



























We are rich with an amazing bounty of recent decolonial and critical scholarship in CP that highlights the gaps in our disciplinary thinking and practices and offers compelling antidotes to research, teaching, and action that maintains or is agnostic to structural injustice (e.g. Beals et al., 2021; Dutta, 2016, 2018; Fernández, 2018; Fernández et al., 2021; Dugeon et al., 2020; Langhout, 2015, 2016; Langhout et al., 2016; Lykes et al., 2018; Montero et al., 2017; Silva & The Students for Diversity Now, 2018; Singh et al., 2018; Sonn et al., 2017, to name but a few). We should make ample space for the voices “of community psychologists of Color who are contributing to and transforming the discipline, while forming their own professional identities...” (Fernández, 2018, p. 224) and helping us to question ours.

#### *Becoming Co-conspirators and Accomplices*

In our community praxis we must make clear that we are accountable to marginalized, oppressed communities most impacted by structural injustice (Fine & Torre, 2021; Kesten et al., 2017; O’Neill, 1989; Wilson et al., 2020). We can seek out Black led racial justice organizations and coalitions and other community-based social justice groups already working against injustice to build long-term relationships and share our resources while accepting their leadership and lived expertise (Gordon da Cruz, 2017; Steinitz & Mishler, 2009; Thomas et al., 2020). I challenge the naïve illusion (that I’ve held for too long) that we can work with privileged groups, organizations, coalitions, or funding agencies that do not center impacted leaders and somehow help them find the error of their ways and move toward centering equity and challenging power. Our praxis must move closer to frontline communities who understand the nuances of structural injustice that those of us with more privileged lives do not (Fine & Torre, 2021).

This type of engagement with social justice groups also means going beyond consulting, evaluation, and technical assistance types of contractual relationships to fully demonstrate commitment to the cause. For example, the EPSA team has fully committed to the work of a local, Black-led youth organization. While engaged in a youth participatory action research project with them, we have also joined with them to speak at school board meetings, helped knock on doors and speak with residents during community canvassing campaigns, and served on the planning committee for their annual fundraiser.

One danger that looms in our efforts to accompany and build solidarity with marginalized groups is that we risk becoming part of the “ally industrial complex” (Indigenous Action Media, 2014). Like many well-meaning “helpers” in community settings, our work for social change is connected to our careers and livelihoods. As discussed above, we’ll have to navigate these contradictions and find ways to move beyond allyship to become co-conspirators and accomplices through activist community praxis. This means getting more courageous in our praxis and not shying away from being accomplices to the more radical actions of social movement organizations that may make us uncomfortable. For example, we can accompany, amplify, and support with our resources, community organizing and direct-action efforts for police-free schools and defunding of police, prison abolition, land reform, mutual aid, worker cooperatives, housing justice and tenant rights, transformative justice, disability justice, reproductive justice, economic justice, and community control of municipal budgets. We need to stop being complicit in propagating community interventions designed by academic elites and nonprofit gatekeepers that do not directly target racist and unjust policies and systems.

*Disruption*

One tactic of activist community praxis is disruption. Evans (2015) suggests that playing the role of critical friend is one way to problematize and disrupt ameliorative thinking and action in community settings. For Bond (1999), disruption involves “making visible the perspectives and experiences of those who have been kept at the margins... labeling privilege and challenging values and assumptions” (p. 350). But disruption can also mean directly exposing and challenging abuses of power and subverting and redistributing structural power in the settings where we have influence. Singh et al. (2018) describe how those of us in academic settings can “exercise our epistemic power to train future scholars committed to dismantling structures that benefit from the oppression of marginalized communities” (p. 386). Disruption occurs anytime power is questioned, and the struggles of oppressed people are made primary (Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2020). We can wield all available institutional power we have to detach from white hegemonic positivist transactional ways of practicing (Tuck & Yang, 2014) and disrupt imbalances of power “while remaining especially vigilant toward the destructive allure of the elitism and hierarchy that surround us” (Hale, 2008, p. 18).

Mary Watkins (2019) highlighted the work of critical anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992, 1995) and the role we can play as “negative workers” - “a species of class traitor -... - who colludes with the powerless to identify their needs against the interests of the bourgeois institution” (Watkins, 2015, p. 209). As negative workers, we can disrupt, refuse, and resist in ways that create cracks in mainstream institutions and systems that allow for opportunities to address power differentials and harmful policies. For example, we can make part of our activist

community praxis exposing the complicity of the academic and non-profit industrial complex in perpetuating social and economic injustice. In addition to overt actions to disrupt, refuse, and resist, Tuck and Yang (2011) highlight the ways in which we can also engage in covert everyday acts of resistance that test and erode power that “might include sabotage, feigned ignorance, false compliance, foot dragging, and theft” (Scott, 1985, as cited in Tuck & Yang, 2011, p. 524).

### **Conclusion: Seeking Emancipatory Relevance**

Borrowing from Thomas Teo’s (2009) scholarship in critical psychology, I believe our community practice should be judged by its *emancipatory relevance* – the degree to which we are contributing to the collective effort to resist and overthrow oppressive social conditions. We must be relevant to struggles for equality and social justice or risk sustaining injustice. I acknowledge that these ideas for an activist community praxis are more tidily articulated here than most of us experience in the real-world locations of our engaged research and action “where we are challenged to deal with the complexities, contradictions, and binaries...” (Suffla et al., 2015, p. 14). These tensions and contradictions are not easily navigated, yet we must recognize and mine the radical possibilities inhabiting this “not-yet” space in the constant process of becoming in an ever-unfinished process of solidarity (Bloch, 1995; Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002). Engaging with radical imagination allows us to then return to the present to shake up our thinking and help us remember how things could be radically different (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2010; Sarason, 1976).

In the end, the power of our activist community praxis to affect change “depends on the dosage of its break with the dominant

culture” (Martín-Baró, 1994, p. 37). The dominant culture of capitalism and neoliberalism, of our disciplines, and of our social-institutional contexts exerts a powerful influence on how we choose to act in the world for social justice. Each of us inevitably falls short of consistently living the values and politics we commit to. This is the tragic nature of our praxis. And yet, might we be willing to recognize the ways in which we are complicit in the maintenance of structural injustice and begin to imagine ways we can practice differently?

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