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Introduction

Edil Torres Rivera and Lillian Comas-Díaz

No one is free when others are oppressed.

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN

We invite you to expand your perspective on oppression, power, and liberation. In this edited book, we discuss liberation psychology, a discipline that encourages empowerment, healing, and transformation. *Liberation psychology* refers to the use of psychological approaches to understand and address oppression among individuals and groups (Martín-Baró, 1994). Liberation psychologists view oppression as the interaction of intrapsychic factors with systemic factors, such as sociopolitical injustice (Comas-Díaz, Hall, & Neville, 2019). They foster awareness of discrimination and inequality, fortify individuals' strengths, affirm cultural identities, and promote change to attenuate human suffering and improve people's lives (Martín-Baró, 1994; Montero & Sonn, 2009). If you are new to liberation psychology, you will find in this edited book ways to address oppression through psychological theory, method, practice, and activism. On the other hand, if you are already familiar with this approach, you will find new applications of liberation psychology. For example, given that liberation psychology has its beginnings in Latin America's community psychology, its uses in the therapeutic field are not well known.

To communicate with you, we use a testimonial voice (whether implicit or explicit) in several chapters, a liberation psychology method that relates in a more personal and intimate manner (Brabeck, 2003; see Chapter 7, this

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volume). We believe that liberation psychology is relevant to most people because the majority of us have areas of oppression and areas of privilege. Given that we are caught in a matrix of oppression, we can benefit from liberation approaches. For instance, the Brazilian Paulo Freire (1970, 2005), who developed the pedagogy of the oppressed, suggested that the oppressed carry an internalized oppressor, an aspect of the self that is also in need of liberation. Freire (1970) indicated that oppressed people experience (a) powerlessness, (b) disunion, (c) prevention from realizing their full potential, (d) internalization of the oppressor's consciousness, (e) conditioning by dominant thinking and behavior, and (f) unawareness of being manipulated and exploited. Conversely, those with privilege (a) have power, (b) are unaware of their privilege, (c) feel unified, (d) believe that the status quo is "the way things are," (e) use their power to preserve their position, and (f) exploit the powerless without acknowledging this behavior (Butts & Rich, 2015). Consistent with this argument, liberation practitioners work in a collaborative and participatory manner with oppressed people and populations. They place individuals in multiple contexts, including cultural, historical, gender, sexual orientation, sociopolitical, geopolitical, and other intersecting factors. In this way, liberation psychologists recognize the impact of the confluence of context, history, social location, and power–powerlessness on health and well-being.

Liberation psychology originated from several emancipatory movements in Latin America. We find sources of liberation in Freire's (1970) pedagogical process, an approach that promotes *conscientización* (the Spanish word for critical consciousness), dialogue, and collaboration between educator and student in the struggle against oppression. Freire (2005) coined the term *concientizacao* (the Portuguese word for critical consciousness) to educate individuals in understanding their world to develop an awareness of social and political contradictions and to take action against oppression.

Liberation theology is another significant source of liberation psychology. This is not surprising given that the architect of liberation psychology, Ignacio Martín-Baró, was both a priest and a community psychologist. In the Spanish tradition, we place a hyphen between Ignacio's last two names to separate his paternal surname (Martín) from his maternal surname (Baró). Integrating Christian theology and socioeconomic analyses, liberation theologians focus on the emancipation of marginalized and oppressed communities (Gutierrez, 1973). Indeed, liberation theologians predicate a preferential approach for the poor and the oppressed. Similarly, liberation psychologists aim to address the needs of those who suffer from historical, cultural, systemic, and sociopolitical oppression.

We believe that liberation psychology can benefit you, in addition to the people with whom you work. Indeed, we developed this edited book as a resource for psychologists, researchers, educators, clinicians, counselors, trainees, and other mental health practitioners, as well as for social justice activists and other interested individuals. This book is particularly intended to provide the theoretical framework that is missing in the social justice movement in psychology and therapeutic settings, as well as to infuse applications to mental health practitioners that go beyond advocacy (Torres Rivera, 2019).

In this fashion, we follow liberation psychology's value of inclusivity. Because the field originated in Latin America, many liberatory conceptual terms are in Spanish and Portuguese. We recommend that you become familiar with these terms by using the glossary in this book. Likewise, we suggest that you consider the powerful influence of language, particularly when working with individuals whose first language is not English. Notwithstanding its Latin American origins, Liberation psychology has been practiced in many areas of the world, including the Philippines, Thailand, the United Kingdom, Ireland, England, South Africa, and others (see Chapter 1). Thus, the list of countries embracing liberation psychology is growing.

Numerous psychologists practice liberation approaches in the United States. These practitioners tend to be affiliated with diverse branches of psychology, such as social, community, multicultural, feminist, critical, African American, Latinx, Indigenous, international, Asian American, Native American, and other psychologies. Consequently, many U.S. psychologists have applied liberation psychology to People of Color and Indigenous people (POCI; Comas-Díaz, 2007), including African Americans (Thompson & Alfred, 2009); Latinx (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2019); Indigenous individuals (Duran, Firehammer, & Gonzalez, 2008); immigrants (Torres Fernandez & Torres Rivera, 2014); Women of Color (Bryant-Davis & Comas-Díaz, 2016); lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender and queer people (LGBTQ; Singh, 2016); and White women (Lykes & Moane, 2009). Along these lines, the American Psychological Association (APA; 2018) *Revised Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Girls and Women* incorporated liberation psychology's elements. For example, the guidelines encourage psychologists to understand structural discrimination affecting girls and women and their legacies of oppression, in addition to engagement in activism (Guideline 3); use affirmative, strength-based, gender, and culturally relevant interventions (Guideline 4); engage in psychological practice that promotes agency and critical consciousness (Guideline 6); understand girls' and women's sociopolitical and geopolitical contexts (Guideline 8); when appropriate, use indigenous and complementary alternative healing (Guideline 9); and work to change institutional, systemic, and global discrimination affecting girls and women (Guideline 10).

Even though a number of psychologists have incorporated elements of liberation psychology into dominant psychological approaches, there is still a need to liberate psychology. This is essential to counterbalance psychology's monocultural orientation.

LIBERATING DOMINANT PSYCHOLOGY

To do liberation psychology requires first, to liberate psychology.

—IGNACIO MARTÍN-BARÓ

Martín-Baró (1994) reminded us that notwithstanding liberation psychology's acceptance in the United States, dominant psychology still needs to be liberated.

For instance, dominant psychology tends to be Eurocentric and linear and is perceived as universal psychological theory, science, and practice. This ethnocentric perception has limitations. To illustrate, psychology in the United States is characterized by being decontextualized and ahistorical. As a Western-based discipline, it is infused with individualist worldview values, such as meritocracy and self-determination (Pyke, 2010). Moreover, dominant European American psychology tends to support the status quo, resulting in the marginalization of POCI (Comas-Díaz, 2007), low socioeconomic status people, women (Lykes & Moane, 2009), LGBTQ people (Russell & Bohan, 2007; Singh et al., 2011), and other disenfranchised groups (Martín-Baró, 1994). Furthermore, dominant psychology can result in cultural imperialism (Afuafe, 2011). Therefore, to liberate dominant psychology requires an infusion of diverse psychological and interdisciplinary approaches. We believe that liberation psychology is one of these approaches.

Liberation psychology emerged as a reaction to dominant Eurocentric psychology's limitations to impart collectivistic, holistic orientations and social justice activism into psychological knowledge, research, and practice. In this way, liberation psychology expands dominant psychology's lens. Consequently, liberation psychologists advance dominant psychology by offering pluralistic perspectives, recognizing the multiple contexts of reality, nurturing critical thinking, cultivating creative solutions, and fostering emancipatory actions. They honor multiple ways of knowing and integrate Indigenous, decolonial, postcolonial, antiracist, ethnic, and transnational approaches into psychology. Decolonial approaches are needed because a history of colonization, oppression, and subordination persist, permeating the culture and psychology of the colonized (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). These approaches address coloniality of power—how colonizing systems of control, power, and privilege prevalent during colonization continue to negatively impact individuals with a colonization history, affecting their culture, knowledge, and systems of hierarchies (Quijano, 2000). Liberation psychologists aim to decolonize dominant psychology's knowledge, research, and practice. Similarly, liberation psychologists use postcolonial approaches to combat neocolonialism (see Chapter 8) among marginalized individuals, groups, and communities.

In addition to decolonial methods, liberation psychologists endorse interdisciplinary approaches, such as philosophy, sociology, theology, anthropology, politics, arts, humanities, cultural studies, and others. In fact, there is no single liberation psychology. Instead, there are several liberation psychologies (Watkins & Shulman, 2008). Some of these include feminist (Lykes & Moane, 2009; Moane, 2010), womanist (Bryant-Davis & Comas-Díaz, 2016), *mujerista* (the term *mujerista* can be translated as Latinx womanist, i.e., that womanist and *mujerista* psychologies are conceptually and spiritually allied; Comas-Díaz, 2016), and transnational (Norsworthy, 2017) approaches, among other liberatory psychologies (see Chapter 1, this volume).

Liberation psychologists foster personal and collective agency by encouraging people to make things happen, as opposed to having things happen to them. This empowering process is based on the belief that everyone, regardless

of intelligence, ability, or talent, needs to engage in the world to survive and help to transform it. Moreover, liberation psychologists believe that personal liberation leads to collective liberation. According to Freire (1970), healing and emancipation emerge for both the oppressed and the oppressor after the oppressed begin their liberation process.

Liberation psychologists engage in progressive action. For instance, they incorporate creativity, spirituality, mythology, *sabiduría popular* (popular wisdom), indigenous beliefs, and multiple ways of knowing into their work. Anchored in an interdisciplinary foundation, liberation psychologists embrace change, progress and evolution. Within this context, liberation psychology functions as Thomas Kuhn's (1970) concept of paradigmatic shift, where liberation psychology "moves" mainstream psychology into new paradigms—and thus, into progressive developments. According to Kuhn, outsiders to a specific science or field act as the promoters of the discipline's "scientific revolutions." As outsiders–insiders, liberation psychologists facilitate dominant psychology's development into its next paradigm.

CRITICISM OF LIBERATION PSYCHOLOGY

Liberation psychology is not without criticism. To illustrate, Afuape (2011), a woman of Nigerian descent born in England, stated that liberation ideas could harm when psychologists resort to an "expert" role and do not collaborate with clients or participants. As liberation practitioners, we can engage in micro-aggressions during therapy when we define oppression for clients, instead of listening to our clients' definitions of oppression. To avoid clinical microaggressions, Afuape recommended that we engage in radical humility and practice authentic collaboration. In other words, we need to become aware of how we can harm when we fail to accompany clients by not developing collaborative and/or participatory relationships. Moreover, previous criticisms of liberation psychology highlighted its lack of attention to women (Lykes & Moane, 2009), and LGBTQ+ individuals (Singh, 2016). Therefore, women liberation psychologists gave birth to several female affirmative liberation psychologies. Some of these include feminist liberation psychology (Lykes & Moane, 2009; Moane, 2010), womanist, and *mujerista* psychologies (Bryant-Davis & Comas-Díaz, 2016).

A LIBERATION PSYCHOLOGY PATH

We believe that regardless of your theoretical and professional orientation, you can incorporate liberation psychology into your work. The cornerstone of liberation psychology is that it is about action. As an illustration, the contributors to this book enact liberation psychology principles in numerous aspects of their professional lives, such as teaching students, organizing community groups, supervising trainees, conducting research, engaging in clinical work, creating activism or art for social justice purpose (Sandoval & LaTorre, 2008),

engaging in social justice action, and training the next generation of psychologists. Moreover, you can potentially incorporate a liberation perspective into your personal life by engaging in creative endeavors, as well as committing to social justice action. In fact, this volume offers diverse forms of knowledge, method, practice, and activism to enhance your effectiveness as a psychologist, nurture your social justice consciousness, and promote your (and other people's) liberation. In this edited book, we aim to advance dominant psychology by expanding its focus, scope, inquiry, and application. We offer liberation psychology's innovative applications while envisioning future developments. This volume is composed of six main parts: Introduction (this chapter), Theory, Method, Clinical Practice, Special Populations, and Social Justice. We include our Conclusion chapter in the Social Justice section to expand liberatory social justice into diverse contexts. In the following section, we introduce the book's chapters, as a path to liberation psychology.

LIBERATION PSYCHOLOGY THEORY

Liberation psychology presents alternatives to Western-based dominant psychology by offering an emancipatory approach. Liberation psychologists anchor their knowledge in the *vivencia* (lived experience), *lo cotidiano* (everyday reality), and the recovery of the historical memory of oppressed individuals and communities.

In Chapter 1, Mark Burton and Raquel Guzzo present a historical overview of liberation psychology. They examine its antecedents in the anticolonial work of Frantz Fanon and Paulo Freire. They also cover parallel developments in several continents and review the growth and diversification of the liberation psychology in the 21st century. In Chapter 2, Edil Torres Rivera examines the roots of liberation psychology focusing on the principles and concepts dealing with its epistemology and ontology. Additionally, he presents liberation psychology's principles and research as they relate to the practice of mental health interventions. Because racism is a major source of oppression, Raúl Quiñones-Rosado (Chapter 3) discusses liberation psychology's antiracist perspective. He states that more than an ideology, racism is a worldview, an intersubjective lens on reality deeply embedded in economic and political institutions, and a paradigm that, after more than 500 years of coloniality, continues to shape colonized identities and guide our ways of relating.

LIBERATION PSYCHOLOGY METHOD

The contributors in this section examine liberation psychology methods and research. Liberation psychologists aim to conduct research from the bottom up, as a way of involving community members and framing the research in the context of benefit for the community. They use quantitative and qualitative research methods to explore evidence for practice. Within the liberation framework, we

understand that research is not neutral. In fact, research is not even objective because it is historically embedded in the culture of privilege, where privileged groups exert dominance and power over marginalized groups (Smith, 2012). Consequently, liberation psychologists commit to the oppressed individuals' participation in conceptualizing and conducting research. In other words, members of the studied community participate and collaborate in the definition of the problem, the methods used to study the problem, and means of distributing the findings (Smith, 2012). Within participatory action research (PAR), a liberation psychology research method (see Chapter 6), community members act as coresearchers and examine the results in view of the needs of the community studied. In short, community members *own* the research findings.

Drawing on new research on the progressive origins of psychoanalysis, Daniel Gaztambide (Chapter 4) traces the psychoanalytic roots of liberation psychology through the works of Freud, Ferenczi, Memmi, Manoni, Fanon, and Freire. This "recovery of historical memory" is contextualized in contemporary psychoanalysis' increasing perspective into issues of race, class, and culture in the therapeutic space. Gaztambide identifies psychoanalysis as a liberatory psychological method. In Chapter 5, Jesica Siham Fernández describes how PAR aligns with *acompañamiento*. Within a liberation framework *acompañamiento* refers to an intentional act of working with, being with, and experiencing people impacted by systemic oppression. *Acompañamiento* (accompaniment) is identified as a key value that undergirds the role of the researcher and that facilitates liberation psychology processes toward transformative justice by and with oppressed communities. Last, in Chapter 6, M. Brinton Lykes and Gabriela Távara draw on their respective experiences as feminist participatory action researchers working in conflict and postconflict Latin American contexts to identify epistemological and methodological resources that have fostered the values and upheld the principles of liberation psychology.

LIBERATION PSYCHOLOGY CLINICAL PRACTICE

Liberation psychologists engage in clinical practice to heal individuals and groups. They honor clients' inner strength and promote resilience. Liberation psychotherapists acknowledge the confluence of clients' internal world with the systemic sociopolitical forces affecting health and well-being. In this way, they integrate liberation psychological approaches such as *testimonio*, psychospiritual, decolonial, and postcolonial approaches into mainstream psychotherapy approaches. The chapters in Part IV illustrate examples of these approaches. For example, Alejandro Cervantes (Chapter 7) presents *testimonio*, a liberation psychology narrative approach in which individuals account their experiences with oppression, trauma, and marginalization (Cervantes & Torres Fernandez, 2016). He illustrates the use of *testimonio* in treatment. Alejandro Cervantes discusses how *testimonio* can alleviate individuals' psychological trauma due to structural violence, oppressive systems, and institutional racism. He focuses on how clients' internal and external processing of creating and sharing their

papelitos guardados (memories or lived experiences suppressed, put away) and promote liberatory practices to both the therapist and client(s). Next, Chakira M. Haddock-Lazala (Chapter 8) discusses how postcolonial feminist theory may offer clinicians insight into developing more social conscious clinical theories and liberatory practices. Specifically, she discusses concepts such as power, oppression, intersectionality, decolonization, and liberation and explores how they may be applied to clinical work—particularly when addressing issues related to race, gender, and class. Finally, in Chapter 9, Lillian Comas-Díaz discusses liberation psychotherapy, a culturally, contextual, and sociopolitically embedded approach that focuses on individuals' lived experience. Anchoring liberation psychotherapy in psychospirituality, she discusses its clinical application. She highlights the uniqueness of therapeutic relationship in liberation psychotherapy.

LIBERATION PSYCHOLOGY'S APPLICATION TO SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Liberation psychology emerged as a vehicle to address the sociopolitical oppression of disadvantaged and marginalized communities. Psychologists in the United States have identified oppressed populations that can benefit from liberation approaches. In this section, we present three of these populations: African Americans, LGBTQ+ communities, and transnational applications of liberation psychology.

In Chapter 10, Thema Bryant-Davis and Shavonne J. Moore-Lobban discuss the dynamics and impact of racism and oppression using the framework of liberation psychology, which provides a revolutionary and radical commitment to the humanity and sacredness of Black Americans. These contributors present how liberation psychology provides a fuller understanding of the impact of the continued traumatic stress of dehumanization, displacement, and interdisciplinary disregard of people of African descent. The authors discuss the growth and creativity integral to liberation psychology that manifests in communal life-affirming innovation among Black Americans. Moreover, they discuss a sociopolitical development theory for action. Next, Anneliese A. Singh, Brean'a Parker, Anushka R. Aqil, and Falon Thacker (Chapter 11) describe applications of liberation psychology to LGBTQ+ communities. They examine the colonization trajectories of People of Color communities and provide a strategy of conscientization in individual and community settings to reclaim experiences and stories of queer and trans people across the globe. In doing so, they highlight practices of resilience that queer and trans communities have developed over time to sustain themselves in the face of oppression, discrimination, and decimation, with a special focus on applying these practices to individual and community change efforts. Lastly, in Chapter 12 Kathryn L. Norsworthy and Ouyporn Khuankaew use feminist liberation psychology, decoloniality, and postcolonial frameworks to examine transnational border crossings. They discuss this framework in describing their collaboration with their Thai and

Burmese colleagues, in addition to local Thai and other South and Southeastern Asian groups.

LIBERATION PSYCHOLOGY SOCIAL ACTION

Liberation psychologists consider social justice action an imperative construct in their work. We define *social justice action* as behaviors that aim to diminish oppression and support fairness, equality, and justice. In promoting our clients' social justice action, we invite them to define what social justice means for them. We ask them to engage in those social justice actions that they feel comfortable with. As part of this process, some clients identified volunteering in a range of ways, including community organizations, visiting sick people in hospitals, creating art for social justice purpose, teaching racial and ethnic socialization, serving community meals on holidays, voting in local and national elections, and even running for public office.

Ester R. Shapiro (Chapter 13) discusses creative arts and arts-based activism, such as activism (art for the purpose of activism; Sandoval & LaTorre, 2008) as compelling social justice methods. An example of activism is the musical group Las Cafeteras (a Chicano band that fuses folk music such as *son jarocho* and Afro Mexican melodies with spoken word) (Tompkins Rivas, 2013) to infuse social justice issues into their music. These artistic methods support the development of ways of knowing that can catalyze power culturally and spiritually rooted knowledge capable of crossing even heavily guarded borderlands. Shapiro applies a cultural-developmental perspective on creativity and the arts to explore the catalytic role of creative arts in liberation psychology across national borders and academic disciplines. Last, the praxis of liberation psychology for students training to become psychologists can be elusive within the structure of accredited doctoral programs, due to the constraints of dominant social discourse and perspectives permeating the field. Therefore, in Chapter 14, Carrie L. Castañeda-Sound, Daryl M. Rowe, Nahaal Binazir, and Marlene L. Cabrera present the development of a multicultural specialty track for clinical psychology doctoral students who work with underserved communities. The curriculum development and pedagogy of the specialty track are grounded in African, Indigenous, Latinx, and *mujerista* liberatory paradigms.

In the Conclusion, we (Lillian Comas-Díaz and Edil Torres Rivera) present an analysis of liberation psychology discussing the chapters in this volume. We integrate the chapters' contents and comment on the similarities between them, as well as their uniqueness. Additionally, we envision potential future applications of liberation psychology. We hope this book inspires you to develop and strengthen your commitment to liberation psychology and invite you to join the growing number of psychologists who find liberation approaches beneficial in their work and life. In our experience, liberation psychology acts as a mirror for continuing reflexivity, a vehicle for critical awareness, a channel for healing, and a beacon for social justice.

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