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CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY PRAXIS

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ABSTRACT

Praxis requires that theory and research be complemented by action. This paper contributes to the development of critical psychology praxis. Critical psychology examines the moral, political, and social implications of psychological discourse and action. The critical psychology movement has been raising awareness about the need to question psychology's support of oppressive social systems. Critical psychologists challenge mainstream psychology's values, assumptions, and practices. But whereas critical psychologists have invested considerable efforts in scrutinizing psychology's moral and epistemological tenets, they have not yet articulated viable and sufficient modes of practice. There is a need to bridge the gap between discourse and action. Otherwise, we risk marginalization and irrelevancy. I argue that it is not only desirable but also possible to translate the theoretical underpinnings of critical psychology into action. I apply the central values and assumptions of critical psychology to formulate guidelines for praxis. I propose an integrative praxis framework that attends to philosophical, contextual, needs, and pragmatic considerations from an interdisciplinary, multi-vocal, and action-oriented point of view. I conclude by applying the values, assumptions and praxis considerations of critical psychology to teaching, research, and practice.

Area: Community Psychology

Key words: values, social change, interdisciplinary models, political action, theory, philosophy, teaching, research, applied psychology

We are all story tellers. We each tell a story from a different vantage point, and we each present a different narrative of a particular subject. The subject of critical psychology enjoys multiple narratives. My narrative focuses on the present and the future of critical psychology; it tells the story of words that find it hard to change the world; it shares the worry that intellectual perfection might lead to inaction. The story of critical psychology is messy; it was not born in one but in many places, there is not one but many critical psychologies, and there is not one but many futures for it. The story I want to tell portrays a future where academic orations invigorate social action. It is a story based on concern for changing and not just understanding the world. As all story tellers, I have a unique path that informed my critical posture. I have written elsewhere about past influences which shaped my story of critical psychology (Prilleltensky, in press-a). Today, I concentrate on the present and the future.

Critical psychology is critical of the status quo in society and in psychology. It is critical of the status quo in society because it perpetuates forms of oppression, and it is critical of mainstream psychology because it supports forms of domination (Prilleltensky, 1994). I have merely written two sentences and I can already hear in my head a chorus of critics challenging my definition of critical psychology, my characterization of society as oppressive, and my portrayal of mainstream psychology as an accomplice in domination. Monolithic depictions of critical and mainstream psychology, and of society at large, surely do not do justice to the multiple voices that define these subjects. I could rehearse here lengthy arguments to bolster each one of my claims, but space is short, and so I prefer to concentrate on the story of praxis. I respectfully refer the audience to previous essays on critical psychology to become familiar with the various roots and dimensions of the field (e.g., Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997; Ibáñez and Íñiguez, 1997; Teo, 1998, in press). I cannot possibly pretend to represent *the* critical psychology, for such does not exist. I can, however, describe the critical psychology I represent in this paper. I endorse a critical psychology that locates itself at the interface of society and psychology. This movement is premised on three basic assumptions: (a) that the societal status quo contributes to the oppression of large segments of the population, (b) that psychology upholds the societal status quo, and (c) that society can be transformed to promote social justice (Prilleltensky, in press-b). Following these precepts, we are not only critical psychologists but, most importantly, critical citizens. This type of critical psychology is concerned with the lack of social justice and how psychology masks social injustice, with the lack of caring and compassion for the disadvantaged, and with psychology's indifference to oppression. As critical psychologists and critical citizens, we should strive to create a psychology that works for, and not against the oppressed (Braginsky & Braginsky, 1974; Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997; Ibáñez & Íñiguez, 1997; Martín Baró, 1994; Parker & Spears, 1996; Sullivan, 1984; Teo, 1998; Tolman, 1994).

The critical psychology I promote is guided by a set of values, assumptions, and practices. These parameters help define what I mean by critical psychology and facilitate dialogue; they are neither perennial nor ubiquitous; they do not apply equally to different social and cultural contexts, nor are they static. I have revised them often to reflect a changing understanding of society and psychology (Prilleltensky, 1994, 1997). They communicate my social location and my subjectivity. For sure, they are subject to revision and challenge, but they provide, I believe, a useful point of departure. In this paper I will outline the values, assumptions and practices that inform my formulation of critical psychology, followed by an application of these tenets to teaching, research, and practice. By the end of this paper, I hope we have more tools to put critical psychology into practice.

Conceptual Tools

A critical psychology concerned primarily with emancipation and oppression requires conceptual resources dealing with (a) social values, (b) basic assumptions about power and moral legitimacy, and (c) the integration of discourse and action in praxis. Praxis, the ultimate concern of critical psychology, builds on clear values and explicit assumptions.

Values

Values guide the process of working towards a desired state of affairs. These are precepts that inform our personal, professional, and political behavior. But values are not only beneficial in that they guide behavior towards a future outcome, for they also have intrinsic merit. We espouse values like empowerment, caring, and solidarity, not just because they lead towards a good or better society, but also because they have merit on their own (Hill Collins, 1993; Kane, 1994; Kekes, 1993). Indeed, according to Mayton, Ball-Rokeach and Loges (1994), "values may be defined as enduring prescriptive or proscriptive beliefs that a specific mode of conduct (instrumental value) or end state of existence (terminal value) is preferred to another mode of conduct or end state" (p. 3).

Critical psychology values can be classified into three groups: (a) *personal values* (e.g., self-determination, autonomy, health and personal growth) (b) *collective values* (e.g., social justice, support for community structures), and (c) *relational values* (e.g., respect for human diversity, collaboration and democratic participation). These categories reflect the need to balance individual and social goals, as well as the need for dialogue in resolving conflicts of interests. There is a dialectic between personal and collective values; one kind cannot exist without the other. While this dialectic has been amply recognized (e.g., Bauman, 1993; Melucci, 1996a, 1996b; Sandel, 1996), what is often missed in the literature is the need for relational values that mediate between the good of the individual and the good of the collective, a need that is often invoked in feminist (Frazer & Lacey, 1993; Hernández, 1997; Hill Collins, 1993) and native writings (Gunn Allen, 1993) but rarely discussed in mainstream social philosophy. Neither personal nor collective values can exist without mechanisms for connecting between them (Habermas, 1990; Putnam, 1996). Audre Lorde (1993) spoke eloquently about relationality and interdependency between women. Her writings illustrate the intimate connections between personal, collective, and relational values:

Interdependency between women is the way to a freedom which allows the *I to be*, not in order to be used, but in order to be creative. This is a difference between the passive *be* and the active *being*....Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters....As women, we have been taught either to ignore our differences, or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change. Without community there is no liberation (Lorde, 1993, p. 486).

Examples of personal values include autonomy, health, and personal growth. Social justice, a central collectivist value, refers to the fair and equitable allocation of bargaining powers, resources, and obligations in society; while support for community structures ensures that we have in place public sources of support. Two examples of relational values include collaboration and democratic participation and respect for human diversity.

These sets of values are premised on the assumption that strong communities benefit everyone. Whether we like it or not, personal fulfilment is linked to the contentment of the group (Melucci, 1996b). Violent neighbourhoods and families constrain personal well-being. Poorly resourced communities limit opportunities for health and development. High quality public institutions like schools and hospitals benefit the community at large. Accessible child care and affordable recreational facilities benefit children and families in low income neighbourhoods. Support for community structures and social justice in allocation of resources are examples of collectivist values because they enhance the quality of life for all citizens.

In some cases, personal and collective values come into conflict. Smokers demand their right to engage in the habit, public health officials uphold the public good by imposing smoking bans; unprepared teenagers want to have babies, preventionists strive to avert teenage pregnancy. Ideally, personal and collective values would be mutually enhancing, but it is often the case that conflicts arise. In order to deal with them, we should promote partnership values, values that uphold conflict resolution and collaboration without masking power differences (MacGillivray, Nelson, & Prilleltensky, 1998; Putnam, 1996). Unless we teach people how to negotiate differences, it is not realistic to expect social harmony, even when power differences are minimized.

A delicate balance between personal and collective values is needed to promote a society in which the good of the private citizen is not inimical to the good of the society. This is why we should promote mediating values and processes that are supposed to bring a measure of collaboration among groups with varied interests. Good and just societies cannot thrive but in the presence of the three groups of values. The absence of social values leads to the competition we are all too accustomed to in capitalist societies, whereas the absence of personal rights leads to the debacle of collectivist communities (Giddens, 1994; Leonard, 1997).

As we shall see, power differences are bound to interfere with the social harmony prescribed by these values. But we should remember that these values portray an ideal scenario we should strive for, not a state of affairs that can be arrived at without taking into account contextual factors such as power and cultural differences. There is merit, however, in conceptualizing the values that could potentially facilitate social cohesion. The successful implementation of these values depends on social context, a subject I will explore in the next section. These caveats notwithstanding, we need to envision values that can help us fulfil personal and collective goals when power differentials are either large or minimal (Melucci, 1996a, 1996b).

Table 1 offers guidelines for balancing critical psychology values. As can be seen, each value is to be promoted in consideration of others. Unless we take care to avert excesses, we end up with conditions in which individuals are either oppressed because of totalitarian collectives or alienated

from each other because of flagrant competition and self-centredness. The point of table 1 is to show that the personal and the collective are so dialectical and intertwined that one cannot flourish without the other.

These values capture the main ingredients for balancing personal with collective well-being; they can be applied to social problems, professional and ethical dilemmas. In situations of conflict, we ask: What values are being privileged and what principles are being neglected? Whose interests are being upheld and whose are being denied? What resources do the poor have to uphold their basic rights? What societal changes should take place to achieve a more equitable allocation of resources in society? and How does psychology contribute to the advancement of values for the entire population?

Prilleltensky and Nelson (1997) suggested that advancing the well-being of oppressed groups requires actualization of all values in a balanced way. We need to remember that within a given social ecology some values appear at the foreground of our consciousness while others remain in the background. To attain the necessary balance among the various values, we must move the neglected values to the foreground. Within the present Western context, this means relocating the value of social justice from the background to the foreground, and pushing the obsession with personal advancement from the foreground to the background.

The challenge of harmonizing personal and collective interests is not trivial. How do we promote the unique identity and rights of a certain group without sacrificing solidarity with other oppressed groups? At which point do we turn our attention to other groups suffering from discrimination? How do we balance attention to processes of dialogue with outcomes of social justice? At which point do we say that we have discussed differences of opinion long enough and that now it is time for action, even if there is not consensus about members of a coalition? (Benhabib, 1996; Jaggar, 1994). All these questions involve values and cannot be answered in the abstract, for each unique constellation of factors requires a unique solution. The framework presented in table 1 is a place to start because it identifies three essential values: personal, collective, and relational; values that Giddens recognized as vital for "an ethics of a globalizing post-traditional society" (1994, p. 253). Giddens promotes these values because they imply a "recognition of the sanctity of human life and the universal right to happiness and self-actualization -- coupled to the obligation to promote cosmopolitan solidarity and an attitude of respect" (1994, p. 253).

Assumptions

Clarity with respect to values is a necessary but insufficient condition for the promotion of critical psychology praxis. Values are enacted by agents with differing political agendas in social contexts saturated with power differentials and inequities. The abstract compilation of ideal values requires immersion in messy social settings. To facilitate the implementation of values and ideals in specific social contexts we need to pay attention to assumptions regarding (a) *power*, (b) *legitimacy* (c) *action*, and (d) *processes*. In order to promote a balanced approach among personal, collective, and relational values, we need to engage in a balancing act with respect to each one of these four assumptions. Table 2 summarizes the guidelines to promote these critical assumptions.

With respect to *power*, it is imperative that we listen to the multiple voices vying for scarce social resources and for cultural recognition. We are to attend not just to the powerful voices of society but also to the voices of people rendered invisible in the process of policy formation: children, the poor, and people otherwise disenfranchised. We need to balance the voices of the powerful with the voices of oppressed. Most social policies are conceived in the absence of meaningful input from those most affected by them (Taylor, 1996; Wharf & McKenzie, 1998). The same experiences of exclusion are experienced by many populations controlled by psychologists: students, clients, children, or community groups (Burman et al., 1996). Values that are based on the voice of the powerful will irrevocably perpetuate the status quo. Values that are based on the voice of the powerless have a chance of promoting social justice (Jaggar, 1994). Attending to power differentials permits scrutiny of the social conflicts in which values are to be enacted.

Critical assumptions about *legitimacy* require that we strike a balance between deductive and inductive approaches to knowledge and ethics, and that we complement theoretical epistemologies with grounded input. Abstract philosophical analyses of what values can lead to a good life and a good society are useful but limited. One reason for the limitation of philosophical analyses is that "to cover a wide range of cases, ethical principles typically are formulated at a high level of abstraction and consequently leave much room for individual discretion" (Jaggar, 1994, p. 9). Feminist philosopher Alison Jaggar goes on to say that

individual discretion is always required to determine which principle or principles are appropriate for a given situation and, in cases of conflict between them, which principles should take precedence over others....The consideration of particular cases thus plays an indispensable role in formulating moral principles. (Jaggar, 1994, p. 9)

What good is it to have an internally consistent framework of values that does not reflect the living realities of most people? The corollary of this question is that *moral philosophy is not enough*. On the other hand, we can ask what is the point of knowing people's needs and aspirations if that knowledge is not processed into principles and guidelines for action? The main corollary of this question is that *grounded knowledge is not enough* (Kane, 1998).

Moral philosophy and grounded experience are complementary. Theories of values have to be validated with lived experience. Otherwise, we can end up with notions that are theoretically flawless but practically useless. This is a serious risk, for as Bowden (1997) claims, in grand theories of

ethics, "attention to the messy contingencies of concrete situations is set aside in favour of the theoretical project of organizing moral knowledge under general principles and rules of conduct that exhibit the exactness and formality of mathematics" (p. 3). When proposing a set of values, it is crucial to appreciate the "dynamic complexity and diversity of specific situations, and the particular needs, desires, intellectual and emotional habits of the persons participating in them" (Bowden, 1997, p. 3). A framework for values should strive to answer Toulmin's call for an approach that is "particular not universal, local not general, timely not eternal, and -- above all -- concrete not abstract" (1996, p. 7).

Asking people what they regard important in life is essential, but not enough to guide action, for the simple reason that people can wish upon others objectionable and reprehensible things. This is why we need philosophical critique of people's voices as much as grounded validation of conceptual frameworks. Critical assumptions about *action* call for a balance between theory and practice. This is needed to ensure that theoretical knowledge does not remain the sole object of intellectual play. But the impetus for action should be tempered by the need to understand our own subjectivity, our political aspirations, and the risks and benefits involved in any chosen course of action. Understanding pertains not only to the internal consistency of any set of values, but also to the context of application. Whereas one set of values may be appropriate to one social context, it may be inimical to the well being of people in another setting. Thus, while we promote more autonomy and control for disadvantaged people in oppressively controlling environments, we do not want to push for more self-determination of violent people in disorganized societies. Blind adherence to any value, from personal empowerment to sense of community, is risky. Actions to promote personal control, for instance, have to be considered in light of social repercussions.

With respect to *processes*, a balance between processes and outcomes is needed to ensure that dialogue is not an end in itself. By the same token, we need to assert that ends do not justify any means. If the object of an intervention is to uphold the rights of a minority group, do we justify any means, including terrorism? On the other hand, can we justify endless talk when the lives of vulnerable children and families are at risk? These are very difficult questions for which there are never easy solutions, but the tension between valid processes and just outcomes should be reflected in any effort to implement values.

Praxis

Praxis refers to the unity of theory and action. This is the stage where the dialectic between conceptualization and application gets played out. This is the moment when critical values descend from their intellectual Olympus to be wrestled with in arenas of social contestation. This is where lived experience informs philosophy and social science, where social change strategies complement visions of the good society, and where community members have as much sway as intellectuals.

Table 3 integrates critical psychology values and assumptions into a praxis-oriented framework. The first point to be noted is that the four sets of praxis considerations are fully complementary; praxis depends on equal attention to all of them. The framework I propose consists of *philosophical*, *contextual*, *needs*, and *pragmatic* considerations. According to table 3, each set of considerations calls on the critical psychologist to probe various states of affairs, to consult multiple voices, to research different sources, and to seek various and complementary outcomes. The unique contribution of the framework is that it integrates praxis considerations that have hitherto been studied in isolation. Whereas some critical psychologists concentrate on contextual configurations of power and discourse, others explore needs of a particular population, and still a third group focuses on social change (Burman et al., 1996; Parker & Spears, 1996; Teo, in press). This framework integrates the various strands of critical psychology into a praxis-oriented model. The model incorporates multiple voices, combines research and action, draws on various disciplines, pays attention to power and contextual considerations, and can be applied to guide and examine critical psychology practice.

The reason we need four sets of considerations is that each one by itself is insufficient to cover the ground necessary for praxis. *Philosophical considerations* are needed in order to evaluate the merits and drawbacks of diverse scenarios of the good life and the good society. Moral and political philosophers examine potential contradictions among competing ideals and spend considerable time formulating coherent visions. Philosophers contribute to praxis by debating the ideal vision we should strive for.

Our implicit and explicit notions of what constitutes the good life and the good society is going to have an impact on the interventions and programs we develop for people who come into contact with psychologists. But convincing philosophical positions notwithstanding, they are insufficient to mount social policies that meet human needs. An ever present danger in philosophical discourse is its detachment from the social conditions in which people live. To counteract this risk we need to explore the contextual circumstances that complement philosophical considerations.

Contextual considerations explore what is the actual state of affairs in which people live. Social scientists strive to understand what are the social, economic, cultural, and political conditions of a specific community. This line of inquiry helps us to determine social norms and cultural trends influencing people's choices, discourses, and behavior. A contextual assessment is necessary to understand the subjective experience of residents of a particular community. Individualist and collectivist societies differ markedly with respect to socialization, customs, and visions of the good society. Poor and rich communities vary with regards to the importance they ascribe to basic necessities. An analysis of culture and context draws on resources from history, anthropology, sociology, communications, economics, and cultural studies. These sources of information combine to provide a picture of the context in which we want to promote certain values. Knowing the context will help us determine the most appropriate values for a particular situation.

Values attain their meaning within a social context. The meaning of self-determination in an individualist society is vastly different from its

connotation in a collectivist environment. In a totally collectivist society, citizens yearn for more autonomy and resent state and communal intrusion. Examples include "curtailing individual rights in the name of community needs; suppressing creativity in the name of conformity; and even suppressing a sense of self, losing individuality in a mesh of familial or communal relations" (Etzioni, 1996, p. 26). In an individualist environment, on the other hand, citizens wish to experience more sense of community and less selfishness.

We understand values more fully when we comprehend the set of circumstances within which they are embedded (Bell, 1993; Etzioni, 1996). Pushed to extremes, values lose their merit. Excessive collectivism violates one's right to privacy, while flagrant individualism numbs our sensitivity to others and leads to desolation. It is incumbent upon us, then, to watch out for signs of value immoderation (Kane, 1994). The moment one principle takes too much space, others shrink proportionately. Applied to North American society, this means that collectivist values such as solidarity, sharing, co-operation, and social justice have shrunk in reverse proportion to the increase in individualism (Saul, 1995).

Needs considerations infuse philosophical and contextual considerations with human sentiments. It is not enough for philosophers to ponder what the rest of us need, or for social scientists to recommend what will make our communities a better place to live. What good is it to have an internally consistent set of principles that does not reflect the realities and desires of most people? Philosophical tenets have to be validated with the lived experience of community members and with the knowledge of social scientists (Kane, 1998; Montero, 1998). It is only when most people attest to the benefits of having voice and choice that the abstract notion of self-determination becomes meaningful.

Needs considerations contribute to praxis by answering the questions What is missing?, and What is a desirable state of affairs for community members? This set of considerations pays explicit attention to the voice of the people with whom we partner to reduce oppressive conditions. Qualitative methods, grounded theory, and lived experience serve to identify basic human needs of people in context.

Whereas the previous sets of considerations examined actual, ideal, and desirable states of affairs, *pragmatic considerations* concern feasible social change. Unlike previous deliberations, which asked what is, what is missing, or what should be, the main question answered by this set of considerations is what could be done. This question is meant to bridge the gap between the actual state of affairs on one hand, and desirable and ideal visions on the other. Feasible change draws our attention to what social improvements can be realistically accomplished -- a distinct political goal.

This set of considerations follows the assumption stipulated earlier for balancing research and action. By reflecting on previous efforts at social change and learning from agents of change we can hope to close the gap between the ideal and the actual. A specific outcome of pragmatic thinking is a plan for social action.

The complementary nature of the four sets of considerations now becomes apparent: without a philosophical analysis we lack a vision; without a contextual analysis we lack an understanding of social forces; without a needs assessment we lack an idea of what people want; and finally, without pragmatic thinking we lack a plan of action. The interdependence of these deliberations makes it impossible to privilege one set of considerations over another.

This model of praxis incorporates values and assumptions throughout its various components. Values are part of philosophical considerations in imagining ideal communities, part of needs considerations in consulting with citizens about their views, and part of understanding the social context. Assumptions about power, legitimacy, action, and processes are reflected in pragmatic considerations dealing with social change, in contextual considerations dealing with economic and social inequality, and in philosophical and needs considerations as well. Legitimacy concerns the dual input from philosophers and community members, while action and processes concern consultation with citizens and strategies for social change. Other examples could be furnished, but it is already clear that praxis builds on the values and assumptions of critical psychology.

Practical Applications

The challenge now is to translate critical psychology values, assumptions, and models of praxis into concrete applications. I offer here just an overview of guidelines for the application of critical psychology tenets in teaching, research, and practice; each area deserves full deliberation at a later point. In each instance I explore how critical psychology can be advanced in the content and the process of our work. I discuss how the content or subject matter of teaching, research, and interventions can advance critical psychology and how the very process of working in each area may reflect critical psychology principles.

The suggestions I present concern primarily the role of critical psychology in promoting emancipation and reducing oppression. The recommendations assume that students, research participants, and persons seeking professional help are all potential agents of personal and social transformation. Needless to say, the guidelines transcend the boundaries of values, assumptions, and praxis; it is only for pedagogical reasons that they are outlined separately in tables 4, 5, and 6.

Teaching

Critical teaching means promoting a balance among personal, relational, and collective values with students; fostering critical assumptions about power, legitimacy, action, and processes; and advancing the model of praxis. Table 4 presents a brief outline of activities designed to advance

critical teaching.

Regarding the content, I believe that critical psychology comes to supplement areas neglected by other branches of psychology. Hegemony, oppression, and domination, central themes in critical psychology, are rarely addressed in other sub-disciplines; and although materials are available, the role of psychology in these social phenomena is seldom mentioned in mainstream courses (Prilleltensky, 1994; Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1994, 1996). An inquiry into the psychological dimensions of oppression, domination, emancipation, and hegemony requires an examination of critical assumptions concerning power, values, subjectivity, and the role of psychology in preventing or contributing to these phenomena (Burman et al., 1996).

Teaching from a critical psychology perspective relies primarily on the process of conscientization developed by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1975, 1994, 1997). Conscientization refers to the process whereby people attain an insightful awareness of socioeconomic, cultural, psychological and political circumstances affecting their lives, and of their potential to transform that reality. Conscientization is achieved by the concurrent implementation of two tasks: (a) denunciation and (b) annunciation. While the former deconstructs ideological messages that distort people's awareness of oppressive conditions, the latter elaborates means of advancing emancipation and liberation. Conscientization is the attempt to understand how the public gives tacit consent to the present social system. This phenomenon of consent and conformity achieved by persuasion rather than force is what Gramsci (1971) called cultural "hegemony" (see also Femia, 1981; Kiros, 1985; Simon, 1982). This concept is well summarized by Boggs (1976): "By hegemony Gramsci meant the permeation throughout civil society... of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs, morality, etc. that is in one way or another supportive of the established order and the class interests that dominate it" (p. 39).

The process of teaching in critical psychology is to create an atmosphere that facilitates conscientization, the antithesis of hegemony. Conscientization is to elucidate the oppression of students, to the extent that they feel oppressed, and the subjugation of others in society. "In Freirian pedagogy it is through the interrogation of their own experiences that the oppressed will come to an understanding of their own power as knowers and creators of the world; this knowledge will contribute to the transformation of their world" (Weiler, 1994, p. 27).

Denunciation and annunciation constitute the core of praxis in teaching. To achieve this level of praxis, a safe climate of respect has to be fostered in the classroom. Unless students and professors feel safe in the learning environment, intellectual growth and moral accountability are hard to achieve. But as in feminist (Hernández, 1997) and critical pedagogy (McLaren & Lankshear, 1994), in critical psychology it is also important to attend to the balance between process and outcomes and between understanding and action. There is a risk of celebrating the process of self-expression at the expense of emancipatory action, either for the self, one's reference group, or other marginalized populations. This caveat is sounded by feminist teacher Weiler and by critical pedagogue Macedo. Weiler (1994) claims that there "is a danger that the expression of strong emotion can be simply cathartic and can in fact serve to deflect the need for action" (p. 27). Macedo (1994), in turn, asserts that the "sharing of experiences must always be understood within a social praxis that entails both reflection and political action. In short, it must always involve a political project with the objective of dismantling oppressive structures and mechanisms" (p. xv).

Research

As in the case of teaching, I draw a distinction between the content and the process of critical psychology research. In essence, research and knowledge are to be used to help oppressed populations. Three content areas of concern for an emancipatory critical psychology are (a) the configuration of personal, collective, and relational values in the most emancipatory fashion, (b) the psychological and political sources and manifestations of oppression, and (c) the dynamics of cultural hegemony. Research on values can elucidate (a) what values are most needed under a particular set of sociohistorical circumstances to advance the well being of oppressed populations (Etzioni, 1996) and (b) what psychological and social mechanisms foster or inhibit greater social justice (Tyler, Boeckman, Smith, & Huo, 1997). The study of objective and subjective dimensions of oppression is central to critical psychology (Burman et al., 1996). Researchers have begun to address the multiple cultural, economic, political and psychological dynamics involved in oppression. (Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996). The underlying mechanisms of hegemonic consent should also be explored. As changes in social contexts take place, new forms of masked domination appear. Research by Gamson, Fireman, and Rytina (1982) and by Kelman and Hamilton (1989) explain some of the processes involved in the acceptance or rejection of unjust social arrangements, while studies by Burman and colleagues (1996) distil how structures of domination infiltrate psychological discourse. It is essential to elucidate the paths conducive to tacit consent of oppressive social norms. The role of language in this endeavour cannot be underestimated. As Hughes (1986) put it, "there is no neutral language or discourse of Truth: there are simply different forms of discourse, employed for different purposes" (p. 18).

To be consistent with the values and assumptions of critical psychology, the research process has to (a) foster collaboration among researchers and participants, (b) involve stakeholders in research design and implementation, and (c) contain an action component designed to meet the needs of marginalized populations. The research process utilized by Nelson, Lord, and Ochoka (1999) is quite paradigmatic of critical psychology research. Their study of changes in mental health policies and practices was carried out with the full collaboration of consumer/survivors of the psychiatric system. They established steering committees that included consumers/survivors and personnel from mental health agencies participating in the study. Consumer/survivors became part of the research team, contributed meaningfully to data collection and interpretation of findings, and felt an integral part of the research process. Participants felt the research was not about them, but with them.

Practice

Counseling is an act of oppression when entering into a counseling relationship requires clients to embrace a view of themselves as needy and helpless rather than resourceful and powerful; when the "help" rendered enables the client to "cope with" rather than confront and change situations of oppression or injustice; and when a facade or shared power obfuscates the real power differential between counselor and client. Whenever counseling serves to maintain the status quo at the expense of the client's self-determination or dignity, counseling is oppressive (McWhirter, 1994, p. 20).

Numerous accounts confirm that these dangers are not imagined but very real (e.g., Mack, 1994; Mair, 1992; Spinelli, 1994). Critical practice is needed to (a) counteract some of the risks posed by uncritical help, and (b) promote the emancipation of oppressed citizens. Critical psychologists may avoid these dangers by examining the role of interpersonal and social oppression; by considering not just therapy but also self-help, community development, and social action as possible alternatives; and by trying to equalize power in the helping relationship.

The helper may act as counsellor, consultant, social change agent and advocate at the same time; while the person seeking help may also resort to political and self-help groups for sources of empowerment. The legitimacy of the content and process of help derives not from professional authority but from open dialogue in the helping relationship. Each person contributes his or her opinion and action follows the emerging consensus. Psychological knowledge is demythologized and shared with client groups. Nelson, Prilleltensky, and colleagues have outlined guidelines for solidarity and community work with oppressed groups and with service providers. Their work presents models of consultation and community practice congruent with critical psychology tenets (e.g., MacGillivray, Nelson, & Prilleltensky, 1998; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997; Prilleltensky, Peirson, & Nelson, 1997).

The articulation of the connection between the personal and the political is a primary subject in the critical practice of clinical, counseling, and community psychology. McWhirter (1994) performs a great service by illuminating the political dynamics at play in the subjectivity of the helper and the helpee. She claims that

In a society marred by inequality and injustice, racism and sexism, economic stratification and violence, and numerous other sources of oppression, the counseling relationship can reflect society all too easily. Band-Aid solutions, pacification, and redirection of the client's energy may serve to maintain the status quo rather than to inspire fundamental change. The goal of empowerment requires a professional and personal commitment to challenge rather than to reflect the dynamics of oppression. (McWhirter, 1994, p. 225)

Her work scrutinizes uncritical approaches and offers meaningful ways of practicing from an empowering and critical point of view. Her numerous suggestions translate the tenets of a critical approach into empowerment practices. She enacts the tenets of critical psychology by fostering *collaboration, critical consciousness, competence, community*, and an appreciation for *context*. McWhirter's refers to collaboration as the "dynamic relationship between the counsellor and the client in which both are expected to play an active role. The relationship should be characterized by collaborative definition of the problem and collaborative development of intervention and strategies for change" (1997, p. 5). This type of practice is congruent with critical psychology's values of collaboration and democratic participation.

According to McWhirter, critical consciousness is achieved "through two simultaneous processes: critical self-reflection and power analysis....Critical self-reflection involves increasing awareness of one's privilege, power....Power analysis refers to examining how power, including the power of privilege, is used in a given context" (1997, p. 5). This practice is in line with critical psychology's attention to the role of power and subjectivity in the helping process.

Competence refers to "authentic appreciation of client resources" (McWhirter, 1998, p. 16). She further claims that "Clients' existing competencies are often overlooked or underemphasized, with a focus on deficits only" (1997, p. 5). This assertion parallels critical psychology's concern for recognizing a sense of agency in all citizens.

Recognizing citizens' unique cultural background and relying on informal sources of support are two ways in which McWhirter validates the importance of community in the helping process. Her conceptualization and practice of community reflect critical psychology's concern for diversity and collective wellness.

The model of critical psychology praxis directs our attention to context. Without this component, we risk the homogenization of theory and practice; that is, we risk treating all people, in all situations, the same, irrespective of social location, diverse identities, culture, and power differences. McWhirter (1998) rightfully claims that "the dynamics of power and privilege shape the client's context as well as the context in which we provide counselling services....The context includes larger social forces (e.g., ageism, racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, able-bodied assumptions) and the effects of these assumptions on care providers, families, and individuals" (p. 17). In practical terms, she indicates that "integration of the context component into counselling means that we acknowledge the role of context in the client's current situation or problem, including how the context serves to maintain or exacerbate problems, while at the same time acknowledging the client's options and responsibilities related to change" (p. 17). In summary, McWhirter's model of practice calls for conscientization, attention to context, a sense of agency, action, and solidarity; key ingredients of a critical psychology approach.

Conclusion

Critical psychology requires a praxis orientation as much as mainstream psychology requires a critical psychology. To promote the dialectic between discourse and action, I offered three sets of conceptual tools: values, assumptions, and praxis considerations. These are tools and not solutions. They are a compass, not a map. Each concrete challenge, embedded in a specific context, requires a unique combination of values and praxis considerations, a new solution every time.

Being from South America, my story of critical psychology derives much inspiration from the work of the late Martín Baró (1994). Martín Baró wrote that "psychology has always been clear about the necessity for personal liberation; that is, people's need to gain control over their own existence... but it has not been very clear about the intimate relationship between the liberation of each person and the liberation of a whole people....Psychology must work for liberation. This involves breaking the chains of personal oppression as much as the chains of social oppression" (1994, p. 27). Western psychology has contributed to repressive as well as to emancipatory aims. As Herman put it, psychology "has served to complicate, and often obscure, the exercise of power,...but it has also legitimized innovative ideas and actions whose aim has been to...expand the scope of liberty" (p. 15). She went on to say that the public consequences of psychological expertise are "sometimes repressive and deserving of condemnation [and] sometimes inspiring people to move boldly in pursuit of personal freedom and social justice" (p. 15). I hope critical psychology and the legacy of Martín Baró inspire us to work for personal and social liberation, for personal freedom and for social justice, and for the values of interdependence and relationality that complete the dialectic between the personal and the collective. References

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Table 1

Guidelines for Promoting a Balance Among Personal, Collective, and Relational Values in Critical Psychology

Values	Guidelines
Personal	
Self-determination	Promote the ability of community members to pursue their chosen goals in life <i>in consideration</i> of other people's needs
Health	Promote the physical and emotional well-being of individuals through acquisition of skills and behavioral change <i>in consideration</i> of structural and economic factors impinging on the health of the population at large. Promote the personal growth of community members <i>in consideration</i> of vital community structures needed to advance individual health and self-actualization.
Personal growth	
Collective	
Social justice	Promote fair allocation of bargaining powers, resources, and obligations in society <i>in consideration</i> of people's differential power, needs and abilities. Promote vital structures that meet the needs of entire communities <i>in consideration</i> of the risks of curtailing individual freedoms and fostering conformity and uniformity.
Support for community	
Relational	
Respect for diversity	Promote respect and appreciation for diverse social identities and unique oppressions <i>in consideration</i> of need for solidarity and risk of social fragmentation. Promote peaceful, respectful, and equitable processes of dialogue whereby citizens have meaningful input into decisions affecting their lives, <i>in consideration</i> of need to act and not just avoid conflicts.
Collaboration and democratic participation	

Table 2

Guidelines for Promoting Critical Psychology Assumptions

Assumptions	Guidelines
Power	Attend to multiple and suppressed voices to ensure that the oppressed is not rendered invisible or inaudible in decisions affecting their well-being.
Legitimacy	Complement theoretical knowledge with grounded input to ensure that abstract values reflect human needs and that expressed needs do not violate rights of others to fulfil their aspirations.
Action	Seek a balance between theory and action to ensure that discourse is not the sole object of intellectual play and that practice is not inconsistent with theoretical postulates.
Processes	Strike a balance between attention to processes and outcomes to ensure that dialogue is not an end in itself and that ends do not justify any means.

Table 3

Guidelines for the Promotion of Complementary Praxis Considerations in Critical Psychology

Praxis Considerations	Probe state of affairs	Consult	Study	Seek
Philosophical	What should be ideal vision?	Moral and political philosophers	Philosophical discourse	Vision of good life and good society
Contextual	What is actual state of affairs?	Social scientists	Economic, social, and cultural trends, as well as subjectivity	Identification of prevailing norms and social conditions
Needs	What is missing from desirable state of affairs?	Community members	Grounded theory and lived experience	Identification of human needs
Pragmatic	What can be done to change oppressive state of affairs?	Agents of change	Resource mobilization and social change theory	Social change strategies

Table 4

Guidelines for Teaching from a Critical Psychology Perspective

Critical Psychology Tenets	Guidelines
Values	<i>Content:</i> Explore with students the balance among personal, collective, and relational values in different social contexts, and what changes in value priorities need to take place in order for oppressed people to advance their interests. Subject prevalent social values to deconstructive analysis to determine whose interests they represent.

Process: Foster values of personal growth, sense of community, and relational principles by identifying these as explicit objectives of learning process and by developing collectively means of achieving a facilitative learning environment. Identify contradictions between students' and instructors' stated values and behaviours and create safe space to discuss them. Afford students opportunity to respectfully challenge their own personal values, dominant social values, and the values of critical psychology.

Assumptions *Content:* Analyze historical and socially constructed nature of psychological concepts and discuss role of social power in according legitimacy to certain theories and not to others. Study the ties between concepts of gender, race, class, and ability in psychology and the voices they represent. Examine whose definitions are given legitimacy and whose are ignored. Explore how concepts might differ if they were defined by people in other cultures and subcultures.

Process: Foster process of conscientization through denunciation and annunciation. Consider how power differences in the classroom facilitate or inhibit personal expression and dissent. Afford students a voice in co-determining with instructor aspects of course content and process of learning. Maintain equilibrium between process and outcomes.

Praxis *Content:* Examine philosophical, contextual, needs, and pragmatic dimensions of subject matter. Study psychological phenomena from interdisciplinary point of view. Understand concept of cultural hegemony and forces inculcating social messages of conformity and acquiescence. Examine economic, social, cultural, anthropological dimensions of constructs like depression, normal development, adjustment, and antisocial personality.

Process: Identify topics to be studied from point of view of four praxis considerations and have an action component. Develop with students solidarity and social action projects that put into practice the material covered in the classroom.

Table 5

Guidelines for Research from a Critical Psychology Perspective

Critical
Psychology
Tenets

Guidelines

Values *Content:* Study what are the social conditions most conducive to a balance among personal, collective, and relational values. Contrast people's values, needs and aspirations in individualist and collectivist societies, and ask citizens what they would change in their societies to advance neglected values and priorities. Conduct naturalistic case studies on effects of injustice.

Process: Promote participants' self-determination and democratic participation in research project. Formulate research agenda with community members by engaging in participatory process, attending to diversity of stakeholders and differing levels of power and ability to communicate their needs and values.

Assumptions *Content:* Study how power suffuses social relations that perpetuate oppression, what social change strategies work under what circumstances, and what are social conditions most conducive to personal and collective emancipation.

Process: Negotiate with multiple research stakeholders ways to reduce power differences by creating representative steering committees. Ensure voice and interests of participants are represented in research. Create climate of collaboration and foster sense of collective ownership to ensure that there is follow up of research recommendations.

Praxis *Content:* Study personal and collective experiences of oppression from philosophical, contextual, needs, and pragmatic considerations. Explore successful ways of integrating four praxis considerations in personal and collective change.

Process: Use participatory action research techniques. Identify with research participants goals and objectives for social change that would benefit their community. Ensure there is follow up on recommendations for systemic change after data collection.

Table 6

Guidelines for Practice from a Critical Psychology Perspective

Critical
Psychology
Tenets

Guidelines

Values *Content:* Balance prevalent emphasis on individualism and autonomy with concern for neglected values of interdependence and social justice. Seek to balance attention to personal rights of citizens with responsibilities towards other oppressed individuals and groups.

Process: Show caring and compassion for citizens seeking service, respect their social identities, and foster their ability to pursue personal goals. At the same time, strive to uphold collective values such as support for community structures and social justice.

Assumptions *Content:* Ensure that definition of problem includes voice of citizen seeking help and is not circumscribed to professional opinion. Consider role of social oppression in psychological problems. Avoid destructive pathologizing and focus on strengths and competencies of person as perceived and described by person seeking help. Deconstruct political meaning of deficit oriented constructs. Analyze mental health problems from multi-level perspective that includes intra and interpersonal dynamics, family, community, and social spheres. Attend to politics and economics of diagnosis and beware of controlling and surveillance role of interventions. Avoid professionalised diagnoses that blame the victim and that ignore societal sources of suffering.

Process: Act as resource collaborator instead of removed expert. Engage citizens in active roles throughout the process of help or self-help. Consider alternatives to therapy such as non-professional mutual help groups. Afford people seeking help meaningful opportunities to present their point of view concerning problem and solutions. Renew informed consent often and solicit input from client as to direction and aims of helping relationship.

Praxis *Content:* Consider interventions that go beyond individual change and that strive to alter deleterious social conditions leading to oppression and domination. Examine philosophical, contextual, needs, and pragmatic dimensions of problems.

Process: Complement attention to psychological needs with concern for social context and political dimensions of problem definition and solutions. Promote political education and social action leading to conscientization and to personal and collective empowerment.