

**From Complexity and Social Justice to Consciousness:
Ideas that Have Constructed Community Psychology**

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From complexity and social justice to consciousness: Ideas that have built a Community Psychology

Abstract

This address focuses on the analysis of ideas that have contributed to build a psychology oriented towards a way to answer social problems affecting a kind of group present in every society: the community. Because of their human condition communities have a history, are **relational** and should be understood in their **complexity**. Community Psychology (CP), in its critical orientation, has looked for **social transformation** as a way to seek that constant goal of humanity: a better world. To do so, CP has assumed the idea of **praxis** and, consequently, the ideas of **engagement** and **participation**, whose links will be presented in their theoretical, methodological and practical aspects. That transformational praxis is also related with the ideas of **power** and **empowerment** (*fortalecimiento*) understood as the joint construction carried out by psychologists (external agents) and community stakeholders (internal agents), that may lead to **conscientization** and **liberation**, two ideas introduced by Freire. These ideas are presented as a theoretical system in which the **ethic** and **political** dimensions, together with complexity, constitute the basis for transformation, balance or, fleeting amelioration.

Key words: Complexity. Ethics. Politics. Praxis. Engaged participation. Participatory Engagement. Symmetrical Power. Conscientización.

De la complejidad y la justicia social a la conciencia: Ideas que han construido la psicología comunitaria

Resumen

Esta conferencia se centra en el análisis de ideas que han contribuido a generar una psicología orientada hacia la construcción de respuestas a problemas sociales que afectan a una forma de grupo presente en todas las sociedades: la comunidad. Como todo hecho humano las comunidades tienen una historia, son **relacionales** y deben ser entendidas en su **complejidad**. La Psicología Comunitaria (PC) en su **carácter crítico** se ha orientado por la idea de la **transformación social** que la impulsa a contribuir a la más constante búsqueda de la humanidad: un mundo mejor. Para ello asumió en su línea crítica la idea de **praxis** y por consiguiente, las ideas de **compromiso** y de **participación**, cuya fusión será presentada en sus aspectos teóricos, metodológicos y prácticos. Esa praxis transformadora a su vez se relaciona con las ideas de **poder** y de **fortalecimiento** (*empowerment, strengthening*), entendidas como construcción realizada en la participación conjunta de psicólogos/as (agentes externos) y personas comprometidas en la comunidad (agentes internos), que puede conducir a la **concientización** y a la **liberación**, dos ideas de origen freiriano. Estas ideas son consideradas desde la perspectiva de un sistema teórico en el cual las dimensiones **ética** y **política** constituyen junto con la complejidad la base que puede producir transformación, equilibrio o mejoría pasajera.

Palabras clave: Complejidad. Ética. Política. Praxis. Participación comprometida. Compromiso participativo. Poder simétrico. Conscientización.

Introduction

Community psychology (CP), in its community social psychology version or just as community psychology, has been concerned with social problems, either from an institutional perspective or from an engaged participatory perspective. Nowadays, as it was also in the past, it claims to be a psychology aimed at solving social problems for and with, the communities, contributing to their conscious strengthening (this includes empowerment and *fortalecimiento* (concept used in Latin America), with the purpose of obtaining desired transformations in their life conditions.

Social transformation, as well as the importance given to prevention, specially manifested in its United States origins, constitutes the foundation for the transforming condition that has characterized community psychology, to the point that the former has been included in one of its definitions². Both in its community social version and in its denomination as CP, this branch of psychology, which has gathered us in the Third International Congress, has been related to the social problems in the situations within which it is applied, be it from an institutional perspective or from a participatory perspective, prevention always being predominant in it. That is what a quick review of papers published in community psychology journals³ reveal. They also show the need to carry out social changes at the same time that actions are taken to fight and prevent etiological factors and behaviors that need to be eliminated.

Almost forty years of construction of CP provide enough history as to allow to make a deconstruction of its object, its method, its language, and its objectives. In such a way that I may present, in this address, a paradigmatic vision of this sub-discipline, through the ideas that, from my point of view, have been and still are fundamental for the construction of CP. These are not frozen ideas, converted into petrified statues. They are alive and continue being constructed, sometimes modulated, others transformed, depending on their response to the problems or challenges we have when confronting community praxis.

² A branch of psychology whose object is the study of psychosocial factors allowing the development, promotion and placement of control and power exerted by the people on their individual and social environment, in order to solve the problems affecting them and achieve changes within their environment and in the social structure (Montero, 2004/1984).

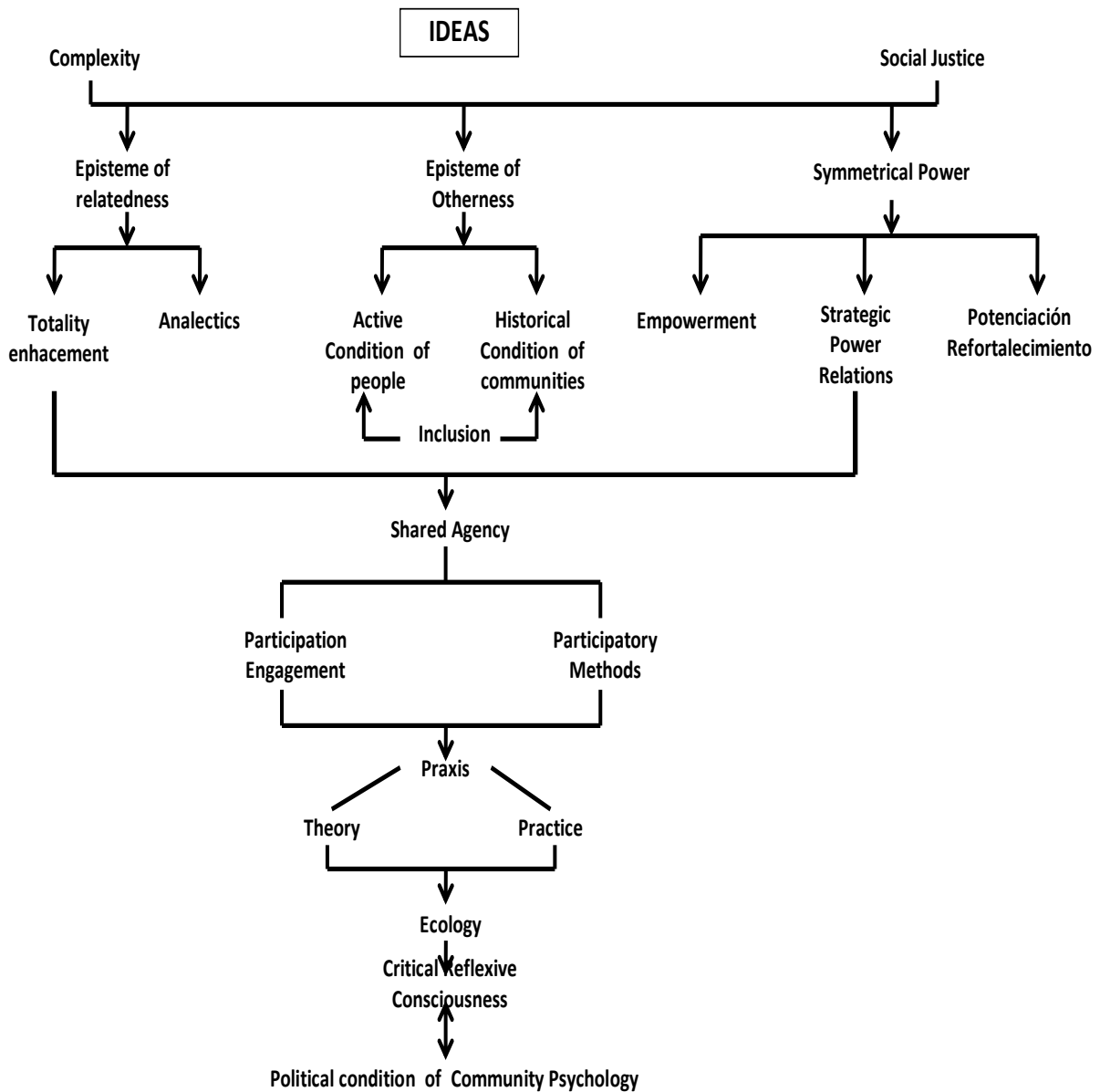
³ AJCP, JCP, CWF, RIP' JCSP, JPIC. Psykhe, AVEPSO.

To this effect I will start from the conception of CP as a social sub-discipline, inserted into each society according to the problems, needs and expectations generated in them; from its engaged participatory condition, and from its practice, produced both from within and without the community. A CP which is political because it affects the public space and concerns power and control of the circumstances upon which it intervenes to achieve transformations. A psychology in which the subject of the psychological action is an active being, participating in an activity that concerns him/her, not a mere passive receptor of services generated, decided and administered from a scientific, professional, institutional, and in any case external pole, presented as organizer and rector of therapeutic or psychosocial relations, decided exclusively by psychologists.

These characteristics respond to the initial commitment formally assumed in some countries (i.e. USA during the Swampscott Conference, 1965), or just implicitly introducing them in practice, as was the case of Latin America, where CP did not immediately use the denomination because what the pioneers intended to do was to renovate a social psychology criticized because of its lack of social sensibility, unable to attend to the real needs of the population.

In Graphic # 1 is presented a synthesis of the ideas that have marked CP as a psychology sub-discipline with a participating, committed, integrating, liberating, critical and conscious character. This graphic serves as a script for this address.

Graphic N° 1. Main Ideas in Community Psychology



The platform for these ideas resides in the complexity of the knowledge produced by CP. This is a work with neither beginning nor end or time limit. Firstly, because there may be multiple responses to the problems or to the satisfaction of a need; furthermore, the subjects with which we work change, go in and out, and at the same time the community remains with its

relationships and does not stop being. The objectives raised, which also may change along the way, are sometimes achieved in excess, sometimes in deficit. We cannot establish rhythms, although we may set goals and ends with participants of the communities. The cognitive subjects are all those that in somehow participate; there are no passive subjects waiting for or following the instructions generated from outside the community. The decisions are taken by collective consensus, and therefore, there are multiple voices.

Along with the complexity of the object of study and participants, there is an ethical conception equally fundamental: the orientation towards social justice, based on the respect of the Other. About this concept the work of Fondacaro & Weinberg (2002) shows how it has been an implicit participant in CP work over the years, but with little explicit discussion. These authors illustrate their point with the work of Prilleltensky & Nelson (1997) where “social justice figures as a naturally self-evident premise or *guiding principle*, for research in community psychology, not as a potentially problematic *topic* of research in its own right” (2002:486). They propose a program of research that incorporates the ecological principle and opens the possibility to “recast epistemological questions in terms that are amenable to empirical inquiry” (2002:487). They present it as a social ecological epistemology, open to the discussion of ethic, values, principles that are, or should be, the foundation for CP.

As those ideas that I consider the pillars for the construction of CP are developed, a connection between them, oriented towards inclusion and equality; as well as to the defense and exercise of social rights and to the compliance with duties towards society and humanity, can be seen. This aspect gives to CP not only an ethic character, but also political, expressed as an exercise of citizenship and as occupation of public space. I will then proceed to briefly discuss these ideas and how they are reflected on the community psychological praxis.

The idea of Contextual Ecology

I will start with an idea already prefigured in the previous paragraph, which is related to others that I will be drawing along this conference, and whose parallel emergence indicates that there is a paradigm supporting them which responds to the construction of CP. In its formal statement it corresponds to the line of thought which modeled the construction of CP in the United States and which corresponds to the ecologic-contextual and cultural consideration,

typical of the quantum-relativist paradigm which was being developed in the natural sciences during the seventies and the eighties.

Diverse American authors have constructed the ecological approach. I will mainly mention James G. Kelly (1966), a pioneer who, starting from the idea of complexity, understands that to be able to work with communities it must be understood that each one of them is unique; that the epistemological relation between researchers and the researched subjects, in community research and action, is complex, as it generates relationships of mutual influence and a double construction of meanings; besides understanding that the knowledge produced needs continuous revision, reconstruction, and re-elaboration. In this approach, we also find Rappaport (1977), whose work complements the ecologic aspect with the recognition of the unavoidable existence of values that need to be explicitly stated, in every relationship.

Returning to Kelly and his proposal, he too refers to epistemological premises, and to the analysis of the “converging and discriminative validity of concepts” (Westergaard and Kelly, 1992:38), since in doing that one avoids that “the scientific disciplines function with only an implicit knowledge” (Kelly, 1992:37), producing the impoverishment of knowledge. That rich, complex, dynamic, systemic, multi-variable, and with multi-leveled character, unpredictable but describable, relation, is a demonstration of the community world complexity constituting our field of study.

I cannot close this section without mentioning a notion derived from the idea of contextual ecology, which has influenced CP in such a manner that I dare say that probably the better part of the works published in the English language and also in Spanish, in the field of CP, constitute forms of preventive intervention. Prevention and intervention are guide words for action. Regarding this point, also there is the work of Seidman regarding the construction of a theory of intervention (1987/2003).

The Idea of Relatedness

Latin-American work way of community work is not **in** or **for** the community, but **with** the community (an aspect which is part of the complexity of communities). The way to define what is a community and who are the people constructing it, derives from this aspect. Usually, when speaking of community the reference is made to a group with a history, a culture and/or

sub-culture; a group whose relationships are characterized by shared social and psychological factors, and occupying a certain space. Very frequently, the territory is seen as the main aspect defining the community. That is the reason why territoriality is considered as what shapes the community, or as defining its characteristics. However, it is the relations generated by the people, what determine the community configuration and the limits, if any, of the territory. There may be communities that do not cohabit in the same place and at the same time. Territorial communities are such, due to the relationships established within them.

In fact, community psychosocial work starts with the relationships established between external and internal agents⁴, as that work is a form of shared agency. Therefore, CP has incorporated a conception of relatedness which started to be developed 40 years ago in Freire's *Adult Literacy*; whose systematic construction has been the labor of philosophers of liberation (Scannone, 1976, 1990; Dussel, 1987, 1998), who have defined an episteme of relatedness in which ontology rejects the dominant idea in Western thinking, of individuality as the essence of Being. That episteme considers that the Being resides in the relatedness in which all of us exist. Not because we cease to exist as individuals, but because we can only be individuals within the relations that we construct and that construct us. Let us remind the words of Freire: "We are beings of relations in a world of relationships" (1976). It is possible in this manner to overcome the autarchic conceptions of the Self constructed as opposed to the Other, and seeking to possess or suppress that Other (Levinas, 1977), thus generating forms of exclusion.

The basis of this episteme is the enlargement of Hegel's concept of dialectic totality, with the object of including a fourth element (besides thesis, antithesis and synthesis), proceeding from an Other that responds neither to thesis nor to antithesis, but that has opinions, knowledge, interests, that will have an influence on the antithesis, and in the elements originally considered as its only sources. Often in CP communities are those Others, whose otherness has also frequently been negatively defined, relegating them to exclusion.

Due to its primary mandate of social justice, CP seeks to eliminate all forms of exclusion. For this reason, the episteme of relatedness, indicating that we know by and, within relations, permits to explain the type of participative, inclusive approach of CP regarding the task to be

⁴ External agents are those who come to work, from outside, with the communities. Internal agents are the stakeholders and persons interested in achieving changes or solutions to problems inside the community.

carried out and the manner of deal with it. That episteme leads, as we will later see, to forms of symmetric power, thus avoiding three forms of exclusion (Montero, 2002):

1. The exclusion of the Other from the universe contained in the totality.
2. The exclusion of the Other from the lifeworld controlled by the Other.
3. The exclusion of the Other denied, dominated, disqualified and constructed as negative, whose independence is refused or suppressed.

These forms of exclusion constitute what Levinas defines as an “ontology of selfishness” [...] “a form par excellence through which the Other becomes him/her own self when becoming mine” (1977:70).

From the idea of relatedness derive the notions of sense of community and of community identity, which as has been discussed, seem to overlap in CP, as they look as the same subject, which at its core is the network of relations constituting a community and giving sense and ownership to those belonging to it..

The Idea of Otherness

From the episteme of relatedness derives then the need not only of accepting the existence in equality of those who used to be socially constructed as different, as external Others, because they are not like us. In this sense much of the work done by CP is directed to fulfill needs or, to obtain equality in reception of public services required by those others, who nevertheless belong to the same society. And as it has been understood that knowledge is not produced through acts in which a type of agent introduces ideas or actions that another passively receives, it is necessary to understand that this other one whom we approach must be part of a relation characterized by equality and respect; by shared responsibility and belonging of the same totality (Dussel, 1998; Montero, 2002).

The notion of Other, and what Levinas (1977/1995) and Moreno (in press), to quote a philosopher whose work has been enlightening and a psychologist, call Episteme of Otherness, defines this Other who is recognized as the subject by definition of the working relation in CP, as:

- A social actor with opinions, desires, expectations and a voice, who can make, execute and correct decisions, and over all, has the right and the duty to participate in the activities carried out within the community.
- Someone pertaining to a culture and having a history.
- A producer of knowledge. His/her existence and participation require that plurality in the modes of knowing be considered and that be a part of the action and the reflection on community psychosocial work.
- An internal agent participating in the actions, discussions and transformations which take place in her/his community or his/her society.

Accepting the Other in his/her Otherness means that the criticism aimed at breaking ideologised and ideologising canons should be applied equally to both the internal and external agents (professionals, technicians, NGOs, civil servants). All of them are part of a relation in which all must work and produce and be responsible for the actions and their consequences. Transformation of the Hegelian dialectic does not preclude the dialectic character in a relationship in which the participants mutually influence each other, when constructing a new knowledge starting from their respective wisdoms. This idea directly leads to other, fundamental for CP: the idea of participation.

The Idea of Engagement-Participation

It can be said that there is a consensus with regard to participation being a central, if not the most important aspect of CP, whose practice is marked by the active presence of those for whom we work. To participate is a verb which forms part of common and current language, since it describes a form of action characteristic of daily life. But, when we say participation in connection with CP, the term is full of meanings. The first of them is that it does not refer to something that may be performed individually, as this would mean destroying the sense and notion of community itself.

From the start CP, both in its form of community social psychology (CSP) and as CP, incorporates participation, because it permits to achieve the transformations responding to community expectations and needs. And it is participation that warrants the success when we work with normative needs.

However, it is not a simple participation. The participation developed in CP requires something else which cannot be dealt with separately. Since the eighties it was acknowledged that the commitment factor plays a fundamental role, as without it participation could be transitory, itinerant, superficial and capricious, which would preclude its capacity of constructing other means of doing and thinking in relation with the community to which one belongs.

Engagement and commitment are necessary in order to have the kind of participation that may comply with the goal of contributing to social transformation, and to maintain the actions and changes, to generate others that would continue, sustain, modify, or even totally modify those actions and changes, according to the situations,. Although neither participation nor engagement, remain forever, their joint presence may furnish the responses to the changes within the community. Community praxis has permitted to identify the aspects that provide a base for a theory of binomial participation-engagement in CP. These aspects are:

- The direct relation observed in groups and persons (IAs and EAs) that achieve transformations in their communities. That relation points out that the greater the participation, the greater the commitment, and vice versa: the greater the commitment, the greater the participation.
- The dynamic character of the binomial participation-engagement. In practice we have encountered various degrees or levels of engaged-participation, permitting to say that as the engagement is increased there is more participation in the community, thus ratifying the previous point.
- There is a tendency which fluctuates in centripetal and centrifuge sense with regard to the nucleus of greater engaged-participation in a community. The ideal would be to obtain more people joining the centre than those leaving it, because community work can be a tiring task, taken time from people's leisure. Knowing that there always are fluctuations in participation, there is not an evaluation of the amount of engaged-participation. All modes of participation are necessary.
- When there is committed participation the links of circumstantial support and sporadic actions are maintained.
- Engagement is needed both in the internal and in the external agents. In this sense we go further than what was understood by social sciences during the 70's and 80's, when it was considered that only the EAs should be committed. In our praxis we have found

that if the IAs are not committed, the results are less effective or the desired knowledge is not obtained.

- Therefore, the interchange of scientific or specialized knowledge, and popular knowledge, proposed by Freire (1970, 1977) and by Fals Borda (1977, 1985) is obtained through engaged-participation. As proposed by Gonçalves de Freitas (1977) and Gonçalves de Freitas & Montero (2006) it is necessary to have an interchange of knowledge and modes of knowing including acknowledgment and analysis of what has been done, during community psychology work.

From engaged-participation, which we could also mention as participatory-engagement, derive other ideas. The first one, connected at the same time with the ideas of relatedness and of the Other and his/her inclusion, is *the active character of every human being*. No one is so poor, so weak, so ignorant as not being able to participate. Adverse conditions, as well as favourable ones, may be modified, and in the community psychosocial perspective, they can be used to produce changes in the people and their environment.

Another idea derives from the previously mentioned *political condition* of community action, being generated by engaged-participation, as in doing so it creates a way of action in public space, and simultaneously, a mode of appropriation of that space, as it is a form of civic activity.

A third idea is that of *the shared agency*. Community psychological work has a change generating function performed by two types of agents: those of an origin external to the community, already mentioned, and the stakeholders interested people and organized groups inside the community, who are internal agents of such transformations. Both agents should work together.

Participatory Methods

Not exactly an idea, but a very important action derived from the idea of participation, has been the adoption of participatory methods generated and successfully employed by other social sciences (i.e.: sociology, anthropology, ethnomethodology), such as participatory action-research; participatory interviews, and participant observation. When adopted by community psychology these methods have been adapted to community work, enhancing their applications.

These methods not only provide ways to do, but also promote and strengthen engaged-participation; simultaneously uniting the activity of EAs and IAs, strengthening their relation and producing new knowledge. To this should be added that those methods facilitate the engaged-participatory permanence of a greater number of IAs.

The Idea of Symmetrical Power

This idea is generated in CP. It was first developed in practice and then theorized, and has been slow in its dissemination. I must say that its scarce popularity is due in part to the fact that it is an idea that goes against another one that has absolutely reigned since the beginning of the 20th century. One that is so deeply ingrained and naturalized that, for many people, and I do not refer to the common people but to academics and college students, it is the only way possible to refer to power. I refer to the notion of power coined by Max Weber in 1922.

In fact, it is so naturalized that to speak of symmetry in relation to power seems like an oxymoron. Weber defined power as “the probability of imposing one’s own will in a social relationship even against every resistance and whatever the basis of that probability is” (Weber, 1922/1964: 228). A definition that since then has been paraphrased by innumerable social scientists (Dahl, 1969), including a few psychologists (i.e.: Fischer, 1992; Martín-Baró, 1984; Jiménez Burillo, 2006, amongst others). In that theory the power is always asymmetric; that is, power would always be concentrated in one pole of the relation. Such definition condemns to a perpetual situation of unbalance, in which any change would refer only to the holders of the power, not to its distribution in society. When it is accepted that there may be different forms of exercising the power which could break the asymmetry, fair and durable changes will be achieved.

Serrano-García and López Sánchez have been developing, in the field of PSC since the late eighties, a theory which deviates from the Weberian line. Their work, of which I heard for the first time in Costa Rica in 1991, was published in a book edited by me in Mexico in 1994 (reedited in 2001). These authors introduced the idea that resources, the basis of power, are unequally distributed, but at the same time, as they argue, every person has the capacity to exercise the power. They define power as “a personal, or indirect, daily action, in which people

express their social consensus and the ruptures between their experience and their conscience” (Serrano-García & López Sánchez, 1994:178).

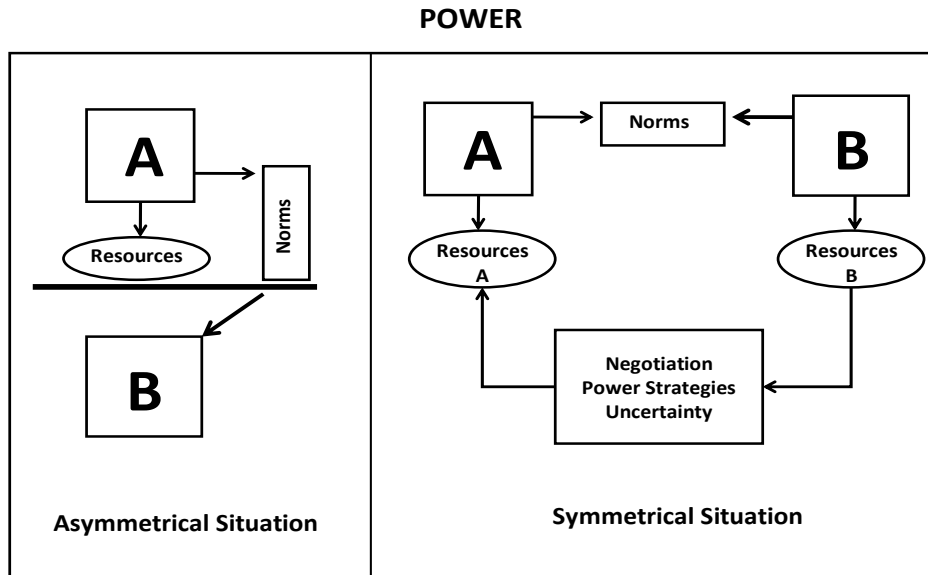
And as other authors had already anticipated (Foucault, Martín-Baró, Fischer), they consider that power is a relation. Power relations have a historical character and precede interaction, leading to the emergence of conflicts between individuals or groups of interest, as both parts in those conflicts are interested in the resources unequally handled benefitting one part and depriving the other.

This relational conception is important because it constructs the relation as being plural. Uniqueness does not make a relation, therefore when speaking of relation, the possibility of knowledge, feelings and various actions is being introduced. Thus, although a person or a group control all the possible resources in a situation, establishing the norms and the organization of the relation, as well as the behaviour to be observed by those lacking the resources, and wishing to obtain them, they are related with those people in need. The power relation needs them.

It is then possible to introduce in the relation other cultural and historical resources generated by desire and necessity, that might affect the certitude that those controlling the resources may have, in relation with their position and role in the relation. At the same time, the controlling ones may be interested in those other unexpected resources. A negotiation could be thus produced, and even more important, a change in the norms and organization of the relation, regarding the use of the desired resources.

Crozier (1970), introduced the concept of *power strategies* that can be used to define that intra-relation movement by making possible the contrast between resources, both asymmetrical, in order to balance the relation and gain access to what is desired. These could also generate “zones of incertitude with reference to the constrictive relation that may be exercised” (Crozier and Friedberg, 1977:86), from a pole of relation to the other. Graphic # 2 presents situations of asymmetrical and symmetrical power. Graphic 3 shows the dynamic of asymmetrical power.

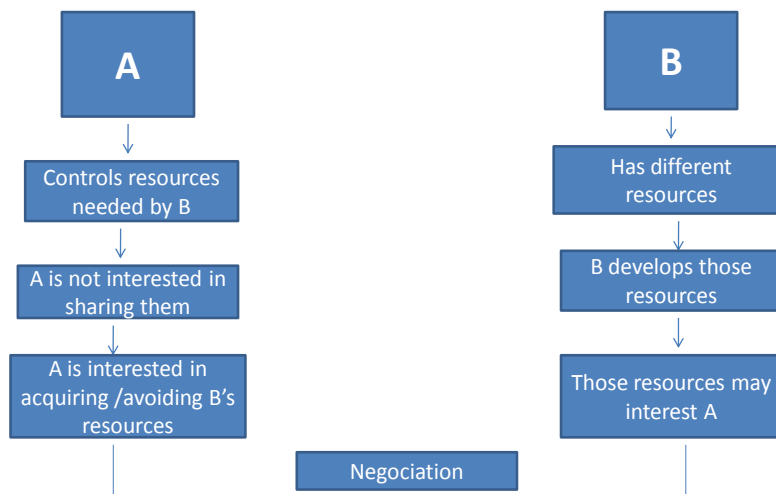
Graphic N° 2. Conceptions of Power



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Graphic N° 3. Dynamics of Symmetrical power

Symmetrical Power



An Idea and Two Answers: Empowerment and *Fortalecimiento*

“Power is a problem {...} not only when exercised abusively, within a dominant and oppressive frame, but also when its possession is ignored” (Montero, 2003:33). This ignorance of the power that may be possessed and exerted in order to transform things or to obtain a better quality of life, is a problem present in the community psychology field.

In 1981 Julian Rappaport introduced the concept of empowerment as a means of tending to the lack of power through the development in individuals and communities, consciousness of their power, or of their capacities. This concept was rapidly converted into an instrument for community work, as it implies processes in which community stakeholders jointly develop capacities and resources to control their living situation, committing themselves to achieve transformations in their environment, and at the same time transforming themselves.

In 1984 Rappaport defined empowerment as a set of possibilities that go from being a powerful model for social policies directed to community intervention, to being a process whose aims, ways and outcomes are variable and even inconsistent; to be considered both as an internalized attitude and as an observable behaviour that may produce a sense of control and authority over the life of a person. Rappaport’s idea has developed a life of its own and is a very successful one considering its high rate of utilization in CP research, intervention and prevention. Its heuristic usefulness is very high, as well as its productivity in terms of methodological forms of obtaining that individuals and communities develop control of their potentials and their capacities (see compilation Rappaport and Hess, 1984; Rappaport, 1990). Likewise, there has been considerable discussion over the theoretical (see Rappaport, 1987, for theoretical aspects), as well as critical aspects (Serrano-García, 1984; Fuks, 2006; Swift & Levin, 1987; Vázquez, 2004; Orford, 2008).

The idea of ignorance of power has provoked another, more recent reaction, to the concept of empowerment: I refer to the critical work of Carlos Vázquez (2004) in Puerto Rico, and his concept of *refortalecimiento* (re-strengthening). This is a concept that may be considered as ecologic in the before mentioned sense given by Kelly’s, because Vázquez highlights the need for contextualization and, as said, is essentially critical. In *Refortalecimiento* (re-strengthening) weaknesses are considered as strengths; it does not place itself where what is social digs into what is personal making itself part of it, but where “what is

social is what is personal” (p. 45); because what is personal is political and the subject is its context. Thus, re-strengthening is a paradox that implies rethinking what has been automatically assumed. To me this conception fits in with the idea of conscience, discussed later; with the processes of denaturalization and problematisation moving it, and incorporating the deconstruction about which Vazquez refers (2004), and with the symmetric conception of power.

The Idea of Praxis

This idea has a long history. In the first place and as its name indicates, it was originated in Greece and was created by Aristotle (*Nichomachean Ethics*), who will never cease to impress us with his enormous capacity of producing knowledge. In that first definition, which he defined as practice, praxis formed part of a triad together with *poiesis* (creation) and *episteme* (knowledge). A second Aristotelian version of these gnoseologic fields substituted episteme by *theory*, as the highest limit of what is human, bordering divinity. Then, praxis had a long historical period being considered as the lowest expression of knowledge. In the CPS developed in Latin America the concept of praxis is taken from the version developed in the nineteenth century by Karl Marx, in which that distance between praxis and theory generated through history is overcome.

The Marxian version gives praxis a critical practice character considering that practical and theoretical reasons are linked, and that union is such that from practice emerges theory and from theory derives practice. It is in this sense, developed from the Marxian criticism of Feuerbach theses, and from the experiences in research and action, that the idea of praxis is assumed by CP. The concept has a philosophical origin, but its development is based on action and reflection, as is so well illustrated by researches made according to Freirian ideas, and a host of followers all over the world, as well as from post-Marxist, neo-Marxist, and also non-Marxist perspectives incorporating the concept of praxis.

The Idea of Consciousness

This idea was also originated in Latin America and proceeds from the Freirean popular education (Adult Literacy) (1970, 1988 /1971, 1977), from Vieira Pinto (1960), from the critical sociology developed by Orlando Fals Borda (1959, 1978, 1985) from their followers, and also from the theology of liberation and the philosophers of liberation (Dussel, 1987; 1998). CP developed in LA adopted certain basic concepts and the emphasis in the mobilization of consciousness in order to be able to produce radical transformations in groups and individuals, so engaged-participation and/or participatory-engagement can be up to merit such denomination. That is what has been named conscientization, which is understood as a change in consciousness that enlarges cognition and affectivity, thus obtaining transforming actions. Through conscientization, consciousness critically examines situations and facts not previously considered and redefine situations or facts previously considered as natural and unavoidable. Conscientization supposes linking the knowledge of the present reality, with all its deficiencies, biases and limitations and the positive or negative conditions it may have, to the knowledge of their causes and effects (acknowledging and recovering their historical character). Analyzing one's individual and collective capacities to carry out transforming actions in the world of personal and community life, and generating new forms of understanding reality and its possibilities of change, are some other possibilities deriving from conscientization. Furthermore, conscientization is a way to generate a critical problematizing capacity.

This idea has impelled in CP, the construction of methods to foster conscientization (Montero, 2009), taking on account the specific situations characteristic of each community. This does not mean establishing a fixed line of action, but trying to respond in a critical manner to negative situations, stimulating analytical reflection. In this sense CP joins to its efforts the idea of liberation, of which it is one of its more assiduous exponents.

The Relation Between Ideas and Theoretical Concepts and Social Problems.

To close an analysis that insists on the situated condition (contextual) and the response to the specific needs, expectations and problems of communities as belonging to CP's praxis orientation, it is necessary to go further than a declaration of principles. I will not present a listing of the topics and problems with which deals PC's practice. That would just be a boring

gesture, and an insufficient task. Social problems are multiple, varied, changing and, few at the same time.

I'll develop the point a little more. A distinction should be made when speaking about social problems, classifying them in two lines that in fact are interwoven. These lines are:

- Problems of survival and autonomy/liberation.
- Problems of excellence and autonomy/liberation.

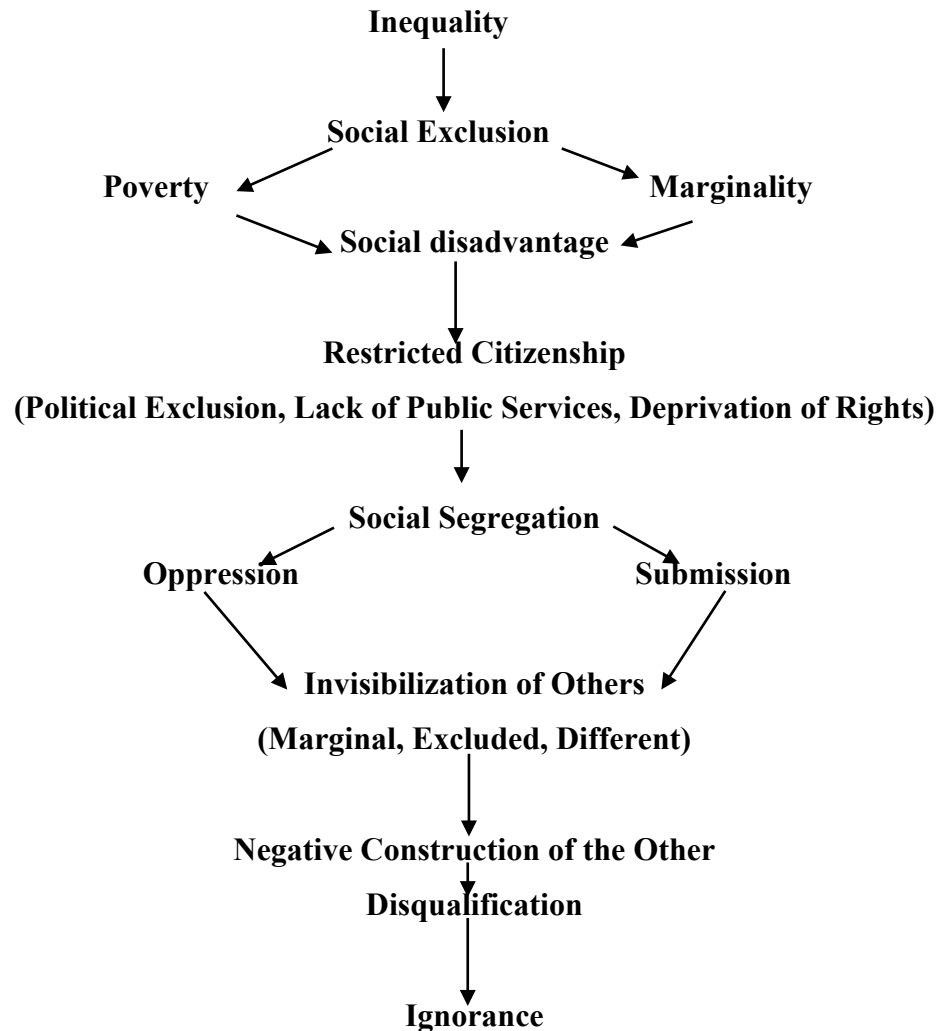
This means that unfortunately there are societies within which staying alive is the first daily task of a person. That is why liberation is primordial. Autonomy in them may be called liberation. That is, liberation from slavery, oppression, illness, hunger and thirst, and from the inequality and necessity producing those circumstances.

And there are societies in which the main task is to achieve the greatest possible well-being, by improving the services and opportunities within equal circumstances and with the autonomy derived from the liberation of disqualifying ideologies, alienation and anomy.

In the first case, the task of living includes being liberated from situations which make precarious that uncertain life. In the second case, the target is to reach the highest possible degree in quality of life, obtaining at the same time the necessary autonomy to make of that life a sum of satisfactions. In both cases human creativity is present.

The fundamental causes of social problems are always the same and I summarize them in Graphic N° 4.

Graphic N° 4: Causes of Social Problems



Challenges and Conclusions

What I have briefly described is a construction elaborated from a long experience characterized more by multiple everyday queries and questioning I pose myself than by orderly and clear definition. The reason is apparently simple: CP is in constant movement, every day we learn new things, others are more deeply studied, something is understood, which tomorrow might be problematised anew, because it is a knowledge being constructed at various fronts. I

started speaking of the complexity it presents from its birth, as a form of doing science, while being involved in common daily life. Now, at the moment of closing this address, I can only do it by enumerating the challenges that as a community psychologist and researcher I see in front of me, but knowing that other people, in other places, are equally perceiving, and probably much more, what I will state as follows:

- In the first place the necessity, more urgent time and time again, of conscientizing the external agents, in all their manifestations: psychology and other branches of science practitioners; technicians; representatives of NGOs and also of governmental institutions. The idea of consciousness as the moment of understanding necessary to transform a situation is not something to be reached only by IAs, all of us need to be conscientized regarding what we do and how and for whom we do it. Because nobody can conscientize if before she/he has not developed the necessary consciousness to do it (Montero, 2009).
- This supposes that EAs have to be problematized in order to be able to problematize other persons. And, likewise, they must be sensitized towards the people, locations, situations and relations with which they must work. It is not an easy task, but it is necessary to undertake it, as the current situation frequently is unbalanced with regard to these aspects. The question is not that in the communities they do not understand us, it is a question that many EA do not understand the communities.
- Other challenge is the necessity of handling with a plurality of methods, developed ad hoc, situations of a very high complexity. We need to avoid the methods in vogue, generating responses that really respond to the situations confronted.
- And to finish, even when there must be many other challenges, let us avoid the rigidity of procedures and let us hear, observe, respond and act according to each situation and its peculiarities, remaining faithful in this manner to the paradigm of which CP is part and to whose development CP has contributed.

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