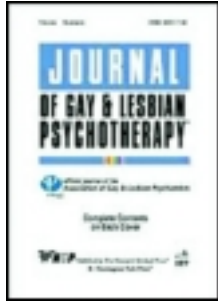


This article was downloaded by: [University of Memphis]

On: 21 July 2012, At: 13:44

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wzgp20>

### Liberating Psychotherapy: Liberation Psychology and Psychotherapy with LGBT Clients

Glenda M. Russell PhD & Janis S. Bohan PhD

Version of record first published: 21 Oct 2008

To cite this article: Glenda M. Russell PhD & Janis S. Bohan PhD (2007): Liberating Psychotherapy: Liberation Psychology and Psychotherapy with LGBT Clients, *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy*, 11:3-4, 59-75

To link to this article: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J236v11n03\\_04](http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J236v11n03_04)

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

# Liberating Psychotherapy: Liberation Psychology and Psychotherapy with LGBT Clients

Glenda M. Russell, PhD  
Janis S. Bohan, PhD

**SUMMARY.** This paper argues that neither science nor psychotherapy can be separated from values, and it calls on the insights of liberation psychology to examine the role of the social and the political in understandings of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) experiences. Liberation psychology challenges the separation between the personal and the social, suggesting that their interwoven quality provides fertile ground for both personal and social change. Using the concept of internalized homophobia as an illustrative construct, the paper explores strategies for bringing these understandings to bear in psychotherapy with LGBT people, as well as in interventions that move beyond the therapy hour. doi:10.1300/J236v11n03\_04 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800- HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

---

Glenda M. Russell and Janis S. Bohan are independent scholars.

Addressed correspondence to: Glenda M. Russell, PhD, 536 Ridgeview Drive, Louisville, CO 80027 (E-mail: [gmrussell5@hotmail.com](mailto:gmrussell5@hotmail.com)).

[Haworth co-indexing entry note]: "Liberating Psychotherapy: Liberation Psychology and Psychotherapy with LGBT Clients." Russell, Glenda M., and Janis S. Bohan. Co-published simultaneously in *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy* (The Haworth Medical Press, an imprint of The Haworth Press, Inc.) Vol. 11, No. 3/4, 2007, pp. 59-75; and: *Activism and LGBT Psychology* (ed: Judith M. Glassgold, and Jack Drescher) The Haworth Medical Press, an imprint of The Haworth Press, Inc., 2007, pp. 59-75. Single or multiple copies of this article are available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service [1-800-HAWORTH, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. (EST). E-mail address: [docdelivery@haworthpress.com](mailto:docdelivery@haworthpress.com)].

Available online at <http://jglp.haworthpress.com>

© 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.

doi:10.1300/J236v11n03\_04

**KEYWORDS.** Activism, bisexual, gay, homonegativity, homophobia, homosexuality, lesbian, liberation psychology, psychotherapy, transgender, internalized homophobia

### *INTRODUCTION*

It is common for formal psychological training and professional psychological communities to urge a separation between scholarship and advocacy and to eschew the political in favor of the “purely” scientific, scholarly, or professional. Cushman (1995) has pointed out that the prescription for avoiding the sociopolitical has filtered into understandings of psychotherapy, where it has assumed a different form: the individual has become the dominant (if not always the exclusive) point of focus, and the sociopolitical realities of individuals’ lives have been largely disregarded or even dismissed as inappropriate for psychological consideration. However, we reject this insistence on separating the psychological from the sociopolitical; our disagreement with this position rests on several key points.

First, we suggest, with many others, that it is impossible to separate scholarship or psychotherapy from the political realities of human experience (e.g., Bakan, 1977; Bohan & Russell, 1999; Caplan and Nelson, 1973; Cushman, 1995; Fine, 1992; Gergen, 1973, 1985; Glassgold, 2008—in this volume; Gonsiorek and Weinrich, 1991; Hare-Mustin, 1983; Hare-Mustin and Marecek, 1988, 1997; Holzman and Morse, 2000; Martín-Baró, 1994; Parker, 1989; Parker and Shotter, 1990; Prilleltensky, 1989; Radical Therapist Collective, 1971; Russell and Bohan, 1999; Sampson, 1985, 1989, 1990; Unger, 1982). Protestations of apolitical professionalism and value neutrality notwithstanding, at every stage of professional work—whether that be research, consulting, teaching, clinical practice—psychologists and other mental health professionals make decisions that reflect values, and those values, in turn, have political implications. From this perspective, to avoid explicitly addressing matters of politics is not to be apolitical; it is to condone by silence a particular political meaning: the political status quo.

While mental health professionals may choose to proceed in this way, it is essential to recognize that this is not an apolitical choice; indeed, such choices have significant personal as well as political meanings. In the clinical domain, for example, a decision not to discuss significant political events during psychotherapy does not neutralize those events in the world or in the life of a client; it simply implies that their impact is

unimportant—or, perhaps even unspeakable. The tacit message is that the dominant understanding of events is, by default, the only legitimate understanding, and any other is inappropriate or irrelevant as a topic for psychotherapeutic exploration.

The suggestion that we must attend to values challenges psychology's historical penchant for separating science from values, scholarship from advocacy, and professionalism from activism. This position stands in contrast to that of (most of) mainstream psychology. For example, Kendler (2005) has recently reiterated the importance of retaining this separation, arguing that this separation of values from science stems directly from the fact that psychology cannot provide the empirical basis from which to select among values (see also, Kendler 1999, 2004). In the face of this empirical insufficiency (and given psychology's allegiance to scientific evidence as the only legitimate form of knowledge), Kendler argued that psychologists must distinguish between the psychological (i.e., the scientific) bases for their positions and the phenomenological (i.e., the personal) grounds that underlie those positions. Of direct relevance here, Kendler (2004, 2005) has brought this argument to bear on the question of the relationship between psychology and politics, suggesting that while psychology might rightfully bring (empirical) psychological knowledge to debates about public policy, psychology should not argue for particular outcomes of those debates, where those outcomes reflect values that cannot themselves be validated.

While we concur that scientific evidence cannot “prove” values or provide criteria for judging the superiority of one value over another, we argue nonetheless that it is impossible not to bring values to matters of public policy; there is no value-neutral position in such debates—and those debates do occur in and affect the lives of psychotherapy clients. We suggest that, far from setting aside values and the political implications and ramifications they embody—what Kendler (2005) has termed the phenomenological—we inevitably bring politics and values to our work as psychologists, whether those values are invited or not, acknowledged or not. As the late liberation psychologist Martín-Baró (1994) noted, an exclusive focus on those things that have been demonstrated by psychological science ignores possibilities that have not been thus demonstrated, and thereby “consecrates the existing order as natural” (p. 21).

Our second disagreement with arguments for an apolitical psychology is this: as members of the human community, we believe that we are obligated to contribute where and when we can to the betterment of the human condition. In the spirit of this conviction and as psychologists, we believe that bringing psychological knowledge to bear in matters of

public policy represents a unique opportunity to make such contributions. In claiming this as our goal we again echo the words of Martín-Baró (1994), “the concern of the social scientist should not be so much to explain the world as to change it” (p. 19).

Finally, while it is important to address sociopolitical matters in psychotherapeutic work whoever the client may be, it is particularly crucial when working with clients whose lives are the explicit subject of broad social and political discourse. The political landscape currently surrounding lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) experiences brings into stark relief the deeply political nature of our work with members of this population. LGBT people are inarguably the object of extensive and intense political debate at the current time, and psychological research, theory, and practice that address the individual and collective lives of LGBT people are therefore unavoidably suffused with political meanings.

Together, these arguments urge us to bring psychological thinking to bear on the questions of LGBT experience and to do so with full awareness that our work in this regard has political as well as psychological meaning. With these points as prologue, our goal in this paper is to explore the role of the extra-psychic and value-laden—the social and political—in understanding the experiences of LGBT people, especially as those understandings inform psychotherapeutic work with LGBT clients. We pursue this aim through an examination of one of the core concepts found in the LGBT psychological literature: internalized homophobia. In this paper we discuss both standard and alternative perspectives on internalized homophobia with an eye toward their social and political—as well as their traditionally psychological or intrapsychic—meanings and implications.

### ***HOMOPHOBIA, HETEROSEXISM, AND INTERNALIZED HOMOPHOBIA***

It is a truism that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender clients, as other clients, come to psychotherapy with a wide range of issues. In the case of LGBT clients, however, an additional dynamic is often at work—albeit frequently an unstated or even unrecognized one. Many of the issues that LGBT clients come to address in therapy are related to their status as members of a particular social group (and as individuals who claim an identity) that is widely regarded as deviant, at least in the normative sense of the term. Indeed, many—perhaps most—of the concerns that

LGBT clients raise in therapy are influenced directly or indirectly by homophobia and heterosexism. The spectrum of issues reflecting such influence is broad. It can range from overt intrusions of homophobia in their lives, such as having witnessed or been victim to gay bashing, to more subtle presentations, such as an unexamined sense of shame about themselves and their lives. In between lie a range of experiences and issues that are intertwined to greater or lesser degrees with the daily reality of being non-heterosexual in a heterosexist culture. In recent decades, psychotherapists have, to varying degrees, become more sensitive to LGBT issues and to the impact of homophobia and heterosexism on individuals' and communities' psychological well-being. Yet more subtle influences of homophobia and heterosexism, including the manner in which homonegativity is experienced and expressed by LGBT people, often remain unacknowledged or perhaps unrecognized in therapy.

### ***POLITICAL REALITIES, PSYCHOTHERAPY, AND INTERNALIZED HOMOPHOBIA***

A variety of approaches have been helpful as we have worked to examine the role of political factors in psychotherapy with LGBT clients. Critical psychology and postmodern psychology (e.g., Cushman, 1990, 1995; Fox and Prilleltensky, 1997; Gergen 1973, 1982, 1985, 1992, 1994; Hare-Mustin and Marecek, 1988; Kitzinger, 1987, 1995; Parker and Shotter, 1990; Sampson, 1985, 1989, 1993) have proven valuable in this regard; elsewhere, we have called on these models to explore a range of topics in the broad domain of psychology and sexual orientation (Bohan and Russell, 1999). More recently, we have employed postmodern notions and critical psychology to examine the role of homonegativity in LGBT psychology, deconstructing the concept of internalized homophobia and reframing it in terms of the postmodern dissolution of the boundary between the self and the social (Russell, in press; Russell and Bohan, in press).

#### ***Liberation Psychology***

The frank acknowledgement of the intertwining of the sociopolitical world with individual experience found in critical psychology and postmodernism also resonates with the literature of liberation psychology. Here we discuss key elements of liberation psychology, calling on insights garnered from the collected works of Martín-Baró (1994) to suggest how it can enrich our understanding of the experience of LGBT people

and enhance psychotherapeutic work with LGBT clients. In particular, we will invoke Martín-Baró's contention that the individual is inseparable from the sociopolitical, that the presumption of a distinction between the two is fraught with both political and psychological meaning, and that recognition of the inseparability of the two is liberating to both.

Liberation psychology, represented here in the works of Martín-Baró (1994), shares with postmodern critiques the insistence that psychology has neglected the collective and the political in its single-minded attention to the individual and especially to the intrapsychic. Martín-Baró argued that mainstream psychology's virtually exclusive emphasis on the individual fails to recognize that characteristics often attributed to the individual are actually only found in the collective; they do not exist as intra-individual qualities but rather reside "in the dialectic of interpersonal relations" (1994, p. 22). According to this view, traditional psychology's individualizing perspective ignores social structures and historical contexts, and in so doing reduces sociopolitical, structural problems to individual problems. The argument is reminiscent of a tenant central to feminist analyses: the political has been rendered personal.

Following in the tradition of Freire (1971, 1978), Martín-Baró referred to the transformative recognition of this intrinsic interconnection between the individual and the sociopolitical as *concientización*. This "awakening of critical consciousness," he wrote, "joins the psychological dimension of personal consciousness with its social and political dimension" (1994, p. 18). Once we become aware of this linkage, it is apparent that we cannot address matters of individual psychology without simultaneously addressing matters of the sociopolitical contexts that co-construct experiences. In Martín-Baró's words, "the personal here is the dialectic correlate of the social and, as such, incomprehensible if its constitutive referent is omitted" (p. 41).

### ***Liberation Psychology and Psychotherapy***

The application of postmodern and liberation psychological analyses to questions of psychotherapy raises significant challenges for those of us trained in traditional psychological science and traditional psychotherapeutic approaches. It seems clear that if the (so-called) personal and the (so-called) social/political are inseparable, then understanding one of these requires and also enhances the process of understanding both. This is a far cry from the individualizing tendency of traditional psychological models. In dealing with LGBT clients, we are charged to address not only questions of individual identity and psychological



functioning but also matters of political power and social oppression. Speaking of Martín-Baró's position on this topic, Mischler (1994) summarized the task of liberation psychology as it is brought to bear on questions of oppression: to focus not on the intrapsychic, the individual in isolation but on "problems of identity development within a system of social relations that are aberrant, dehumanizing, and alienating" (1994, p. x).

Seen in this light, psychological distress looks quite different from its traditional portrayal. "How enlightening it is," Martín-Baró wrote, "[to see mental health or illness] not as the result of the individual's internal functioning but as the manifestation, in a person or group, of the humanizing or alienating character of a framework of historical relationships" (1994, p. 111). To apply this analysis to the topic of internalized homophobia, a (far less elegant) rendition of this argument would regard it not as a psychological malady suffered by LGBT people but as the manifestation of the alienating character of a pattern of historically sustained oppression of LGBT people. Given our collective immersion in this oppression, it is no wonder that we all—LGBT people included—incorporate and express the personal and social alienation it embodies.

If we take these analyses seriously, the implications for psychotherapy in general and for psychotherapy with LGBT people in particular are enormous. We will explore these implications in two broad categories: those having to do with the content and process of psychotherapy in its usual therapist-client format, and those having to do with suggestions for therapeutic changes that reach beyond the therapy setting and into the sociopolitical realm.

### ***Implications for Formal Psychotherapy***

A growing body of research testifies to the adverse mental health consequences of homonegativity and resultant social stress (e.g., Balsam, Rothblum and Beauchaine, 2005; Beals and Pepleau, 2005; Brown, 1986, 1988, 1989; Cochran, 2001; Corliss, Cochran and Mays, 2002; deMonteflores, 1986; Garnets, Herek and Levy, 1992; Herek, 1998; Meyer, 2003; Russell, 2000; Russell and Richards, 2003). The present analysis suggests several levels at which these consequences might be addressed in psychotherapy.

At the most basic level, the explicit realization that a large proportion of the life experiences of LGBT people are colored in some (often unexamined) way by homonegativity can itself be reassuring. At this level, an analysis by a model that does not regard client distress as an



internal flaw (in oneself or in others) but as an expression of immersion in alienating sociopolitical circumstances provides an opportunity to demystify (Frank, 1973) much of the discomfort that many LGBT clients experience. It may also pave the way for further explorations, both of how one inadvertently participates in such dynamics and of how one might deal with homonegativity more constructively.

The following anecdote is illustrative. One of us (Russell) has conducted extensive research on the psychological impact of anti-gay politics (see Russell, 2000; Russell and Richards, 2003). One part of this project entailed a questionnaire circulated among LGB people in Colorado following that state's passage of the anti-gay Amendment 2. The questionnaire inquired about LGB people's experiences around the Amendment, asking specifically about a number of possible psychological responses to the campaign. While this project was underway, Russell received a call from a gay man who asked that a copy of the questionnaire be sent to his therapist. After assuring him that she would do that, Russell asked his purpose in requesting that the questionnaire be sent. He explained that although he had previously been experiencing steady improvement in therapy, in recent months he had begun feeling depressed; his depression coincided with the campaign about and passage of Amendment 2. He and his therapist had been unable to identify the source of his declining mood. However, when he read the survey, his depression finally made sense to him: it was a response to the homophobic political campaign and vote he had just experienced. He had shared this insight with his therapist and she requested a copy of the questionnaire so that they could explore it further. Simply having the questions raised, noticing the possibility of psychological consequences deriving from this political event had demystified his psychological distress.

This anecdote points to the personal relief that may come from a clearer understanding of the impact of political events that expose the homonegativity that is often less explicitly expressed and therefore less visible. As Martín-Baró (1994) pointed out, psychology has often regarded alienation as an intrapsychic phenomenon when in fact its origin is often more accurately located in social disconnection than in intrapsychic phenomena. In this case, the client's depression became understandable when it was couched in terms of his encounter with an antigay campaign and vote and was thereby seen as a manifestation of social disconnection.

The value of a critical consciousness that links political events to psychological experience also extends beyond the individual sense of alienation that might well be sparked by such encounters with homonegativity and the personal relief that comes from recognizing its source.

This understanding has additional implications for work in psychotherapy, particularly work addressing issues related to internalized homophobia. Most obviously, reframing internalized homophobia as an understandable incorporation of and participation in a miasmatic social oppression, as a fundamentally sociopolitical phenomenon, alters the nature of psychotherapeutic considerations of this topic. In a sense, this framing provides another level of demystification. Whereas the simple recognition of the political location and impact of homonegativity may make sense of some feelings of personal alienation, that simple analysis may leave intact the notion that the client is somehow flawed for having taken in these cultural attitudes. From the perspective of liberation psychology, however, internalized homophobia is itself demystified: an individual's homonegative feelings and acts do not reflect intrapsychic pathological self-hatred; rather, they are manifestations of immersion in a homonegative and alienating environment that is fundamentally political rather than individual.

For LGBT clients, this analysis means that they are not saddled with pathology; in this case a malady termed *internalized homophobia* (and traditionally represented as intrapsychic self-denigration). Rather, self-devaluing behaviors and negative attitudes about their own identities, about LGBT communities, or about LGBT experiences in general are recast. These are regarded as frames of mind whose automaticity<sup>1</sup> and unreflective quality are products of the pervasively homonegative political circumstance in which we live. Freed from the onus of an interpretation that charges them with harboring self-hating beliefs, LGBT people may be freer to examine the ways in which they personally (if inadvertently) participate in this homonegativity. From this grounding, psychotherapy can work toward helping clients to recognize both their own complicity in and their own power vis-à-vis homonegativity, and to assume responsibility for their future attitudes and behaviors. Further, to invoke liberation psychology's depiction of the personal and the political as entwined, LGBT individuals can explore the possibility that by changing themselves, they are altering the sociopolitical world.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, non-LGBT clients can be relieved of the burden of regarding themselves as pathologically or reprehensibly homophobic by acknowledging the pervasiveness and deeply political<sup>3</sup> quality of homonegativity. For heterosexual clients, the challenge lies in recognizing that while homonegativity's assimilation has been automatic, its expression need no longer be. They now bear a responsibility to resist it in the future. This form of demystification and the empowerment it entails may be especially important for heterosexuals who regard themselves as open-minded and

accepting, but who nonetheless find themselves uncomfortable (often unexpectedly so) with certain encounters with LGBT identity.<sup>4</sup>

Elsewhere, we have discussed the impact of these changes on the processes of psychotherapy in more detail (e.g., Russell, in press; Russell and Bohan, in press). For the remainder of this paper, we will focus on the changes such a model suggests for what happens beyond the therapy office.

### ***LIBERATION PSYCHOLOGY: BEYOND THE PSYCHOTHERAPY SESSION***

In addition to the implications for psychotherapy in its usual forms, we suggest that a model grounded in principles of liberation psychology has profound implications for the relationship between psychotherapy and the political world—and therefore for the broader task of psychotherapy. The focus on the collective and on social context suggests that traditional psychotherapy would often not be the sole healing medium of choice. It is true that the therapeutic relationship can be understood as a microcosm of social relations more broadly, and it is clear that individuals often sort through some of the interpersonal dimensions of homonegativity within the context of that relationship. At the same time, the private, even secretive, parameters of the psychotherapeutic alliance—including the very appropriate demands of confidentiality—necessarily distinguish that relationship from other social contexts. Psychotherapy's bounded and circumscribed qualities, while crucial to the clinical endeavor, mark this relationship as a distinctive one, well set apart from broader relationships with LGBT communities. Traditional psychotherapy thus unavoidably separates the individual from the broader social context in which issues of homonegativity, alienation, oppression, and liberation are largely explored and enacted. From the perspective of liberation psychology, the wider questions of social and political identity—of community with other LGBT people with whom one might not feel an automatic alliance—remain largely unaddressed within the circumscribed psychotherapeutic relationship and may be best confronted outside the confines of traditional psychotherapy. This is true for several reasons.

First, if we take liberation psychology seriously, the individual is not simply a passive recipient of homonegativity but actively incorporates and enacts it in her or his own life through participation in the politicized culture of which she or he is a part. Since that homonegativity resides in the nexus of social relationships, the appropriate venue for altering one's

participation in it is precisely that sociopolitical world. Similarly, since the personal and the social are inseparable, the very act of engaging in processes of social change vis-à-vis homonegative attitudes in the culture is itself a means of changing one's own relationship to homonegativity. This analysis suggests that active involvement in the broader sociopolitical realm might prove very healing for the individual struggling with issues regarding her/his relationship to LGBT identity.

Key here is the liberation psychology notion that the individual's psychological well-being is inextricably intertwined with the sociopolitical context in which s/he lives. Oppression generates social and personal alienation, a sense of ill-fit, dis-ease, and hopelessness. The remediation of these personal ills, thus, requires joining with others in social change, resistance to oppression, and the empowerment that derives from actively claiming one's social identity. For Martín-Baró (1994), this shift relies on *conscientización*—the process of becoming aware of the inextricable connection between the personal and the political—which makes space for changes in both social systems and individual mental health. The outcome of the process is that “the human being is transformed through changing his or her reality” (p. 41).

To clarify what this has to do with the role of psychology and psychotherapy, what follows is a discussion of the central points of *conscientización*, applying Martín-Baró's insights to the case of homonegativity and calling upon research findings to demonstrate their relevance and viability as explanatory constructs here. According to Martín-Baró, the transformation that heals both the individual and the social order becomes possible when the person “decodes” the messages implicit in the social order and thereby “grasps the mechanisms of oppression and dehumanization” (1994, p. 40) in which s/he has been living. This decoding is a matter of recognizing and naming the political power that lies beneath daily events and daily oppression. Interestingly, precisely this sort of grasp was noted in the results of the studies mentioned above that dealt with the impact of anti-gay politics (Russell, 2000; Russell and Richards, 2003).

One of the consequences of exposure to the intense and homonegative political campaign waged in Colorado was that many LGBT people (and their allies) were stunned to discover the level of homonegativity that resided, often unspoken and frequently unnoticed, among Colorado citizens—including the families, friends, and co-workers of LGBT people. For some, this awareness was frightening and led them to withdraw into further isolation. But for others, this realization was one of the factors that inspired some LGBT people to come out of the closet, encouraged some to become more active in the LGBT community, and inspired many

to become involved in political efforts to achieve equal rights for LGBT people. An emerging critical consciousness had opened their eyes to the reality that they lived in a system of oppression whose depth and extent they had formerly not realized. Interestingly, the research team applied the code “grasp” to comments that expressed this sort of realization—inadvertently using precisely the word that Martín-Baró employed to describe this first step toward *conscientización*.

To continue with Martín-Baró’s analysis, this new understanding of oppression “crumbles the consciousness that mythifies the situation as natural” (1994, p. 41); such “crumbling” dismantles established misconceptions that had disguised oppression and thereby opens new possibilities for action. New actions, in turn, make possible new levels of consciousness, and so on, in a dialectic that intertwines the personal and the sociopolitical. In the case of homophobia and heterosexism, once antigay policies can be framed, not as understandable or justifiable components of social systems, but as elements of a widespread campaign of oppressive politics (broader than just anti-gay politics, we might add; see Pharr, 1996), it becomes possible to reframe one’s relationship to the political. Political campaigns and public policies whose goal is to perpetuate oppression can be seen not as personal attacks but as expressions of broad cultural attitudes in need of change. This “crumbling” of the belief that placing limitations on human rights is “natural” allows one to see homonegativity for what it is: a form of social oppression. Just as might be expected from this explication, follow-up research conducted some time after Amendment 2 found that a political analysis of homonegativity of just the sort suggested by Martín-Baró proved a potent aid to resilience for LGBT people (Russell and Richards, 2003).

Finally for Martín-Baró, this new sensitivity to one’s position in the political domain and to the possibility of resistance to oppression allows for a reframing of personal and social identity. It allows individuals to “discover themselves in their mastery” (1994, p. 41), to realize that their actions transform reality, and thereby to see new avenues for action. The awareness of the social and political nature of homonegativity (and its expression in anti-gay politics) provides the space for new possibilities to emerge, including the possibility of one’s own actions to counter that oppression. Once again, Amendment 2 follow-up research found that becoming active in the wake of an antigay political assault was another of the most potent of resilience factors for LGBT people. Russell and her colleagues found that when individuals are actively involved as change agents they are better insulated against the damage wrought by anti-gay politics. Correlatively, becoming active in the wake of such

attacks enhances coping and provides a degree of resilience for the future (Russell, 2000; Russell and Richards, 2003).

All of these findings resonate with Martín-Baró's analysis of *conscientización*, the process of becoming aware of the inextricable connection between the personal and the political. Martín-Baró's analyses and these accompanying data suggest that one important route to addressing the psychological consequences of homophobia leads not through the therapy room but through the streets. Activity directed toward social change that is relevant to one's life is intertwined with personal well-being. Changing oneself by becoming active changes the world; changing the world changes oneself.

One last element of *conscientización* is relevant here: it "makes manifest the historical dialectic . . . between individual growth and community organization, between personal liberation and social transformation" (Martín-Baró, 1994, p. 18). This focus on the historical dimension of social identity, combined with the joining of individual growth and community organization, points to the central role of broad and lasting movements for social change in liberation psychology. Individuals are not simply oppressed in isolation, do not experience alienation simply in isolation, and do not enact social change in isolation. Rather, they are members of social groups that participate in a long history—whether those are oppressed groups, groups operating as agents of social change, or both. An awareness of these historical relationships is central to *conscientización* because it locates the individual and the current political events firmly in an expanse of time, highlighting the reality that today's events are not merely a matter of individual experience.

Once again, this insight came to life in the results of the Amendment 2 research. One of the most robust findings was the importance of what was termed a "movement perspective": the recognition that this political campaign was only a moment and only one issue in the long and broad movement for human rights (Russell, 2000; Russell and Richards, 2003). This recognition of what Martín-Baró termed the "historical dialectic between individual growth and community organizing" (1994, p. 18) proved a strong foundation for psychological resilience among LGBT people facing political attack.

Martín-Baró was speaking particularly about Latin America and the oppressive political regimes that have historically fostered social and personal alienation among its nations' residents.<sup>5</sup> These insights speak, as well, to the status of other oppressed groups whose diminished power, paradoxically, often renders them unwitting participants in the very social systems that oppress them. In the case of LGBT people, as members of a



culture characterized by widespread and historically enduring anti-LGBT oppression, we all share in the enactment of homonegative attitudes. However, having incorporated and enacted those attitudes in the past does not preclude our responsible resistance to them in the future—on both personal and social levels. The task of mental health professionals who work with LGBT people is twofold: to explore the many ways in which we all take in and express homonegativity; and to support and encourage active engagement in the long historical tradition that works toward transforming the alienating and dehumanizing social oppression in which we are all immersed.

### NOTES

1. For discussions of automaticity, see Banaji and Hardin, 1996; Bargh and Chartrand, 1999; Corrigan and Penn, 1999; Devine, 1989; Nathanson et al., 2002; Park, 1999.

2. As we will discuss below, the converse is also true: by engaging in political activity, individuals can change their psychological reality.

3. Such stories abound, for instance, among liberal people who are surprised to discover the struggle they face when a family member or friend comes out (e.g., Russell, in press). The stories of PFLAG parents for example, are replete with such struggles. With the realization that their struggles represent not a character flaw, but an understandable outcome of living in a homonegative culture, heterosexual people who strive to change these attitudes can proceed by considering their responsibility for their subsequent actions rather than by dwelling on guilt over their well-learned homophobia (see Ji, this volume).

4. Freire (1971, 1978), whose work, as noted previously—particularly his concept of *conscientización*—has illuminated Martín-Baró's insights, also wrote about oppression among peoples of Latin America. The legacy of liberation psychology has inspired others as well. For example, Watts, Griffith and Abdul-Adil (1999) have provided similar analyses of the oppression confronted by young African-American men in an urban setting in this country, invoking the concept of critical consciousness as key to the possibility of liberation. These insights speak, as well, to the status of other oppressed groups whose diminished power, paradoxically, often renders them unwitting participants in the very social systems that oppress them.

### REFERENCES

- Bakan, D. (1977), Political factors in the development of American psychology. *Annals New York Academy of Sciences*, 291:222-232.
- Balsam, K. F., Rothblum, E. D. & Beauchaine, T. P. (2005), Victimization over the life-span: A comparison of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual siblings. *J. Consulting & Clinical Psychology*, 73:477-487.



- Banaji, M. R., & Hardin, C.D. (1996), Automatic stereotyping. *Psychological Science*, 7:136-140.
- Bargh, J. A., & Chartrand, T.L. (1999), The unbearable automaticity of being. *American Psychologist*, 54:462-479.
- Beals, K. P., & Pepleau, L. A. (2005), Identity support, identity devaluation, and well-being among lesbians. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 29:140-148.
- Bohan, J. S., & Russell, G. M. (1999), *Conversations about Psychology and Sexual Orientation*. New York: New York University Press.
- Brown, L. S. (1986), Confronting internalized oppression. *J. Homosexuality*, 12(3/4): 99-107.
- Brown, L. S. (1988), Lesbians, gay men, and their families: Common clinical issues. *J. Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy*, 1(1):65-77.
- Brown, L. S. (1989), New voices, new visions: Toward a lesbian/gay paradigm for psychology. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 13:445-458.
- Caplan, N. & Nelson, S. D. (1973), On being useful: The nature and consequences of psychological research on social problems. *American Psychologist*, 28:199-211.
- Cochran, S. D. (2001), Emerging issues in research on lesbians' and gay men's mental health: Does sexual orientation really matter? *American Psychologist*, 36:931-947.
- Corliss, H. L., Cochran, S. D. & Mays, V. M. (2002), Reports of parental maltreatment during childhood in a United States population-based survey of homosexual, bisexual, and heterosexual adults. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 26:1165-1178.
- Corrigan, P. W. & Penn, D. L. (1999), Lessons from social psychology on discrediting psychiatric stigma. *American Psychologist*, 54:765-776.
- Cushman, P. (1990), Why the self is empty. *American Psychologist*, 45:599-611.
- Cushman, P. (1995), *Constructing the Self, Constructing America: A Cultural History of Psychotherapy*. New York: Addison-Wesley.
- De Monte Flores, C. (1986), Notes on the management of difference. In: *Contemporary Perspectives on Psychotherapy with Lesbians and Gay Men*, eds. T. S. Stein & C. Cohen. New York: Plenum, pp. 73-101.
- Devine, A. G. (1989), Stereotypes and prejudice: Their automatic and controlled components. *J. Personality & Social Psychology*, 56:5-18.
- Fine, M. (1992), Passions, politics, and power. In: *Disruptive Voices: The Possibilities of Feminist Research*, ed. M. Fine. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp. 205-231.
- Fox, D., & Prilleltensky, I., eds. (1997), *Critical Psychology: An Introduction*. London: Sage.
- Frank, J. (1973), *Persuasion and Healing: A Comparative Study of Psychotherapy*. New York: Schocken.
- Freire, P. (1971), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder & Herder.
- Freire, P. (1978), *Education for Critical Consciousness*. New York: Seabury.
- Garnets, L. D., Herek, G. M. & Levy, B. (1992), Violence and victimization of lesbians and gay men: Mental health consequences. In: *Hate Crimes: Confronting Violence against Lesbians and Gay Men*, eds. G. M. Herek & K. T. Berrill. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, pp. 207-226.
- Gergen, K. J. (1973), Social psychology as history. *J. Personality & Social Psychology*, 26:09-320.

- Gergen, K. J. (1982), *Toward Transformation in Social Knowledge*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Gergen, K. J. (1985), The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. *American Psychologist*, 40:266-275.
- Gergen, K. J. (1992), *The Saturated Self*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gergen, K. J. (1994), *Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction*. London: Sage.
- Glassgold, J. M. (2007), "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities" Psychology, Agency, and Activism. *J. Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy*, 11(3/4): 37-58.
- Gonsiorek, J. C. & Weinrich, J. D. (1991), *Homosexuality: Research Implications for Public Policy*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Hare-Mustin, R. T. (1983), An appraisal of the relationship between women and psychotherapy: 80 years after the case of Dora. *American Psychologist*, 38:593-601.
- Hare-Mustin, R. T. & Marecek, J. (1988), The meaning of difference: Gender theory, postmodernism, and psychology. *American Psychologist*, 43:455-464.
- Hare-Mustin, R., & Marecek, J. (1997), Abnormal and clinical psychology: The politics of madness. In: *Critical Psychology: An Introduction*, eds. D. Fox & I. Prilleltensky. London: Sage, pp. 104-120.
- Herek, G. M. (1998), *Stigma and Sexual Orientation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Holzman, L., & Morss, J., eds. (2000), *Postmodern Psychologies, Societal Practice, and Political Life*. New York: Routledge.
- Kendler, H. H. (1999), The role of values in the world of psychology. *American Psychologist*, 54:828-835.
- Kendler, H. H. (2004), Politics and science: A combustible mixture. *American Psychologist*, 59:122-123.
- Kendler, H. H. (2005), Psychology and phenomenology: A clarification. *American Psychologist*, 60:318-324.
- Kitzinger, C. (1987), *The Social Constructionism of Lesbianism*. London: Sage.
- Kitzinger, C. (1995), Social constructionism: Implications for gay and lesbian psychology. In: *Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identities over the Lifespan*, eds. A. R. D'Augelli & C. J. Patterson. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 136-161.
- Martín-Baró, I. (1994), *Writings for a Liberation Psychology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Meyer, I. H. (2003), Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129:674-697.
- Mischler, E. G. (1994), Foreword. In: *I. Martín-Baró: Writings for a Liberation Psychology*, eds. & trans. A. Aaron & S. Corne. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. vii-xiv.
- Nathanson, A. I., Wilson, B.J., McGee, J. & Sebastian, M. (2002), Counteracting the effects of female stereotypes on television via active mediation. *J. Communication*, 52:922-937.
- Park, D. C. (1999). Acts of will? *American Psychologist*, 54: 461.
- Parker, I. (1989), *The Crisis in Modern Social Psychology—and How to End It*. London: Routledge.

- Parker, I. & Shotter, J., eds. (1990), *Deconstructing Social Psychology*. London: Methuen.
- Pharr, S. (1996), *In the Time of the Right: Reflections on Liberation*. Oakland, CA: Chardon.
- Prilleltensky, I. (1989), Psychology and the status quo. *American Psychologist*, 44:795-802.
- Radical Therapist Collective. (1971), *The Radical Therapist*. New York: Ballantine.
- Russell, G. M. (2000), *Voted Out: The Psychological Consequences of Anti-gay Politics*. New York: New York University Press.
- Russell, G. M. (in press), Internalized homophobia: Lessons from the Mobius strip. In: *Postmodern Practices in Narrative Therapy*, eds. C. Brown & T. Augusta-Scott. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Russell, G. M. & Bohan, J. S. (1999), Implications for public policy. In: *Conversations about Psychology and Sexual Orientation*, eds. J.S. Bohan & G. M. Russell. New York: New York University Press, pp. 139-164.
- Russell, G. M. & Bohan, J. S. (in press), The case of internalized homophobia: Theory and/as practice. *Theory & Psychology*.
- Russell, G. M. & Richards, J. A. (2003), Stressor and resilience factors for lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals confronting antigay politics. *American J. Community Psychology*, 31:313-328.
- Sampson, E. E. (1985), The decentralization of identity: Toward a revised concept of personal and social order. *American Psychologist*, 40:1203-1211.
- Sampson, E. E. (1989), The challenge of social change for psychology: Globalization and psychology's theory of the person. *American Psychologist*, 44:914-921.
- Sampson, E. E. (1990), Social psychology and social control. In: *Deconstructing Social Psychology*, eds. I. Parker & J. Shotter. London: Routledge, pp. 117-126.
- Sampson, E. E. (1993), *Celebrating the Other: A Dialogic Account of Human Nature*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Unger, R. K. (1982), Advocacy versus scholarship revisited: Issues in the psychology of women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 7:5-17.
- Watts, R. J., Griffith, D. M. & Abdul-Adil, J. (1999), Sociopolitical development as an antidote for oppression: Theory and action. *American J. Community Psychology*, 27: 255-271.

doi:10.1300/J236v11n03\_04