologist training programs due to political beliefs or are alternatively not applying to these programs due to self-selecting out of a profession that seems unwelcoming to their viewpoints, this limits opportunities for students to experience ideological diversity in the classroom. Such selective sociopolitical and ideological exposure during formative training years has the unintended effects of likely promoting a confirmation bias (Nickerson, 1998) and reducing critical thinking skills (Lamont, 2020). Additionally, selective exposure to alternative viewpoints can reduce trainees' ability to work effectively with ideologically different clients (Redding, 2020; Silander et al., 2020). Therapists without sufficient exposure to diverse viewpoints and ideologies during training run the risk of “ideological countertransference,” the tendency to strongly align with clients whose values are similar to one's own, and to create distance from clients whose values diverge (Silander et al., 2020).

Researchers

Researchers are also seemingly impacted by ideological homogeneity. Ideology not only impacts what is researched, potentially greatly reducing the evidence base for counter-perspectives, but also contributes to the creation of blind spots whereby inconsistent data is overlooked or ignored. Research that contradicts prevailing ideological commitments is often held to a higher methodological standard, while research aligned with dominant political perspectives may pass with less scrutiny (Honeycutt & Jussim, 2022; O'Donohue, 2023). One salient example is research on diversity training initiatives. Despite their high popularity and iniquitousness, the counselling and psychology professions seem generally unaware of the very low effectiveness of most diversity training on real-world outcomes and future behaviours

(Dobbin & Kalev, 2018), including implicit bias training (Atewologun et al., 2018), and thus are hindered in developing more effective training due to a lack of awareness of this need.

Therapists

The work of therapists and their clinical training is similarly impacted. Returning to the issue of potential ideological countertransference (Silander et al., 2020), this is the exact opposite of inclusivity in practice. As Redding and Cobb (2023) argue, sociopolitical values represent a deep culture in psychotherapy, meaning that overlooking them undermines culturally competent practice (Redding & Satel, 2023). For example, if counsellors and psychologists are not able to or unwilling to support the mental health of individuals with ideologically-different perspectives, or if they provide inferior or biased services to these individuals, this creates a noticeable gap in services for a notably large segment of the general population. Further, termination of therapy or refusing to see a client based solely on a client's identity is unethical, as therapists are to respect client diversity and avoid engaging in discrimination in treatment practices (CCPA, 2020; CPA, 2017). About 49% of therapists readily admit and are aware that their sociopolitical beliefs moderately or strongly impact how they practice in session (Bilgrave & Deluty, 2002). About 34% of therapists in one study admitted that knowing the client's different sociopolitical leanings would bias their diagnosis, 31% said it would adversely affect the therapy, 40% realized it created a real risk of imposing therapist values on the client, and 50% recognized it had the potential to damage the therapeutic relationship (Redding, 2020) – and this is based on awareness and self-report, as social desirability and implicit biases suggest that these numbers are much higher. Further, 58% of therapists in this study thought it was appropriate to directly challenge the client's sociopolitical values, something that they did not state in response to the client's other cultural values (racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, etc.; Redding, 2020).

Psychologists and counsellors may also commit microaggressions against clients possessing divergent sociopolitical values or ideologies, such as stereotyping all conservatives as cognitively rigid, authoritarian, racist, or immoral or seeing their values as wrong or inferior (Redding, 2020). This is despite, for example, unbiased research demonstrating left-wing authoritarianism is just as common as the well-touted right-wing authoritarianism (e.g., Costello et al., 2022).

Psychologists and counsellors may also misperceive a client as characterologically flawed, morally corrupt, or mentally ill due to ideological differences rather than objective clinical opinion, and clients can often sense this (Redding, 2020; Silander et al., 2020). For example, one client quoted in Redding's (2020) study about sociopolitical values in therapy said, "I think that the therapist's different beliefs temporarily made her not care much about helping me because she seemed to cut that session short and acted distant" (p. 434). Another said, "By some of what she said, her body posture, and the way she said what she did, it became very clear to me that my beliefs (and thus me) were the epitome of everything she was raised to think of as 'wrong.' Her demeanor took on a coldness after this exchange" (p. 435). These issues align with broader concerns that ideological homogeneity risks not only narrowing research and training but also compromising the ethical integrity of the psychological profession (Redding, 2023a; Frisby et al., 2023).

The evidence also comes from therapists themselves. One therapist quoted in Redding (2020) said, "Finding out that my client was raised hard-core Christian and understanding the impact of her strict religious culture has had on her made it difficult for me to find a way to work with her because her beliefs were so rigid – this contributed to me liking her less" (p. 435). Another therapist said, "In my opinion, it was a good thing that I might impose my values on the client, because this kid's views foster prejudice, hate, and materialism, which I do not

believe will serve him well in the wrong run... The client's assumption that those less fortunate than he do nothing but collect money from the government... I came to see him as an entitled, privileged, materialistic brat" (p. 435). These shocking statements from therapists in response to clients with differing values underscore the arguments made previously in this paper – educators must better prepare students to respond to clients from a broad range of backgrounds, including political and ideological backgrounds.

A Speaker Series

It is unclear how educators and trainers of counsellors and psychologists in Canada are currently engaging with the topic of ideological and sociopolitical diversity in their programs. One recent qualitative study demonstrated that students, after graduation, discover that their university education did not prepare them to discuss issues related to ideological diversity (Johnson & Peacock, 2020). These researchers sought to identify recent graduates' experiences of ideological diversity and found that these graduates reported that, while in university, they generally lived in a bubble of ideological homogeneity. Upon graduation and entering the workforce, these civic-minded recent graduates (including those in psychology and education) reported difficulty navigating conversations with co-workers and clients where there was near-constant ideological misalignment. They reported that outside of a few isolated experiences with different opinions, their university experience had not prepared them for engaging with people with differing ideological beliefs. This study further demonstrated the need for programs to prepare students to interact with colleagues and future clients who could hold ideologies or sociopolitical values with which they may disagree.

As illustrated thus far, training programs need to improve their ability to develop culturally competent therapists who can better serve the needs of ideologically and politically diverse clients. Educators, for one, can improve training through acknowledging ideological diversity and framing ideology as a client identity and as diversity. Duarte et al. (2015) suggest that professors openly acknowledge that political homogeneity is a problem in the fields of counselling and psychology and provide opportunities to talk about the issue openly in a mutually respectful environment with colleagues and students. They also suggest seeking out and openly welcoming input from non-liberal colleagues and students, which may not exist amongst program faculty and thus have to be sought from elsewhere. One way in which education programs could integrate ideological diversity into their curricula is through guest speakers (Kong, 2018; Leor, 2015). Guest speakers can provide unique perspectives that would otherwise not be available in standard curricula, especially for programs with a smaller faculty or situated in larger, homogenous communities. Speaker series have been used to educate about multicultural sensitivity (Karpinski & Heinerichs, 2015), and speaker series are continuing to be used in higher education on a variety of topics, all intending to raise awareness of topics that are typically absent from standard curricula.

Based on the evidence provided in the above literature review on the need to increase conversations about ideological diversity in training programs and the potential usefulness of a speaker series in promoting awareness of diverse perspectives, a speaker series was proposed as an innovative model of trainee engagement with ideological diversity. A speaker series focused on ideological diversity would promote the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists, 4th edition (CPA, 2017) standards I.1, III.8, and III. 21, and Code of Ethics of the CCPA (2020) standard A7. This speaker series was held for students, faculty, and community members connected to the counselling psychology program in the Faculty of Education at The University of British Columbia, as well as members of the Heterodox Academy. The remainder of this article will report on the Confronting Hegemonic Ideas Speaker Series and its impact on those students training to become counsellors and psychologists and the broader academic and

professional community, with the underlying purpose of evaluating how effective the Speaker Series was with respect to its objectives.

Methods

Program Development

The Confronting Hegemonic Ideas Speaker Series was developed by a member of the Counselling Psychology program in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia [the second author], which trains both master's level counsellors and doctoral level psychologists. It became a collaborative effort between the Counselling Psychology Program and Heterodox Academy, a non-profit advocacy group of academics committed to enhancing the quality of research and promoting open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement in institutions of higher learning (Heterodox Academy, 2023).

The Speaker Series had three specific objectives related to promoting ideological and sociopolitical diversity: 1) Increase awareness of research findings and facts as well as heterodox viewpoints typically ignored or ostracized in counsellor and psychologist training programs because they do not conform to hegemonic narratives and dominant perspectives; 2) Model, by faculty members, intellectual and cultural humility and respectful engagement with speakers who present controversial/unconventional perspectives, and 3) Promote intellectually rigorous research and an improvement in the ability of trainee counsellors/psychologists to serve those who differ from them, including with respect to sociopolitical and ideological diversity.

Current students, faculty, staff, and alumni of the Counselling Psychology Program at the University of British Columbia were invited to attend the Speaker Series, as well as members of the Heterodox Academy. Faculty members and speakers were able to invite specific guests to attend. The Speaker Series was advertised via university listservs, Facebook pages, the Heterodox Academy online newsletter, and the official Counselling Psychology program social media channels. Seven events were organized within seven months. The structure for each event was as follows: a one-hour talk by the speaker, a 30-minute question and answer period with the speaker, and a subsequent small-group discussion for attendees without the speaker present. The events were held virtually via Zoom webinars, with optional group viewing rooms held on the university campus. Eligible individuals were required to register for the event. At registration, attendees indicated their primary affiliation and gender, and willingness to receive a feedback survey, a reading list, and information about the Heterodox Academy. Each event was recorded and uploaded to the second author's (a counselling psychology faculty member's) YouTube page at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6FI6I3exx_gEKIkEOM9mSA.

Speakers

A list of potential speakers was developed through brainstorming and consultation with counselling psychology faculty members. Speakers were selected to be invited based on their contributions to the field of counselling, psychology and/or the social sciences by (a) presenting facts and research findings that contrast hegemonic perspectives in professional counselling and psychology, (b) directly critiquing hegemonic perspectives, or (c) offering alternative non-orthodox viewpoints.

Seven speakers agreed to present and were compensated an average of about 400 Canadian dollars each for their time and expertise. Four were psychologists, one was a Ph.D. candidate in clinical psychology, one was a psychiatrist, and one was an academic economist. Speakers presented their talks on a variety of topics, including social justice, ideological bias in research, racial equality, men's experience of domestic violence, psychiatric drug use,

trigger warnings, and psychotherapy as a Western cultural healing practice. Table 1 provides more information about each speaker and talk.

Measure: Feedback Survey

Following the event, participant feedback was obtained through evaluation and satisfaction surveys administered online through the Qualtrics platform. All attendees who agreed during registration were sent a link to the survey. The survey included three Likert-scale items and four open-ended questions. Attendees were reminded of the three goals of the Speaker Series and were asked, “To what extent was the talk and the selection of the speaker consistent with these goals?” on a scale from 1 (Not at all consistent) to 5 (Extremely consistent). Attendees were asked, “How would you rate the presenter’s knowledge in the subject area?” on a scale from 1 (Not at all knowledgeable) to 5 (Extremely knowledgeable). Attendees were also asked, “Overall, how would you rank the usefulness of the talk to you personally, professionally, and/or academically?” on a scale from 1 (Not at all useful) to 5 (Extremely useful). In addition, open-ended questions asked attendees to describe the impact of the speaker on their opinion of the topic of the talk, and the aspects of the talk that they found most and least impactful, most and least interesting, and most and least useful, and lastly, any other comments, ideas, or suggestions. Finally, the feedback survey included a short demographic form which asked attendees’ primary affiliation, gender, and ethnicity. As this feedback survey was considered a program evaluation activity, we were not required to seek research ethics board approval, as outlined by the Tri-Council Policy Statement Article 2.5 (Panel on Research Ethics, 2022, p. 21).

Analysis of Data

Descriptive statistics were computed to determine the demographic characteristics of attendees who completed the feedback survey and the attendance of each event in the Speaker Series. Descriptive statistics were also calculated for the three Likert questions on the feedback survey. Qualitative responses were evaluated through an inductive basic content analysis of manifest/literal content with minimal higher-level abstraction by the first author and reviewed by the second author for confirmation of trustworthiness, with discussion and consensus resulting in the final themes interpreted from the data (Rigor & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016).

Results

Attendees

Across the seven talks, 525 people registered and were approved to attend ($M = 75.6$, $SD = 31.6$, $Mdn = 67.0$, $Min = 50$, $Max = 150$ each). In total, 329 people attended across the seven talks ($M = 47.7$, $SD = 18.5$, $Mdn = 45$, $Min = 29$, $Max = 88$), which amounts to 62.7% of the total registrants. Table 1 includes a breakdown of registration and attendance per talk.

Of the total number of attendees, 48.3% were from Canada ($N = 159$), 41.9% were from the U.S. ($N = 138$), 4.6% were from the United Kingdom ($N = 15$), and 5.1% from other countries ($N = 17$), including Australia, Austria, Brazil, Germany, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, South Africa, Switzerland, and Turkey. About 45.9% of attendees identified as women ($N = 151$), 36.2% identified as men ($N = 119$), 1.8% identified as non-binary ($N = 6$), 0.6% identified as transgender ($N = 2$), and 15.5% did not provide this information ($N = 51$). About 33.3% of attendees were affiliated with the hosting Counselling Psychology program ($N = 110$), including 63 current students, 8 alumni, and 39 past/present faculty or staff. About 59.5% of attendees were Heterodox Academy members, affiliates, or friends ($N = 197$), and 6.7% were special guests by invitation only, which included select faculty and students from other counselling psychology programs in Canada ($N = 22$).

Feedback

A total of 315 attendees consented to being sent a feedback survey across the seven talks, and of those, 97 surveys were completed (30.1% response rate), with an average of 15 surveys completed per talk ($SD = 5.9$, $Mdn = 13.5$, $Min = 8$, $Max = 26$). About 32.3% of the surveys were completed by individuals from the hosting Counselling Psychology program ($N = 29$), while 58.9% of surveys were completed by members of the Heterodox Academy ($N = 53$), 7.8% were completed by unaffiliated guests ($N = 7$), with one person (1.0%) not reporting their affiliation. About 44.4% identified as men ($N = 40$), 41.1% identified as women ($N = 37$), with 14.4% identifying as transgender, non-binary, a gender not listed, or preferring not to answer ($N = 13$). The majority of respondents identified as White/European descent (72.2%, $N = 65$), 3.3% identified as Japanese ($N = 3$), 5.6% identified as multiple ethnicities ($N = 5$), and 11.1% collectively identified as other ethnicities, including Southeast Asian, Korean, Chinese, and Arab ($N = 10$), while 7.7% preferred not to report their ethnicity or left it blank ($N = 7$).

When asked to what extent the talk and selection of the speaker were consistent with the stated goals of the Speaker Series, across the seven talks, the respondents rated them as “Very Consistent”, on average, with a mean score of 4.4 ($SD = 0.8$). When asked about the speaker’s knowledge area of the subject, on average, they rated the speakers as “Extremely knowledgeable,” with a mean score of 4.6 ($SD = 0.6$). When asked about the usefulness of the talk for each respondent specifically, on average, they rated the talks as “Very Useful,” with a mean score of 4.1 ($SD = 1.1$). See Table 2 for a breakdown of feedback survey results by talk.

The feedback survey also asked respondents to list the most impactful, interesting, or useful aspects of the talks. Several themes emerged from these responses. In general, respondents commented on the importance of the evidence provided by the speakers to support their arguments, including citing data, statistics, meta-analytical results, qualitative evidence, and references. They also repeatedly reported that the background information (e.g., the historical context) of the particular issue or argument discussed was impactful. Other common themes that emerged included: clear and reason-based arguments; recognizing and addressing the opposite sides of each argument; analyzing methodological flaws or biases in previous research; and discussing implications and potential courses of action. Respondents also frequently reported that the Q&A session at the end of the talks was useful.

Respondents were also asked to list the least impactful, interesting, or useful aspects of the talks. There were multiple reports that the introduction to the Speaker Series was too long (theme 1), that aspects of some of the talks were not highly relevant to counsellors/psychologists (e.g., discussion of U.S. admission policies; theme 2), and they expressed a desire for more practical skills/tools for emerging therapists (theme 3). Some reported that a few of the speakers were too monotone (theme 4). Respondents also commented that the discussion afterwards could have been more directed in a way to help foster difficult conversations about the topic of the speaker’s talk (theme 5).

Respondents were also asked to outline whether their opinions on the topic changed in any way after attending the talk. The following are a select sampling of statements from attendees that reported their opinion changed (theme 6):

1. “The talk encouraged me to think about ways in which terms like social justice, which I often draw on in my research and writing as a student, cannot be used ahistorically, without consideration of the histories attending these terms and a sense of how my own definition, as a researcher, therapist, and student, aligns with historical or contemporary definitions” (in response to the social justice talk).

2. “I gained a deeper insight into the topic. Lots of novel pieces of information, especially concerning research findings and perspectives” (in response to the ideological diversity talk).
3. “I didn't realize how widespread this issue is and how powerless and isolated male victims of IPV [interpersonal partner violence] can feel. Prior to the talk, I hadn't given the issue much thought because, as the speaker said, the media, legislation and cultural attitudes think of IPV with the woman as the victim, and as a feminist, I have felt that my concerns and support should be focused on women. However, [the speaker] highlighted very impactfully the dangers of assuming this, specifically with reference to the study on male victims of homicide. As a trainee counsellor and psychotherapist, I feel it is very important to be aware of this issue when supporting future clients. Thanks for putting this on” (in response to the interpersonal partner violence talk).
4. “I felt more strongly that it's important to carry out research on unpopular issues. One point that was made clear was that all populations could benefit by finding ways to help this potentially underserved and understudied group, because they are part of families, communities, etc.” (in response to the interpersonal partner violence talk).
5. “Although there was a lot of talk of prevalence numbers and research, the information was really brought alive by case studies, examples, and quotes. The talk also touched on the intersectional nature of some issues, such as childhood abuse and immigration. I felt that this talk and the discussion that followed would make it easier for me to relate to and empathize with my potential clients” (in response to the interpersonal partner violence talk).
6. “I didn't come to the talk with a firm commitment for or against trigger warnings, but now believe that I can make better decisions about when/how to include them (or not). I appreciated learning about the limited research on the topic and, as noted in the discussion, recognize that more research is needed to support well-reasoned conclusions” (in response to the trigger warnings talk).
7. “I'm understanding that investigating a new perspective doesn't mean I must make it my own, and that I don't need to be black and white about the value of cultural approaches” (in response to the talk on psychotherapy as a Western healing practice).

Discussion

The Confronting Hegemonic Ideas Speaker Series was developed with the intention to counter the growing reluctance to discuss controversial topics or admit willingness to learn about unpopular viewpoints (Zhou & Barbaro, 2023) and the retrospective awareness of under-preparation to work with ideologically diverse clients after graduation (Johnson & Peacock, 2020). Specifically, the Speaker Series set out to (a) increase awareness of heterodox viewpoints, research findings and facts typically ignored or ostracized in counsellor and counselling psychologist training programs, (b) model (by faculty members) intellectual and cultural humility and respectful engagement with speakers who present controversial or unconventional perspectives, and (c) promote intellectually rigorous research and an improvement in the ability of counsellors and psychologists in training to serve those who differ from them, including with respect to sociopolitical values and ideological diversity. The purpose of this evaluation was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Speaker Series with respect to these objectives.

Response rate for the feedback and evaluation surveys was approximately 30%, which is in the moderate range commonly observed in voluntary online program evaluation surveys

(Fincham, 2008; Taherdoost & Madanchian, 2024). While this allowed for quantitative and qualitative analyses, the possibility remains that the nonrespondents may have differed in meaningful ways from those who responded. Evaluation ratings were extremely positive, and narrative feedback was also generally favourable. Overall, the talks were rated as ‘very consistent’ with the goals of the Speaker Series. Speakers were rated, on average, as ‘extremely knowledgeable,’ and the usefulness of the talks was rated, on average, as ‘very useful.’

Objective 1: Increasing Awareness of Heterodox Facts, Research Findings, and Viewpoints

The talks were rated, overall, as ‘very consistent’ with this objective, and this validates the Speaker Series as providing access to controversial or unorthodox perspectives, research with heterodox conclusions, and inconvenient facts/findings that do not conform to hegemonic narratives and dominant perspectives in counselling and psychology. Based on the number of individuals in attendance ($N = 329$, only 33% of who were affiliated with the hosting program) and their variability across current vocation (student, professional, academic etc.), gender, nationality, race, and ethnicity, it does appear that the Speaker Series was successful in widely increasing awareness of heterodox viewpoints and research typically ignored or ostracized in therapist training programs, not only at the hosting counselling psychology program but also across some other therapist training programs across Canada and seemingly across various other countries and professionals. Overall, the feedback from attendees who completed the surveys was very positive, with students, faculty, and professionals all commonly reporting that they were better informed on these issues. The Speaker Series continues to have an impact. As of March 28th, 2025, the seven talks have been collectively viewed over 23,000 times on YouTube.

Objective 2: Modelling Cultural and Intellectual Humility

With the regular attendance of faculty from the hosting program as well as from other programs across Canada and the U.S., and no incidents from faculty or professionals, there was a clear meta-message that speakers were valued guests of the hosting program and students received ample modelling of respectful engagement with speakers who presented controversial/unconventional perspectives, especially during the question-and-answer period after each talk, as well as with others during the subsequent unstructured small group discussion without the speaker present.

Objective 3: Promoting Rigorous Research and the Ability to Serve a Broader Range of Clients

It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which such exposure and engagement with these heterodox speakers and topics promoted intellectually rigorous research, as this is somewhat intangible and requires long-term follow-up to track the impact and thesis, dissertation, and faculty research at the host program. In the future, metrics could include the extent to which students and faculty at the host program, as well as other attendees, begin to research the heterodox topics presented upon, as well as the extent to which the critiques provided by the speakers show up in the limitations sections of research manuscripts. Indirectly, the impact on research could also be assessed in the future by the extent to which the speakers and their topics are being included in the curriculum through examination of course syllabi.

Nevertheless, the extent to which attendance at the talks helped therapists and students better serve a broader range of clients, particularly with respect to sociopolitical values and ideological diversity, was more implied by numerous comments from the attendees (for example, see statements three, four and five in the results section). Overall, the feedback from attendees who completed the surveys with very positive, with students, faculty, and

professionals all commonly reporting that the speakers' talks were useful to them professionally. The Speaker Series led to an immediate increase in noticeable discussion among local students and faculty in classrooms and hallways on the topics and speakers. Several alumni reached out by email, expressing their appreciation for and the impact the Speaker Series was having on them as professionals. These effects were immediate, but it is unknown about the longer-term effects of the Speaker Series on the practices of educators, counsellors, psychologists, and students during practicums and internships. It is hoped that they recall their lived experiences and reflections during the talks and that the talks were impactful in some lasting way on their practices.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is nonresponse bias that could arise from the 30% response rate. Although a 30% response rate is well in line with many program evaluation and voluntary online survey benchmarks (Fincham, 2008; Taherdoost & Madanchian, 2024) and is considered a respectable “moderate” response rate, it falls below what some consider ideal for strong generalizability and representativeness (i.e., response rate greater than 60%). Accordingly, the nonrespondent 70% may differ in their perception or experiences from the respondents of the survey, in that those less engaged with different ideological perspectives may have been less likely to respond. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from the survey data should be interpreted with caution and may not be generalizable to all attendees.

Implications

This speaker series brought diverse perspectives to educators, therapists and students/counsellors/psychologists-in-training. The sample of participants, while not necessarily representative of the broader population due to the lack of random sampling from the population, is practically useful and generalizable: they represent those willing to attend an extra-curricular/optional speaker series talk, which is who a speaker series targets. With this promising evaluation data, there is justification for more formal investigations to evaluate the ability of a future speaker series to increase cultural competence in working with ideologically diverse individuals, to promote better therapeutic outcomes for these individuals, as well as stimulate more ideologically non-biased research. Based on the observed outcomes of this series, other therapist training programs across Canada should consider a speaker series format to promote improved cultural competence for counsellors and psychologists in training to work with ideologically different and socio-politically diverse clients as well as to promote more intellectually diverse and rigorous research (see Clark & Winegard, 2020; Jussim et al., 2016; Martin, 2016). Programs in other social science and education programs, including teacher education, should consider developing, implementing and evaluating speaker series intended to counter ideological homogeneity and promote thoughtful engagement and evaluation with heterodox perspectives in other subject areas.

Social psychology research teaches us that nurturing prosocial interactions between people of different ideologies, like this speaker series was intended to do, has been shown to enhance problem-solving abilities and promote future discoveries (Duarte et al., 2015). On the contrary, when ideological diversity is suppressed, the likelihood of ethical violations is increased (Duarte et al., 2015). Therefore, at the training program level, analogous to other diversity variables (e.g., race ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, age, nationality, disability/ability status), it is important to realize that counsellors and psychologists are very unlikely to provide maximally effective services if (a) they cannot relationally connect with those who hold different identities (and their associated sociopolitical values or ideological positions), (b) if they do not sufficiently understand the characteristic experiences and values of ideologically different clients so they do not “prejudiciously

articulate another's worldview..." (Silander, 2020, p. 9), (c) if they lack understanding of their own ideological and sociopolitical identities and the impact they have on their practice, and (d) if they are unaware about culturally-responsive interventions for ideologically variant individuals (Arthur & Januszkowski, 2001). This all should be done within a spirit of cultural and intellectual humility (Heterodox Academy, 2023).

In line with these implications, liberation psychotherapy (Comas-Diaz, 2020) offers an additional lens that can be generalized for thinking about the aims of a speaker series. Critical-Liberation psychotherapy calls for centring sociopolitical context in psychological practice, fostering critical consciousness, and empowering clients and communities facing systemic forms of oppression (Morrill & Comas-Diaz, 2025). Liberation-oriented perspectives highlight how training initiatives, such as this speaker series focused on ideological diversity, can broaden cultural competence and challenge implicit norms and power dynamics that shape which perspectives are deemed legitimate within psychology. By situating ideological diversity as an aspect of liberation psychology's emphasis on social justice, future speaker series could serve not only to reduce being in an ideological bubble but also to promote healing, dialogue, and solidarity across ideological divides.

Unfortunately, a lot of students do not fully realize their ideological bubble until they graduate and engage in the world of work (Johnson & Peacock, 2020). And, based on the arguments and research presented above, the therapy profession does not seem like a welcoming place for potential therapists who hold very different sociopolitical or ideological leanings, including many immigrants and refugees from conservative, non-Western parts of the world. There may come a day when counsellors and psychologists may face mounting scrutiny for their lack of ideological diversity and the ideological bubble surrounding their profession. There may come a day when louder voices critique the hypocrisy involved in stating a commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, yet ignoring certain types of diversity, and additionally highlighting how, either consciously or unconsciously, the profession excludes those who substantially disagree with hegemonic political principles. But for now, counsellor and psychologist education and training in Canada remains primarily ideologically segregated within an ideological bubble and devoid of true ideological diversity and a speaker series such as the one reported in this paper may be a step towards rapprochement – and a step towards preparing more versatile counsellors and psychologists with expansive multicultural competence capable of serving a wide range of clients in need, not just those they politically or ideologically align with.

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APPENDIX

Table 1

Speaker Series Registration and Attendance

	Speaker	Bio	Event Title	Registered	Attended
1	Dr. Erin Thrift	Dr. Thrift is a registered clinical counsellor and faculty member in the Faculty of Educational Studies at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Surrey, BC, and has a PhD in Educational Psychology. Her scholarship is interdisciplinary, critical, and historical and has included the meaning and implications of the term “social justice” in psychological and educational contexts.	<i>Social Justice and Counselling: A Critical Perspective</i>	75	57
2	Dr. Nina Silander	Dr. Silander is a licensed psychologist at Brooks Rehabilitation Hospital in Jacksonville, FL, U.S.A. and has a PhD in Clinical Psychology. Her research focuses on ideological bias in psychology and effects of this bias on psychological research, professional roles and clinical practice.	<i>What to Know About Ideological Bias in Psychological Research & Its Clinical Implications</i>	65	39
3	Dr. Glenn Loury	Dr. Loury is a professor of economics at Brown University in Providence, RI, U.S.A. and has a PhD in Economics. His research focuses on microeconomic theory, welfare economics, game theory, the economics of income distribution, and racial inequality and social policy.	<i>What is Racial Equality?</i>	150	88
4	Dr. Elizabeth Bates	Dr. Bates is a senior lecturer in Psychology at the University of Cumbria in Carlisle, U.K. and has a PhD in Psychology. Her research focuses domestic violence	<i>Understanding the Experiences of Male Victims of Domestic Violence</i>	50	33

		and aggression, specifically focused on male victims, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviour.			
5	Dr. Joanna Moncrieff	Dr. Moncrieff is a professor of Critical and Social Psychiatry at University College London in the U.K. and has an MD in psychiatry. Her research focuses the use, misuse, and misrepresentation of psychiatric drugs to treat mental health disorders.	<i>The Myth of the Chemical Cure (What Psychiatric Drugs Really Do)</i>	76	45
6	Benjamin Bellet	Bellet is a PhD Candidate at Harvard University in Boston, MA, U.S.A. in Clinical Psychology. His research focuses on alternative assessment models of trauma and loss-related disorders, including PTSD and complicated grief, including the evidence for trigger warnings in reducing trauma symptoms.	<i>Trigger Warnings: Controversies and Conclusions</i>	67	45
7	Dr. Robinder Bedi	Dr. Bedi is a registered psychologist and an associate professor at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, BC, and has a PhD in Counselling Psychology. His research interests focus on international/cross-cultural/multicultural counselling and psychotherapy	<i>Racial, Ethnic, Cultural, and National Disparities in Psychological Treatment Are Inevitable: Psychotherapy as a Western Cultural Healing Practice</i>	52	29

Table 2***Feedback Survey Results***

	Response Rate	Consistency with Goals	Knowledge of Speaker	Usefulness of the Talk
Talk	N (% of total attendees)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
1	14 (24.6%)	3.7 (1.1)	4.3 (0.8)	3.4 (1.5)
2	8 (20.5%)	4.5 (0.5)	4.4 (0.7)	3.9 (1.1)
3	26 (29.5%)	4.6 (0.7)	4.8 (0.4)	4.1 (1.2)
4	13 (39.3%)	4.8 (0.4)	4.9 (0.3)	4.8 (0.4)
5	18 (40.0%)	4.3 (0.6)	4.4 (0.6)	4.3 (0.5)
6	10 (22.2%)	4.3 (0.9)	4.7 (0.5)	4.1 (1.0)
7	8 (27.6%)	4.9 (0.4)	4.9 (0.4)	4.6 (0.5)
Total	97 (30.1%)	4.4 (0.8)	4.6 (0.6)	4.1 (1.1)

Note. Participants rated the speaker series on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating “Not at all” and 5 indicating “Extremely”