



LIBERATION

PSYCHOLOGIES: AN INVITATION TO DIALOGUE

2/22/02

PACIFICA
GRADUATE INSTITUTE

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1. *What is a "liberation psychology"? These points are an invitation to dialogue, not a set of precepts.* For the last hundred years, psychology in the West has most often presented itself as a universal and ahistorical science, largely presenting local and Eurocentric perspectives as facts. Today it is possible to see how psychological theories of a bounded individualistic and competitive subjectivity with fixed developmental stages leading to separation constituted an expression of dominant cultural interests. We are concerned that the academic discipline of psychology has historically been complicit, whether intentionally or not, in the establishment of colonial, neo-colonial, and globalized hierarchies of oppression.

We want to place such psychology alongside other starting points from different cultural environments and other indigenous psychologies. Our efforts to articulate markers to identify liberation psychologies are an outcome of a local dialogue, reflecting and constrained by our own social locations, personal histories, and academic commitments. We welcome conversations with others with different life experiences as we struggle for clarity about the educational system that has formed us and that we simultaneously want to resist and revise.

We present this gathering of provisional ideas to orient discussions about values, praxis, and outcomes in psychology. Our basic orientation is dialogical, and we expect that within the frame of these discussions, many innovative ideas could develop. We are not seeking homogeneity of thought, but the opening of a space for improvisation, for the emergence of new ideas and practices in psychology, for an interdisciplinary approach to the psychological, and for unfolding liberatory work within our communities. We hope that these ideas will provide a lattice that can support such improvisations, without unduly constraining them.

2. *Liberation psychologies locate psychological work within a paradigm of interdependence.* We live in a co-created world where many levels of order interconnect. Psyche, culture, and nature continuously unfold in communication through language, symbol, and image. The psychological can be understood as part of this wider web, thus requiring interdisciplinary approaches to psychological suffering and well-being. Liberation psychologies seek to repair the fragmentation in relationships, experience, theory, and environment inherent in oppression, through reconciliatory and transgressive practices.

3. *Culture and psyche, self and community, [self and nature] co-create each other.* Liberation psychologies suggest they be approached as an evolving multiplicity or diversity of perspectives, performances, and voices in various degrees of dialogue. Liberation psychologies attempt to encourage dialogue, creative thinking, and utopian imagination where it has been absent. Through studying dynamics of oppression and engaging in practices of listening-in to differences, new venues for transformation can be created.

4. *Liberation psychologies recognize the importance of giving priority to what or who has become marginalized both in psyche and society.* In every context, there are always elements of the situation that have been marginalized or else not yet expressed. These are explored for liberatory potentials where exiled voices can enter dialogue with normative scripts. It is important to listen to and acknowledge voices that have become silenced both in individual and community work. Those dispossessed in a community suffer by virtue of their exclusion. Those defending hegemonic myths suffer the loss of silenced perspectives and histories.

5. *Liberation psychologies engage in practices of empowerment and participation that attempt to redress disparities of status in the world and in psyche.* We live in a historical context where structures based on differences of race, gender, and class massively dis-empower large numbers of people. Liberation psychologies open to applications in community, ecological, and individual work where dominant hierarchies of power can be challenged, and alternatives can be imagined. Questions of social and economic justice, hunger and poverty, representation and censorship, resistance and repression, violence and mediation are central to liberation psychologies. Liberatory research would seek to limit power differentials between researchers and researched and to engage in collaborative, participatory explorations that benefit the community involved.

6. *Every perspective is embedded in an evolving local indigenous language, culture, and history.* All of the ways we understand, experience, and represent ourselves and others have inevitably materialized within in a cultural history. Our creativity is constrained by local culture and language, which allow only a limited range of experimentation, parody, transgression, and myth-making. That we are completely free of constraints may be the most widely shared fantasy of those who have been educated in Western Enlightenment thought. Since we tend to be blind to normative cultural values, dialogical spaces need to be created where we can locate their context and historicity. Cross-cultural education and encounters are ideally suited to make our culturally embedded assumptions more visible.

7. *Liberation psychologies carefully question who and what their ideas will serve in any given context.* Psychology has often wittingly or unwittingly served to perpetuate status quo arrangements of power that result in injustice, institutional racism and Eurocentrism. These arrangements have mitigated against cross-cultural encounter and obscured crucial understandings of ideology and power. Presently, Western psychology has begun an attempt to become more multiculturally sensitive. While this is a positive development, it is important that this increasing sensitivity not be used to further support a claim—implicit or explicit—of universality. Western psychology should not strive to be an overarching discipline that assimilates others' knowings, repositioning Western psychology as a "center" and other psychologies as "peripheral".

8. *Cultural and intrapsychic spaces need to be created where dialogue among diverse points of view can question, share, and revise meanings and actions.* Such spaces need to be participatory, welcoming image, poetry, art, dance, music, literature and ritual to express experience and to imagine alternative realities. While open to difference and collaborative creativity, it is inevitable that such spaces would also host fierce confrontations, the revelation of bitter wounds, and the acknowledgement of collusion and responsibility. In situations where dominant groups in power have no interest in such dialogues, it is important to create such spaces at the margin where new scripts can be generated, rehearsed, and nurtured.

9. *Liberation psychologies value the inspirations and energies that emerge from imaginative, artistic, religious, and spiritual practices. Individuals and communities continually redevelop mythologies and practices of meaning to orient their lives.* These mythologies are precious community resources, serving as a reservoir of symbols for future expressions of connectivity and strength, longing and belonging. As we move toward more homogenized globalization of corporate control, the particularity and uniqueness of every local vernacular context is rich with alternative visions of wholeness and sustainability crucial for survival.

10. *Liberation psychologies nurture longings for just and peaceful communities as acts of faith in the future.* We can do much better in creating a just and peaceful world. We recognize that the utopian impulse we are expressing is itself culturally embedded in Western notions of evolution and progress. Nevertheless, we believe the full possibilities for resistance, creativity, and spiritual development are still unexplored and deserve to be cultivated. Subjectivities-in-community are emergent phenomena, and no one can yet say the last word about what we might create together.

11. [added later by Mary Watkins:]

As climate change advances and the ravages of the environment by neocolonialism and its transnational capitalism are apparent throughout the world, liberation psychologies must be eco-liberation psychologies. They must emphasize the effects of coloniality on our relations with nature, and seek to restore an understanding of humans' interdependence with other-than-human animals and nature. The effects of climate change, environmental pollution, and the excess extraction of resources, disproportionately impacts poor communities, once again reminding us to act in the light of the "preferential option for the poor."