

THErapy FOR LIBERATION AND EMPOWERMENT:

SUBVERTING THE DOMINANT WORLDVIEW, CHALLENGING
CULTURAL MESSAGES, AND OTHER RADICAL
INTERVENTIONS WITH COLLEGE STUDENTS

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- Who we are and how we came to this work
- Why is subversive/ liberation health work helpful and meaningful for college students?
- Why is our current historical moment an especially crucial time for this type of work?

A TWO SENTENCE SUMMARY OF LIBERATION HEALTH!

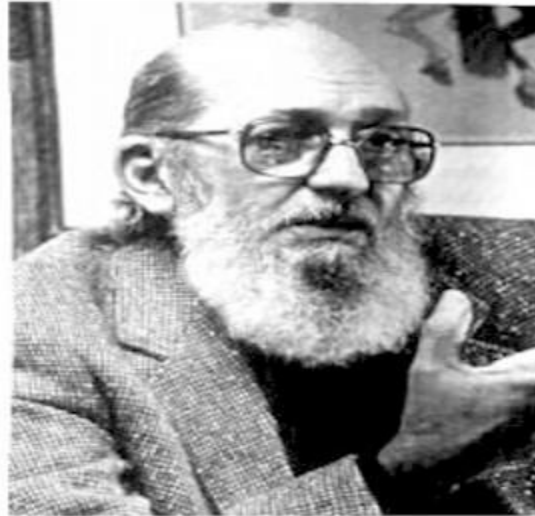
- ⦿ A theory of human behavior which conceptualizes that the problems of individuals can not be understood in isolation from the economic, political, cultural, and historical conditions which give rise to them.
- ⦿ A method of practice which helps individuals, groups and communities understand the personal, cultural and institutional factors that contribute to their problem and act to change these conditions; *to liberate themselves from both internal and external oppressions.*

LIBERATION HEALTH: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Key theoretical and practice frameworks:

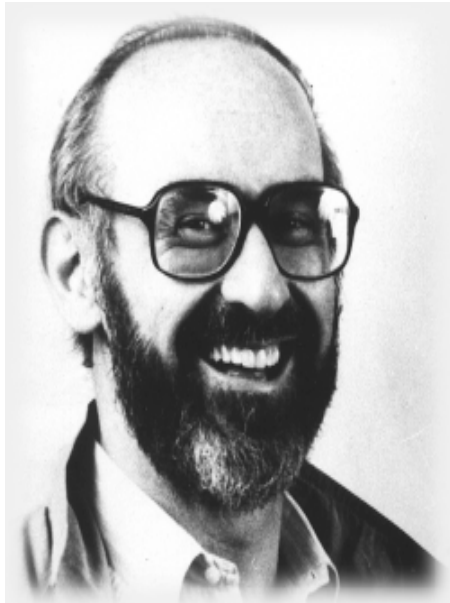
- ◉ *Paulo Freire and Popular Education*
- ◉ *Ignacio Martin Baro and Liberation Psychology*
- ◉ *Tradition of Radical Social Work Practice- roots of the profession*

PAULO FREIRE



- ◉ “Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.”
- ◉ ‘the purpose of education is to change people so they can change the world’
 - [Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*](#)

IGNACIO MARTIN-BARO AND LIBERATION PSYCHOLOGY



“Perhaps the most radical choice psychologists face today concerns the disjunction between an accommodation to a social system that has benefited us personally and a critical confrontation with that system...”

Ignacio Martín-Baró, The Role of the Psychologist
translated by Adrienne Aron

THE PRACTICE: SEE, ANALYZE, ACT!

- ◉ *To see the problem or situation lived by the clients in it's totality.*
- ◉ *To analyze the personal, cultural, and institutional factors contributing to problem*
- ◉ *To act to change the problem or situation*

KEY CONCEPTS OF THE LIBERATION HEALTH FRAMEWORK

- ⦿ The individual and collective historical moment.
- ⦿ Worldviews
- ⦿ Dominant worldviews
- ⦿ Deconstructing dominant worldviews
- ⦿ Objects and Subjects

COMPONENTS OF THE LIBERATION HEALTH CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- ◉ *Knowledge is not neutral; it is the expression of historical moments where some groups exercise dominant power over others.*
- ◉ *“Personal Problems” are directly related to the cultural messages and worldviews we are exposed to, and the institutions we interact with.*
- ◉ *Challenging these dominant worldview messages and institutions, both internally and externally, is a critical component of the work*

LIBERATION HEALTH METHODOLOGY: STEP ONE

- ◉ *See the problem, as experienced by the client in its totality.*
- ◉ *Clients and workers engage in some participatory research about the problem, as well as life outside of the problem*
- ◉ *Problems are externalized*
- ◉ *Clients are asked to make a list of the problems that are getting in the way of optimal functioning*

LIBERATION HEALTH METHODOLOGY: STEP TWO

- ◎ Produce the Codes that Represent the Problem
- ◎ Clients and social workers produce a material representation (code) of the problem. When working with a family or a group, individuals compare their list of problems and then decide on a shared problem they will address together. Clients can create a drawing or visual representation, which demonstrates the problem in its totality and are asked make the link between themselves and the externalized problem.

anxious

depressed

constantly overwhelmed

disconnected

isolated

disconnection

isolation

culture of individualism

no solidarity

culture of consumerism

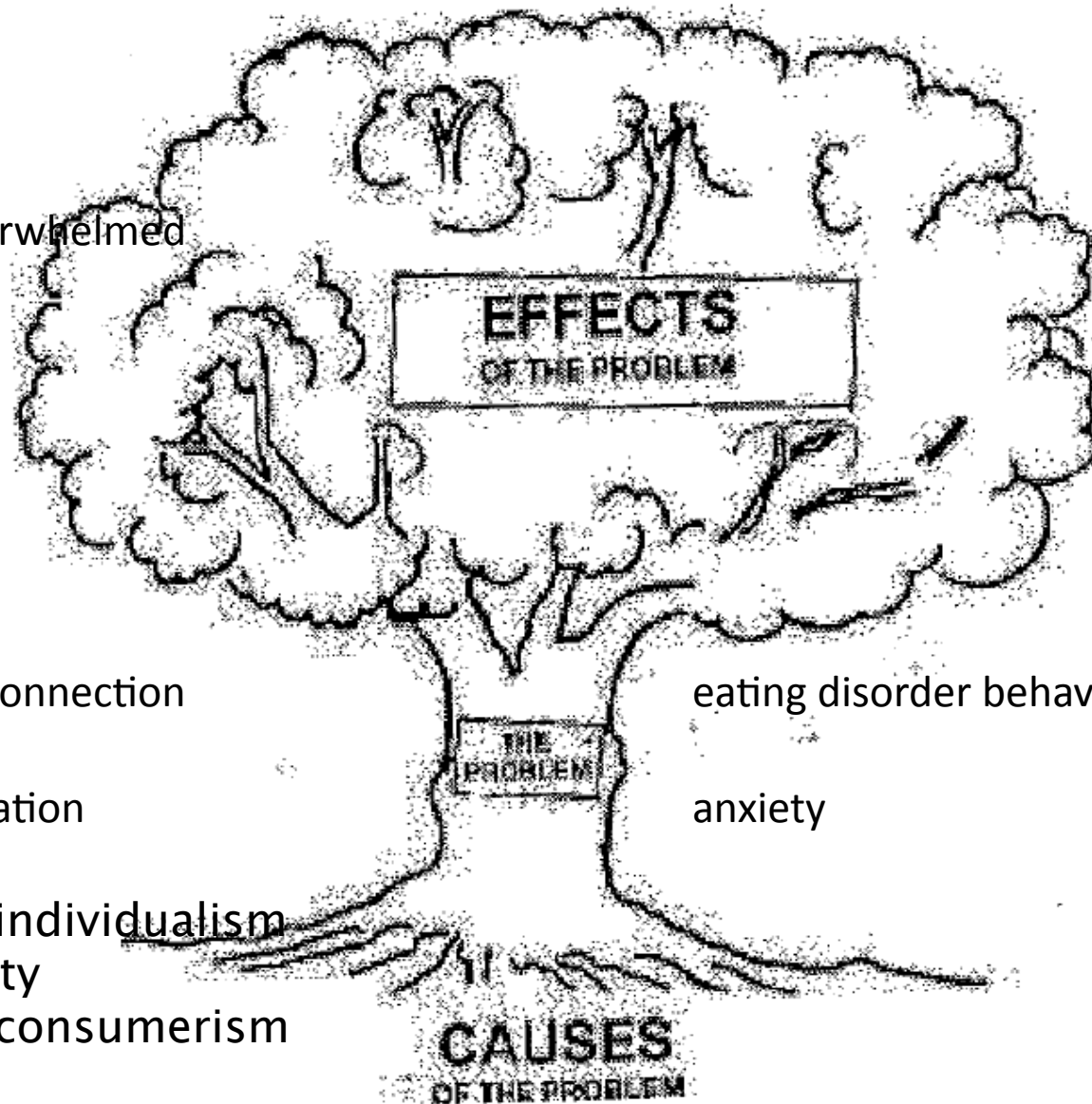
stigma

sexism- culture of impossible beauty/ body image standards

culture of competition

racism

deeper root: capitalist economic system



eating disorder behaviors

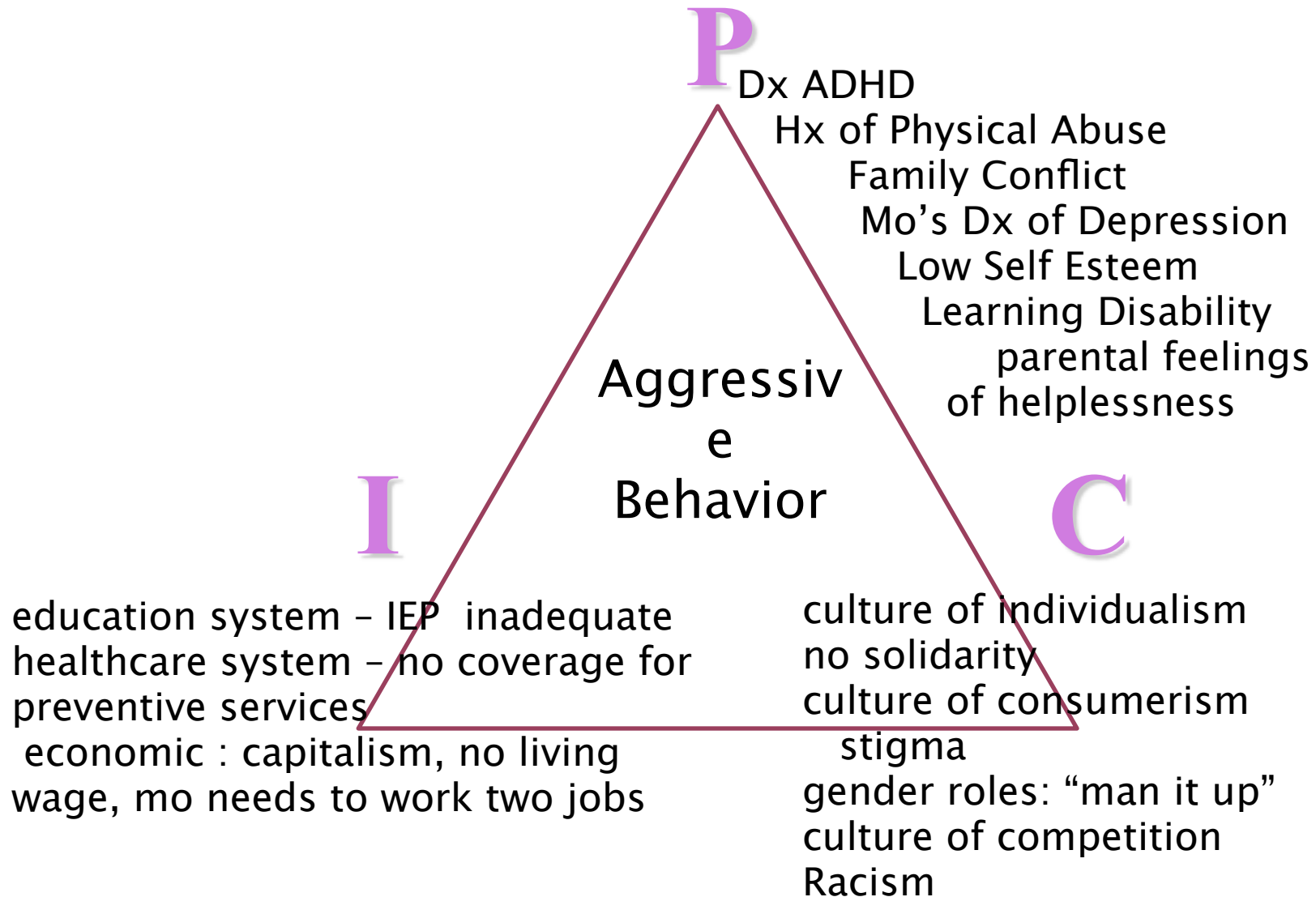
anxiety

CAUSES
OF THE PROBLEM

LIBERATION HEALTH METHODOLOGY: STEP THREE

- ◉ *Analyze the Personal, Cultural, and Institutional Factors that Contribute to the Problem.*
- ◉ *Deconstruction of dominant worldview knowledge and ideology; establishing connections, “lifting the veil of ignorance” required by the dominant worldview.*
- ◉ *Problematization: questioning of existing social situations and producing awareness of them: to survive people accustom themselves to material conditions of life to the point that they come to think of them as the natural way to live.*
- ◉ *Introducing new information and consciousness raising: becoming aware of situations and facts theretofore unknown.*
- ◉ *Rescuing the historical memory of change: ongoing stories of resistance and empowerment*

Problem Analysis



SAMPLE LIBERATION HEALTH QUESTIONS

- ◉ Have you had to stand up for yourself when you were younger? What are we told about how boys should behave?
- ◉ What kind of messages do we get in our culture about black boys and men? In your neighborhood and family, what were the expectations you heard about men?
- ◉ What feelings did you grow up believing were acceptable for you to have? Which ones weren't?
- ◉ What messages do you get about having a big house and a lot of stuff? In whose interest is it for you to think this way? Who benefits?

DECONSTRUCTING CONVERSATIONS:

- ⊙ students coming in with anxiety and extreme stress about needing to be “successful”
- ⊙ unpacking what this means and where our messages come from about success
- ⊙ cultural focus on productivity and outcomes over process, experience and growth-
- ⊙ economic system -> cultural messaging -> families/peers/professors/supervisors -> students.
- ⊙ messaging that our worth is determined by outcomes- ‘you are what you produce’

LIBERATION HEALTH METHODOLOGY: STEP FOUR

- ◉ *To Act to Change the Situation*
- ◉ *The final step involves participants discussing an immediate plan to resolve the problem and a long-range plan of action. Clients and providers can produce a “planning the action” chart. This chart consists of four components:*
 - ◉ *Identification of the problem*
 - ◉ *What needs to change*
 - ◉ *Long range vision*
 - ◉ *Plan for the week*

SAMPLE ACTION PLAN

- ⦿ Identification of the Problem: “Anger and aggression gets in the way of my doing well at school and in relationships”
- ⦿ What needs to change: “Want to feel less angry and express feelings in less destructive ways”
- ⦿ Long range vision: “Not need to be in therapy for this” “Feel like I can control my anger most of the time” “Feel more connected to the world”
- ⦿ Plan for next few weeks (ind): “Write out my feelings more” “Try to identify triggers to feeling overwhelmed and understand why I’m frustrated” “Make connections to the bigger picture of what upsets me”
- ⦿ Plan for next few weeks (cult, inst): spoken word

PRAXIS, CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND ACTION

- ◉ *The Basic steps of the methodology are repeated over and over again following changes in the situation as experienced by the families Changes in the families internal world come about when the external world changes. Changes in the external world come about when people feel and think differently and act differently*

LIBERATION HEALTH METHODOLOGY: FROM PASSIVE OBJECTS BEING ACTED UPON TO ACTIVE SUBJECTS IN THE WORLD

- ◉ Social science research indicates that a critical component in the mental health of individuals and families is their sense of self efficacy and their perceived ability to understand and intervene in the systems that affect their lives (Hardina, 1999, Lee, 1994, Staples, 2004)

LIBERATION HEALTH METHODS: PRACTICAL, HELPFUL, AND NECESSARY!

- ◉ Helping clients understand their problems in their totality and move from passive objects being acted upon by social structures and institutions to active subjects who begin to take charge of their own lives can be an effective and at times necessary component of a social worker's therapeutic work with individuals, families and communities.

LIBERATION HEALTH RESOURCES

- ⦿ Boston Liberation Health Group:
www.liberationhealth.org

Radical Social Work Group of New York:
<https://sites.google.com/site/radicalswg/>

***Social Justice in Clinical Practice: A
Liberation Health Framework for Social
Work.***

Ed. Dawn Belkin-Martinez and Ann Fleck-
Henderson

Routledge Publishing, Due out: March 2014.

SUBVERSIVE THERAPY

- ⦿ Problems clients bring to clinic are directly related to conditioned normative messages of our culture
- ⦿ Challenging the messages and underlying assumptions of this dominant worldview is critical to therapy and can be a powerful lever for change

SOURCES FOR THIS APPROACH

- ◉ Nancy McWilliams (2005)
- ◉ Critical Psychology (Isaac Prilleltensky & others)
- ◉ Feminist Therapy (Laura Brown)
- ◉ Narrative Therapy (Michael White)
- ◉ Buddhist Psychology
- ◉ Acceptance & Commitment Therapy
- ◉ Carl Rogers “quote”

- ◉ A Common Factor in Psychotherapy?

SUBVERSIVE OF WHAT?

- ◉ Oppression, discrimination, systemic barriers
- ◉ Internalized oppression
- ◉ “Ethic of control” (Narrative therapy)
- ◉ Mainstream norms of Western culture regarding human well-being
- ◉ The “problem-solving mind” (ACT)
- ◉ Norms of traditional therapy

SUBVERSIVE PRACTICES

- ◉ Identifying underlying cultural messages and assumptions
- ◉ Helping clients notice alternatives to the dominant stories in their lives
- ◉ Guiding clients to take personal & collective action to resist oppressive forces & dominant messages

SUBVERSIVE PRACTICES

- ⦿ Expanding the view of the self to reveal that the person is greater than the problem
- ⦿ Developing & elaborating “subordinate story-lines”
- ⦿ Connecting the client to deeper/core personal values

SUBVERSIVE PRACTICES

- ◉ Establishing collaborative rather than hierarchical relationships with clients

WHY IS THIS APPROACH USEFUL?

- ◎ For college students:
 - College students very often struggle with the balance between received values and constructed values. This model helps them sharpen their exploration.

WHY IS THIS APPROACH USEFUL?

◎ For therapists:

- “Preserving our humanity” (McWilliams)- acting in accord with our values
- Feeling connected to a larger calling

WHY IS THIS APPROACH USEFUL?

- ◎ For the therapy profession:
 - “Preserving our humanity” (McWilliams)- If we don’t act on our values, we are implicitly supporting the status quo.

WHY IS THIS APPROACH USEFUL?

- ◎ For the world:
 - Promoting social change by inspiring liberation from the status quo of mainstream cultural values

- ◉ Brown, L. S. (1997). The private practice of subversion. *American Psychologist*, 52, 449-462.
- ◉ McWilliams, N. (2005) Preserving our humanity as therapists. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 42, 139-151.
- ◉ Prilleltensky, I., Prilleltensky, O., & Voorhees, C. (2007). Psychopolitical validity in the helping professions. In C. I. Cohen & S. Timimi (Eds.), *Liberatory Psychiatry: Philosophy, Politics, and Mental Health*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press
- ◉ White, M. (2011). *Narrative Practice: Continuing the Conversation*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- ◉ Martin-Baro, I. *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*.
- ◉ Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.
- ◉ Belkin Martinez, D. (2005) Therapy for liberation: the Paulo Freire methodology.

RESISTANCE

OF THE HEART AGAINST
BUSINESS AS USUAL

