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Marxian Currents in Latin And North American Community Psychology

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Abstract *In this paper, I review the differential influence of Marxian theories on the development of North American Community Psychology and Latin American Community Psychology. In considering what appears to be the most glaring difference – that Marxian theories figured prominently in the latter and not at all in the former – I suggest some academic and political forces that might be responsible for the difference. In addition, I present other differences between the emergences of community psychology in Latin- and North-America. I then present what I consider to be some modern theoretical and practice-related consequences of the historical negligence of Marxian theories. I conclude the paper with a personal reflection.*

Introduction

As a farewell gesture for a course in theories and interventions in Community Psychology, my professor and all of the students, including me, agreed to hold our final class at a local café. As is typical of a graduate class in the Community Psychology programme at Wilfrid Laurier University, we engaged in a lengthy discussion, supported by the reading of various articles. It was a difficult discussion, since it was the last one and we were anxious to finish our first-year. But generally, everything was going well, until toward the middle of the discussion, when my professor did the unthinkable: she raised a question that required the class, at the very least, to gloss over Marxian theories. What appeared to me to unfold thereafter was interesting. Sly as the typical graduates, my classmates and I seemed to evade the question with characteristic suaveness. After letting five minutes pass, and perhaps after our worries about her having noticed our evasion evaporated, our professor, astute as she is, called us out on our shameless avoidance of Marx. She said, “Whenever you talk about Marx in any discussion, people typically avoid the topic, just as you have here.” The point I wish to make and the one with which I begin this paper is that Marx does not seem to figure deeply in the discussions among students of Community Psychology (CP) in Canada. And judging by the apparent disappointment of my professor, Marx may not figure deeply in the discussions among professors of Community Psychology in Canada and the US, either. There is, of course, no way to know if such is true, inasmuch as I extrapolate from a handful of experiences. However, when one examines the history of Community Psychology in North America

and juxtaposes that history with that of Latin America, one thing becomes clear: Marxian theories are not strange to Latin American Community Psychology. I should say that I am aware of the different developments of Community Psychology in Canada and the US, and I am aware of the fact that a nascent Community Psychology in Canada predates Community Psychology in the US. However, because US Community Psychology dominates in Canada, a fact with empirical support and one acknowledged by Canadian Community Psychologists themselves (Walsh, 1987b), I focus on the historical record of the US and use that as a focal point for my comparison.

Thus, in this paper I will review the influence of Marxian theories on Latin and North American Community Psychology. First, I give a brief overview of the historical accounts of Latin and North American Community Psychology with a focus on Marxist influence. Second, I offer two explanations for any differences between Latin and North American CP with regard to their relations to Marxism. Third, I comment on other differences, which although unrelated to Marx, are nevertheless important to consider. Then to conclude, with a focus on Marxian influence, I will explore some consequences that may be considered to have followed from the two historical developments on the current and future state of North American Community Psychology.

Comparing Histories

In comparing the histories of CP in North and Latin America,

one should consider three things. The first is the nature of the historical account, which may document either a formal or informal emergence. The second is the presence and significance of a set of ambient forces – historical, political, academic, or social. The third is the relation between the historical account and these ambient forces. In other words, what might the ambient factors tell us about the nature of the historical account? In my opinion, this third factor is perhaps the most useful in understanding what really happened at a given time and why. It is not unlike the superimposition of two images, upon which a new, richer image emerges. Understanding the ambient forces helps to understand why the nature of the historical account is such.

Marxism and the Dawn of Latin American Community Psychology

In the case of the history of Latin American CP, a formal historical record is absent, while informal influences are prominent and may even be said to constitute the entirety of the historical account. Latin American CP is widely recognized by Latin American psychologists as having multiple and various influences, and these influences are brought together to understand the developmental forces on the field (Montero, 1996).

Montero (1996) provides an account of the informal emergence of Community Psychology in Latin America by presenting various influences, including the social and political context. The initial impetus, and what seems to be the broad, over-arching spirit characteristic of academia during the 1950s and 60s, was a desire on the part of citizens and academics to make the social sciences more relevant to societal discontents. This desire was punctuated by the facts of social unrest and inequality in Latin American societies, perhaps largely due to colonial and Cold War impacts. The desire to make the social sciences and thus psychology more relevant to the concerns of citizens led first to community work by academics and others, and then to the “revitalization” of social psychology.

The revitalized social psychology, which deviated from the previously dominant natural science social psychology, was characterized by the following traits: (a) the critical study of social behavior and ideology; (b) an awareness of the historical character of phenomena studied; (c) acceptance of methodological plurality; (d) preference for research in natural settings; (e) an emphasis on individuals as the active constructors of social life, rather than as passive subjects; (f) recognition of the dynamic and dialectic character of social reality; (g) an emphasis on the relative character of knowledge as it is produced in a specific time and space; (h) a conceptualization of the psychologist’s role as an active agent of change including social and political engagement; and (i) an orientation towards a “sociological Social Psychology” (Montero, 1996, p. 591).

Several of these changes seem to reflect a Marxian bent on psychology. For instance, the recognition of the historical nature of social phenomena, the dialectic as a model to understand social reality, and the role of the psychologist in social change, as opposed to simply social interpretation, arguably are all rooted in or parallel to Marxian thought.

Montero (1996) also lists several theoretical influences on Latin American CP, the second of which are “Marxian theories of alienation and ideology which assume that unequal labor relations produce a phenomenon in which the individual does not recognize him/herself as the producer of goods and sees them as more valuable than him/herself” (p. 595). Elsewhere, Montero and Varas-Díaz (2007) list *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* as “the more visible and important [theoretical] influence” in comparison to Lewinian ideas. (p. 67).

One might separate the influence of Marxist thought on Latin American CP into two categories: direct and indirect influence. The direct influence of Marxian thought on the development of Latin American Community Psychology consists of the presence of Marxist theories in the education of psychologists, such as the aforementioned *Manuscripts*. Not to be underestimated, however, are the indirect influences – the influence of Marx *through* other prominent academics and social figures. Most notable of these are eminent educator Paolo Freire (1921-1997), the late Ignacio Martín-Baró (1942-1989), and the aforementioned Kurt Lewin (1890-1947). Although the later of these three is not a recognized Marxist, the former two are, and all are recognized as having made a tremendous impact on Latin American Community Psychology (Montero & Varas-Díaz, 2007).

Marxism and the History of North American Community Psychology

In contrast to Latin American CP, there exists a well-known, formal historical record for the emergence of North American CP, that of the Swampscott Conference, which took place in 1965 in Massachusetts (Montero, 1996). The Conference consisted of 39 males, considered the founding fathers, who would define and develop the field of Community Psychology in the US. Apart from this more apparent difference, there is complete absence of Marxist theories in the formal record of the emergence of North American CP. That is, neither Marx nor any Marxist is recognized as a theoretical influence on the field. This absence includes the aforementioned Freire and Lewin.¹ Why?

¹ Indeed, no theory or theorist is acknowledged as having an influence on the field. Walsh (1987a) found that the founding fathers at Swampscott chose to adopt the tenets of a school of psychology – natural science psychology – but not a formal theory as such.

Why the difference?

Here, the “parallels,” to use Montero’s (1996) word, between the emergence of CP in Latin and North America are important to consider. Why did Marxian theory not enter the discussion, in light of the facts that North American CP developed in the same half of the century as did Latin American CP, that a similar malaise was felt by social scientists in both regions, that the irrelevance of the social sciences and psychology to real-world issues was a recognized problem in both regions, and that the 60s and 70s were a time in which political participation and protests were a definitive characteristic of the *zeitgeist*?

Ambient Forces: Academic and Political

Above, I mentioned that the most telling history is one that superimposes ambient forces onto an historical account. I should say that this macro-level analysis of the history of Community Psychology is congruent with views recently expressed by Kelly and Chang (2008), the former being James G. Kelly, a founder of US Community Psychology. That is, “without knowing the cultural and social background of the storyteller, the utility of a historical report is limited” (p. 678). In other words, knowing the cultural and social background in which the foundations of CP were laid, might help us better understand our present situation. In addition, it helps to understand what did and did not make it into the formal record of the emergence of North American CP.

There were many forces that were present in 1965 that can serve as potential explanations not only for the exclusion of Marxist thought in North American CP, but also for some other differences of which I make mention below. These forces I have listed as academic and political. Though I have chosen to separate them, it is understood that the academic and political contexts are interdependent, and defined, if you will, by a dialectical tension.

Academic Forces

In 1967, at an invited address to the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, Dr. Martin Luther King outlined three societal challenges that social scientists could help overcome. Implicit in his speech was an indictment, I believe, of the academic institution and the social sciences. Dr. King stated “there are some things concerning which we must always be maladjusted if we are to be people of good will (p. 573). That same year, Noam Chomsky published a paper called, *On the Responsibility of Intellectuals*, a scathing attack on academics and the culture to which they were most certainly not “maladjusted.” If we are to take Dr. King and Chomsky’s perspectives as valid, then we must conclude that the American academic culture during the 60s fostered a-critical postures on the part of academics toward the status quo and establishment.

This a-critical academic culture, finally, was the culture in which US Community Psychology was founded and we can assume that the general climate of academia crept into the emergence of North American CP. More specifically, the founders of American CP were placed in an awkward limbo in between an antagonistic sub-discipline in clinical psychology and the antagonistic and incompatible paradigm of natural-science, which was then still dominant within psychology (Walsh, 1987a). On one side, there were psychiatrists, who as Klein (1987) pointed out, despite expressing a desire to practice in the community, were not sympathetic to psychologists practicing in the community with people with mental health issues. On the other side, there was the natural-science paradigm and the psychologists who defended it. Interviews conducted years after revealed that participants at the Swampscott Conference were seriously concerned about losing credibility in the eyes of the more dominant natural-science psychologists (Walsh, 1987b). In other words, they “zealously,” to use Jim Kelly’s word, sought acceptance from natural science psychologists (Kelly, 2002). Arguably, this concern took a place of great significance, decreasing the chance of integrating potentially taboo Marxian theory, methodology, and epistemology or developing a “born-again,” social constructionist psychology.

Whereas in Latin America, “born-again” social psychologists, sociologists, community practitioners and community members were the influential agents in the development of the field, in North America by contrast, clinicians, from psychiatry and psychology, and particularly from the University of Boston, were the influential agents (Klein, 1987). Therefore, the academic context in which North American CP emerged might have made it difficult to recognize the more radical, political work of community organizers such as Saul Alinsky or the theoretical contributions of Kurt Lewin (Walsh, 1987a).

Even today, the academic contexts within which psychologists in Latin and North America work, seems to be different. In Latin America, “intellectuals are often less integrated into the state’s systems,” which means “a certain freedom to develop autonomous approaches that do not serve the state or oligarchy” (Burton & Kagan, 2004, p. 65). This may be a simplified view, however, since many psychologists, such as Montero, may practice from within academic contexts without some of strains experienced by their North American colleagues, but may experience the oppressive weight of their typically more challenging political environment (e.g., Chavez in Venezuela).²

Political Climate

In terms of the political climate, both Latin and North American CP were forged during the years of the Cold War and while the US was at war with Vietnam – both are facts not without significance. That is, the Cold War and the Vietnam War were drawn

2 Thank you to Ian Parker for pointing this out to me.

along lines of allegiance to Communism or Capitalism. Whereas Latin-America was to an extent more open to Marxism, America, on the other hand, the centre and major proponent of Capitalism and “freedom,” was vehemently opposed to Marxist doctrine both ideologically and militarily. This fervent opposition to anything of a Marxian flavor, I have come to learn, found poignant expression in what can only be considered right-wing eccentricities, such as, for instance, HUAC, the House UnAmerican Activities Committee, which was a group comprised of members of the House of Representatives. In staunch opposition to anything of a communist/Marxian flavor, the members of HUAC sought to investigate such “un-American” activities on the part of US citizens. Furthermore, it is telling that two months prior to the Swampscott Conference, the first contingent of US troops landed in Vietnam; that in October of the same year, revolutionary Marxist, Ché Guevara decided to leave Cuba to pursue the spread of his work; that Columbia was undergoing a civil war, largely influenced by Cold War conflict; that less than a year prior, the US was involved in a coup d’état in Brasil, overthrowing the democratically elected President Joao Goulart for a dictatorship; and that in 1965, US foreign investment in Latin America reached its peak. How easy would it have been for US Community Psychologists to mention or endorse Marxism when the US itself was engaging in grandiose capitalistic ventures?

Suffice it to say, there were two very different political climates, one in Latin American and the other in the US, and these climates starkly contrasted in large part with regard to their openness or opposition to Marxism. In this light, the discrepancies in the histories of Latin and North American CP are not surprising. Although only conjecture, it is not outlandish to assume that Community Psychologists in the US were afraid of being labeled “communist sympathizers,” and afraid not only of losing credibility in the eyes of natural-science psychologists, but of more dire consequences from academic institutions, such as the denial of tenure. We know, for instance, that “founding U.S. community psychologists steadfastly avoided association with contemporary African American and White political activists, because they feared losing their legitimacy as scientific psychologists among their more powerful academic peers during the crucial, formative years of their subdiscipline” (Walsh, 2002a, p. 3). If Dr. Martin Luther-King, Saul Alinsky, Bayard Rustin, and Malcolm X were bad company, then surely Marx was, too.

But Not Just Marxism: Other Telling Differences

Apart from the apparent negligence of Marxian theories on the part of US Community Psychologists, however, there are other noteworthy differences, of which I have already made mention or to which I have alluded. The first among these is the place and recognition of the work of Kurt Lewin. In Latin America, Lewin’s work is recognized as a primary, if not, the primary influence (Montero & Varas-Dias, 2007). In North America, Lewin’s

work seems to have been ignored by the “founding fathers” at the Swampscott Conference (Kelly & Chang, 2008).

The second difference concerns the sub-disciplinary “cousin” of CP. In Latin America, the closest ancestor to CP is social psychology – or rather, a “born-again” social psychology not to be confused with natural science social psychology (Montero, 2008). So important is the influence of this “born-again” social psychology, Montero and Varas-Diaz (2007) point out, that often Community Psychology is referred to as Social-Community Psychology. By contrast, in the US, the closest ancestor to CP, by which is meant the discipline or sub-discipline that exerted the most influence, is clinical psychology (Reiff, 1967, Sarason, 1976b, Kelly, 2005), or rather, an out-dated, ineffective, individual-focused, clinical psychology (Sarason, 1976b, Walsh, 1987a). Indeed, the very title of the report on the Swampscott Conference betrays this “prejudice” toward clinical practitioners: *Community psychology: A report of the Boston conference on the education of psychologists for community mental health* (Bennett, Anderson, Cooper, Hassol, Klein, & Rosenbaum, 1966, emphasis added).

But this association between clinical psychology and the new Community Psychology was not taken by all as harmless. Only two years after the conference, one prominent first-generation Community Psychologist warned that if a strong theoretical and practical foundation for North American CP was not established, then Community Psychology would haplessly denigrate as a result of its inheritance of clinical and other psychological paradigms and practices inappropriate to the needs of the field (Reiff, 1967). A decade after that, Sarason (1976a) further lamented the relationship between clinical psychology and Community Psychology, calling for a “divorce” between the two. The impact of clinical psychology on community psychology is thus well established, as is the presence and over-representation of clinicians at the Swampscott Conference (Walsh, 1987a).

The third difference between North and Latin American CP offers some explanations as to why or how this “marriage” occurred in the first place. The difference concerns the broader social ferment out of which each CP emerged, or rather, the direction from which each CP emerged. As we will see, North American CP, in a sense, descended from heaven to earth, while Latin American CP ascended from earth to heaven. In the case of Latin America, that is, CP emerged from the efforts of community organizers, activists, and community members pushing to be heard. Community Psychology was born out of political strife and the need for academics to respond to social justice issues affecting the community. Community Psychology, as such, was not presented, in other words, by academics as their own deliberate answer to political and social problems. Societal pressure facilitated the practice of community organization, political involvement by academics, involvement of community members in research and activism, the desire to address social development, and the adoption of alternative research paradigms, all of which preceded, by at least a de-

cade, the designation of Community Psychology or Social-Community Psychology (Montero, 2008). “In most places,” Montero (2008) notes, “it was only recognized as community psychology at the beginning of the 1980s” (p. 664).

In contrast, Walsh (1987b) pointed out that neither political activism nor societal participation in research were acknowledged as strong influences at Swampscott and thus in the development of the field of Community Psychology in North America. This negligence was exercised despite similar political strife in North America. In addition, the founding fathers made little or no attempt to establish a collaborative relationship with members of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI) (Walsh, 1987a). In North America, the Swampscott Conference and thus Community Psychology were facilitated, not through societal pressure, but out of the mental health movement and the need for clinical psychologists and psychiatrists to respond to a desire for mental health prevention (Bennett et al., 1966; Walsh, 1987a). Of course, departure from the individual-centric model to the “ecological-community” model, to use Sarason’s (1976a) terms, did expose practitioners of Community Psychology to issues such as poverty. But poverty and other topics falling under the current banner of social justice were only considered in light of their influence on mental health. Moreover, an understanding of the influence of social factors on mental health was just beginning to emerge. The strongest influences on the emergence and development of North American CP were not broad community issues, such as poverty and disenfranchisement, nor political involvement by academics and community members, but rather the government – first through the federal initiative that led to the creation of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and second through legislation set in place during the Kennedy Administration. In October of 1963, in response to the recommendations of a multidisciplinary panel concerned with mental health, President Kennedy signed an amendment to the Social Security Act that would increase funding for prevention of mental illness. In addition, NIMH provided many similar funding opportunities. Kelly (2005) recognizes that “without such funding, and the opportunities and incentives that the funds created, it is unlikely that the notion of communities as resources in the treatment and prevention of mental health would have evolved within the profession of psychology” (p. 234). Would CP have emerged in North America, otherwise?

The Convenient Negligence: Theoretical and Practical Implications

Given the above, we must ask how this convenient negligence of Marx on the part of the founding members of US Community Psychology impresses upon modern-day North American CP. However, trying to tease apart the impact of one, the Marxian, factor on the state of CP is inherently problematic, in light of the other differences I have mentioned. Those differences are, again, that in

the Latin American context, CP emerged out of political strife and the political participation of academics who recognized Lewin’s work and were aided by a “born-again” social psychology, while in the North American context, CP emerged out of the mental health movement and the efforts of clinical psychologists who did not recognize Lewin’s work nor emphasize political participation and community collaboration. If I were to make a claim as to how the negligence of Marx impresses upon US Community Psychology acknowledgment of these other factors, it would imply either that (a) no other factor (e.g., the negligence of Lewin) can be considered responsible and (b) a complex synergy is ignored. In short, claiming or implying that the state of North American CP is largely due to the lack of Marxism simplifies the development of the field. Instead, I suggest what I consider to be reasonable consequences of the negligence of Marx on North American CP. I have organized these consequences into two categories: practical and theoretical. Again, by organizing the consequences categorically, I do not mean to imply the independence of theory and practice in general or specific to the topic of this paper.

Theoretical Consequences

Among the more obvious impacts on theory are those related to the critique of psychology and the critique of Capitalism. The negligence of Marx in general might have made Marx’s own critique of psychology and that of his followers unknown to Community Psychologists. Long before community-oriented psychiatrists and psychologists began to consider societal factors as important in the prevention of mental illness, Marx criticized psychology “for neglecting the socio-cultural and political-economic embeddedness of the human mind,” encouraging instead the “study of concrete individuals, who lived in concrete historical societies” (Teo, 2005, p. 94). Marx’s critique easily can still be considered radical, inasmuch as most studies in Community Psychology still lack a fully-developed socio-cultural, political-economic, historical perspective on phenomena of interest. Interestingly, the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, which is recognized as the most influential of Marx’s works in Latin American CP, was the document in which Marx emphasized the impact of history on humanity (Teo, 2005).

Another rather obvious impact of neglecting Marx regards the criticism of Capitalism. Arguably, two of the most prominent North American Community Psychologists today, Nelson and Prilleltensky (2005) recently stated that “CP, which is concerned with social context [and social justice] needs to be cognizant of these larger global changes” – among which corporate capitalism is primary – “because they [global changes] are having enormous impacts on the mission of the field” (p. 31). Though they do not outline the exact impacts, the point is well-taken by other Community Psychologists (e.g., Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007) But such topics as social class and Capitalism remain taboo in mainstream discourse among psychologists (Walsh-Bowers,

2002a). This taboo status is probably in part a result of the impact of decreased autonomy for academics and their studies, first, as a result of government funding (Sarason, 1976b), and second, as a result of corporate influence (e.g., Aronowitz, 2000). Nevertheless, it certainly does not help that Community Psychologists remain theoretically anemic in the face of Capitalism – its critique and complexity. Sloan (2005) recently remarked that “psychology has systematically made itself irrelevant to debates in economics and politics” (p. 315).

Perhaps a less obvious impact of neglecting Marx pertains to the views Marx held on consciousness or the mind and ideology. Arguably, it is this theoretical point responsible for the distinction that most clearly severs Latin American CP from North American CP, not just because of the theoretical understanding that it lends to the world and social problems, but also because of the practical significance, about which I write below. According to Marx, consciousness was a socio-historical product. In *The German Ideology*, he remarks that life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by “life” – language, relations of production, and ideology. The concept of ideology in Marxism, though critiqued and modified, has influenced Latin American Community Psychology through the Freirian concepts of problematization and conscientization or consciousness-raising (Montenegro, 2002) and through the idea that ideology produces false-consciousness. False-consciousness, Martín-Baró (1994) bluntly states, should be the primary focus for psychologists.

In asserting that conscientización ought to be the principal feature in psychology’s horizon, we are proposing that the task of the psychologist must be to achieve the de-alienation of groups and persons by helping them attain a critical understanding of themselves and their reality (p. 41).

Practice-related Consequences

This last theoretical distinction is important to consider in relation to Community Psychology practice, which Montero (2008) separates into two broad models. Both are recognized and practiced in North and Latin America today. The first model centers on the community mental health approach. According to this model, which is referred to as traditional, Community Psychologists provide assistance to communities in a top-down fashion (i.e., heaven to Earth). According to the second model, which is referred to as transformational, Community Psychologists base their work in communities. The transformational model is characterized by a bottom-up pattern (i.e., Earth to heaven). Community psychologists, grassroots organizations and communities work “toward institutions, finding a meeting point with state institutions where dialogue and negotiation lead the relationship” (Montero, 2008, p. 666).

Though both models coexist in Latin America, the traditional

model predominates in North America. From her Latin American perspective, Montero (2008) has criticized this model because it follows a paternalistic tendency. Any kind of external help to communities due to political circumstances, be it official (governmental) or private, commands lowering the head before the demands of external agencies. These sorts of circumstances can actually weaken the community and produce apathy and helplessness (p. 666).

Similarly, in North America Walsh (1987b) stated that “the underlying social philosophy of this system is benevolent protection of the public by professionals. Professionals play the role of experts dispensing solutions to the community, while resisting accountability to it” (p. 783). Interestingly, interviews of first- and second-generation Community Psychologists that Walsh (1987b) conducted found that they posed in opposition the notion of collaborative research and the pressure from the natural-science paradigm. One such paradigm encompassing collaborative research, that developed in the 70s in response to the “crisis of social psychology,” falls under the transformation category, is finding a place in Latin American and European CP, and is recognized as having been influenced by Marxian theory is Liberation Social Psychology or LSP (Burton, 2004). Inherent in LSP are strong Marxian theoretical concepts such as ideology and Freirian problematization and conscientization mentioned above. Burton (2004) recognizes that LSP has the potential to address gaps in field work in Europe. Although he speaks from the European standpoint, his perspective on the value LSP holds for European psychology can be applied to the North American context.

Personal Reflection and Conclusion

Walsh-Bowers (2002b) pointed out that an ambiguity exists around the meaning of the word “social action.” As a Master of Arts student I offer my own observation on the matter to conclude this paper. I think that many students, including me, enter into graduate programmes in Community Psychology because of a sense of disillusionment with natural-science psychology and its unwavering emphasis on research. Indeed, to us, the prospect of “action,” or, to put it crudely, of “doing something,” of “changing the world,” is a fantasy we rely on in order to contend against fatalism. We enter the field somewhat “wide-eyed.” For me, and I would assume, for at least a handful of my peers, CP represented a sort of last hope – in psychology, academia, and maybe even in the professional world – for anyone wanting to contribute toward a broader social justice agenda through the integration of theory and research and while receiving some sort of formal credit (e.g., a degree). Indeed, we hear about the ART, A, R, T – a catchy acronym to suit the social-activist and would-be Community Psychologist. The ART, which stands for Action, Research, Theory, for me represented a manner in which I might avoid losing faith in psychology, because it implied a fine balance between three tools of social change. However, my personal experience with

the “ART” of Community Psychology is not without a sense of disappointment.

It seems to me now that the “ART” we are told to practice, again, which stands for Action, Research, Theory, all beginning with capital letters, is more like the “aRt,” action, RESEARCH, theory, with the word “research” in capital letters, bold-faced, and underlined. In other words, not unlike natural-science psychology, the emphasis in Community Psychology seems to be on research. Moreover, according to my own experience and my knowledge of the literature, critical, in-depth discussion about what “action” means, what it should mean in order to accomplish the goals of social justice, and how it can be practiced and integrated into graduate programmes, if at all, is lacking. For instance, how do we confront authority, including within the walls of our own university, and on what resources should we rely? How do we confront ourselves, any power and fears we may have when facing a difficult moral or ethical situation? How do we organize, rally, protest, and participate in the community and in politics? In short, how can we be the Socratic gadflies that at least I feel we should be, and that seem consonant with recent calls to action by Community Psychologists (e.g., Prilelltensky & Nelson, 1997)?

In my opinion, none of these questions is being sufficiently answered for students. Better yet, these questions, for the most part, are not being asked. Instead, it seems to be taken for granted that action refers to a narrow spectrum, along which is included, among other things, employment for a research organization or the government, the evaluation of programs, and conducting research that affords some power and voice to participants, as is the case with Participatory Action Research. Of course, none of these actions are completely and inherently bad, and in fact, I have seen some benefits of them all. But I find it hard to believe that these actions *alone* are sufficient to realize the stated goals of CP. The cynic in me cannot help but feel that perhaps these items are considered “action” because they are more radical than anything done by natural-science psychologists but not radical enough to effect change and seriously upset the status quo, the guardian of which is, arguably, the modern academic institution. Therefore, it seems to me that until Community Psychologists in North America and the programmes, of which they form a crucial part, choose to extend their definition of action and integrate theory that is critical of the status quo – Marxism being but one example – students of Community Psychology are destined to graduate wanting of experience in action necessary to upset oppressive situations, and will remain bystanders, forever interpreting the world, but never changing it.

I leave the reader with a favorite quote of mine, which illustrates the importance of experience in action. A Chinese philosopher once said [quote] “Even if [one] reads a music score hundreds of times, and discusses, asks, thinks, and sifts scores of times, [one] cannot know music at all. [One] simply has to strike and blow musical instruments, sing with [one’s] own voice, dance with

[one’s] own body, and go through all these [oneself] before [one] knows what music really is.”

Acknowledgments

I would like to sincerely thank Richard Walsh-Bowers, my teacher – on whose shoulders I stood for a bulk of this paper – for all of his help, time, encouragement, effort, and for sharing with me the wisdom of “AFGO.” Thanks, also, to Heather Hunter, Manuel Riemer, Becky Choma, Gordon Hodson, Lisa Armstrong, Kate Klein, Lois Holzman, Ian Parker, and Michael Arfken for his helpful suggestions. Finally, a heartfelt thanks to mom, dad, Mamta, Marcus, Ricky, Barb, for letting me write a huge portion of this in her living room, and to my beloved mate, Aylah, for keeping me balanced.

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