Critical Psychology, Philosophy and Social Therapy

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Abstract

This article presents critical psychology in some new light. First, it presents the history of US critical psychology in terms of the overall foundation of its critique (identity-based, ideologically-based, and epistemologically-based). Second, it broadens the population that can be called critical psychologists. The argument is made to include: 1) philosophers of language, science and mind critical of psychology's foundational assumptions, conceptions and methods of inquiry; and 2) non-professional, ordinary people who live their lives critical of psychology by eschewing mainstream approaches and taking alternative routes to getting help with their emotional and physical pain, or the education of their children. Third, the article discusses ontology-based critique, through the example of the practical-critical theory/practice practical of social therapy.

Key Words

Critical psychology, group psychotherapy, social therapy, Wittgenstein, Vygotsky

> *You cannot lead people to what is good; you can only lead them to some place or other. The good is outside the space of facts.*
>
> Ludwig Wittgenstein (*Culture and Value*, 1980: 3e)

From the vantage point of the second decade of the 21st century, the remarkable development of psychology in the US as a discipline, institution and industry came with relatively little opposition. In its

beginnings, from the second half of the 19th century through the 1920s, psychology's object of study and methods of investigation had not yet hardened in the mold of the natural sciences. Both philosophy and aesthetics were topics in the debate about what constitutes psychology among the early academics and researchers (who included the philosophers James Mark Baldwin, John Dewey, William James and George Herbert Mead). Such openness did not last very long, and from the 1920s psychology sold itself as a science. Attempts to challenge the model, particularly by psychoanalysts and humanists, resulted in their objects of study (i.e., the subjective, social-relational and cultural) being incorporated into mainstream psychology rather than transforming its overall methodology.[1] Yet critics of mainstream psychology endure and, as American psychology is increasingly exported across the globe, it becomes more important than ever that alternative and challenging views not only proliferate, but gain an increasingly broad and international audience.

What is critical psychology? Is there just one? Often, it appears to be many things and nothing at the same time. Unlike social, educational or community, critical psychology is not an area or branch of psychology. Neither is it a particular theoretical approach that crosses areas and branches as do, for example, Freudian, Piagetian or cognitive psychology. It is, more than anything, a position or perspective from which mainstream psychology is viewed and investigated in order to expose its inherent biases.

Critical psychology *identified as such*, applies to the work of a very small group of scholars. This is particularly the case in the US, where there are no university departments and only a handful of courses devoted to critical psychology. The US scholars most closely identified with critical psychology are Dennis Fox and Isaac Prilleltensky, authors of the first American college text on critical psychology (*Critical Psychology: An Introduction,* which first appeared in 1997 and was revised in 2009 by the two original authors and Stephanie Austin). According to these scholars, mainstream psychology institutionally supports some quite troubling ethical practices, especially practices toward the oppressed and vulnerable, and critical psychologists advocate for fundamental changes to existing social structures with the goal of materializing greater social justice and human well being (Fox, Prilleltensky and Austin, 2009: 3ff).

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[1] Among the histories of American psychology and its European roots, those by Danziger (1990, 1997) are especially recommended. See also Gergen (1994a), Graumann and Gergen (1996), Newman and Holzman, (2006/1996), and Robinson (1995).

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More broadly, however, there are dozens of approaches that challenge, in theory and/or practice, psychology's ontology, epistemology or methodology and, in this way, can be considered as critical psychologies. One large grouping challenges psychology's so-called objectivity and location as a natural science. Included here are approaches as varied as humanistic, transpersonal, postmodern, collaborative, existential, and phenomenological psychologies, CHAT (cultural-historical activity theory), and social constructionism. Additionally, one can count as critical psychologies those that are grounded in "the isms" and that focus directly on oppression and oppressed groups—Marxism, feminism, gay psychology, Black psychology, etc.—since typically they are critical of much of mainstream psychology. Included here, as well, are the many alternative therapies that have sprung up over the decades, many of which did not derive from an academically located theoretical perspective.

Taking an even broader view, we must add two other groupings, neither of which is identified with psychology. The first are philosophers, those in particular from the philosophy of science, language and mind traditions, who have arguably provided the most rigorous and scathing critiques of psychology. From the middle of the 20th century until today, philosophers working with these broad topics have created an important critical psychology.

The other grouping consists of people who practice critical psychology in how they live their lives. They don't call themselves critical psychologists; most are not even psychologists by profession. They are, for the most part, ordinary people who work at many different kinds of jobs and perhaps have nothing more in common with each other than their resistance to what mainstream psychology has to offer. They are the people who take alternative routes to getting help with their emotional and physical pain, or the education of their children. Critical psychology is something people do in their lives, that is, as a cultural practice in the world rather than as an intellectual endeavor carried out by those in academia.

These last two groupings—philosophers and people creating and utilizing alternatives to mainstream psychology to deal with what are traditionally and typically understood as psychological issues—have greatly influenced the final type of critical psychology this article addresses, social therapy (Holzman, 2009; Holzman and Mendez, 2003; Holzman and Newman, 2004; Newman, 1999). As will be discussed, it is a critical psychology that is other than, or beyond, the critical, and is better identified as practical-critical.

But even the above brief description of what can be counted as critical psychology is misleading if it is understood as static. The institution of psychology has an impressive capacity to appropriate and incorporate new areas of study and new approaches, including critical ones, essentially moving them from the fringes to the center of the mainstream. In some cases, this results in a once critical approach no longer being so. In other cases, it means that the topic of critique keeps changing. For example, notwithstanding the continued dominance of the personalistic medical model in clinical psychology and psychiatry, the less-individuated and more socio-cultural conceptions of prevention and resilience have entered mainstream dialogue and research agendas. Another example is the way that research agendas first generated by feminist psychology, such as the construction of oppression and its psychological impact on women, have been subsumed under mainstream gender studies, which examines both male and female identities. Third, the advent of cognitive science as an interdisciplinary study has meant that previously philosophically ignorant psychologists who are interested in cognition have familiarized themselves with key philosophical texts on mind, body, consciousness, experience, thought and language.

Keeping all this fuzziness and motion in mind, it is useful to view psychological approaches critical of mainstream psychology as roughly of three types: identity-based; ideology-based; and epistemology-based. While there is considerable overlap among them, this way of seeing might prove helpful. I will elaborate each type and then turn to philosophy and practical-critical psychology (social therapeutics).

Identity-based Critical Psychology.

Here we find psychologies that are mainly critical of how mainstream psychological theory and/or method exclude, ignore or misrepresent vast groupings of people by virtue of psychology's unquestioned allegiance to white, Indo-European males as normative. In the US these psychologies stem from the political movements of the 1960s, including the Black power movement, La Raza (Latino power), women's liberation and gay liberation. Black, feminist and gay psychologies were developed (primarily by African American, women, and lesbians and gay men, respectively), with psychological conceptions, practices and research agendas specific to what were thought to be the unique characteristics, needs and societal restrictions (oppression) of each grouping.

The Association of Black Psychologists was founded in 1968 "to actively address the serious problems facing Black Psychologists and the larger Black community… to have a positive impact upon the mental health of the national Black community by means of planning, programs, services, training, and advocacy" (http://www.abpsi.org/index.php/about-abpsi). Still in existence today, the organization has chosen African identity as its mission and the heart of its alternative psychology (termed African psychology); its mission is "the liberation of the African Mind, empowerment of the African Character, and enlivement and illumination of the African Spirit" (http://www.abpsi.org/index.php/about-abpsi). Most Black psychologists working on issues of race, class and ethnicity, however, work within the mainstream, and many are part of the American Psychological Association's Society for the Psychological Study of Ethnic Minority Issues, established in 1986.

Although feminist psychology stems from Karen Horney's work in the 1920-30s critiquing Freud (and a collection of her essays bearing that title), contemporary feminist psychology can be said to have begun with the publication of Naomi Weisstein's critique of scientific and clinical psychology decades later in 1968 (*Psychology Constructs the Female*), and the founding of the Association for Women in Psychology (AWP) in 1969 during the annual convention of the American Psychological Association. Then, in 1973, the American Psychological Association established a Psychology of Women division in response to the continuing challenges of feminist psychologists within the organization. While today the two organizations occasionally work together toward common goals, the AWP is more identity-based and activist than the American Psychological Association division. For the AWP, identity politics and identity psychology are closely linked, as its stated goals clearly illustrate: "challenging unfounded assumptions about the psychological 'natures' of women and men; encouraging feminist psychological research on sex and gender; combating the oppression of women of color; developing a feminist model of psychotherapy; achieving equality for women within the profession of psychology and allied disciplines; promoting unity among women of all races, ages, social classes, sexual orientations, physical abilities, and religions; sensitizing the public and the profession to the psychological, social, political, and economic problems of women; helping women create individual sexual identities; and encouraging research on the issues of concern to women of color."
(http://www.awpsych.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=51&Itemid=65&limitstart=1)

In the 1960s gay activists directly confronted governmental and institutional discrimination and police violence targeting homosexuals. The famed 1969 Stonewall riots in NYC's Greenwich Village marked the spark of the gay liberation movement in the US. For gay activists and their allies, challenging the ways that psychiatry and psychology institutionally oppressed gay people was next on the agenda. The American Psychiatric Association had included homosexuality as a mental disorder in its first *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, published in 1952. From the late 1960s gay activists, as well as gay psychiatrists within the professional association, aggressively pressured the establishment, and the diagnosis was removed from the manual in 1973. The American Psychological Association established the Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian and Gay issues in 1985, now called the Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues (http://www.apadivision44.org/about/). In the ensuing decades, the depathologizing of homosexuality has yet to be completed, and there is still struggle within the professions of psychiatry, psychology and mental health concerning support for specific legal issues such as gay marriage and gay parenting.

Ideology-based Critical Psychology.

The approaches placed here universally support the empowerment and liberation of the above-mentioned identity groups. Yet, they do so more from an ideological than a circumscribed identity position. All anti-capitalist ideologies fall into this category. While Marxism is the most prominent, others of note, although little discussed in the US, are Marxist-feminist critique, postcolonial critique and liberation psychology. In broad strokes, the anti-capitalist ideological critique of psychology that has arisen in the US and Europe is centered on how psychology supports the status quo by socializing its citizens to a capitalist ideology. Dozens of books have been written on this topic, among them Prilleltensky's *The Morals and Politics of Psychology* (1994). In a chapter on ideology and psychology, he highlights psychology's "pervasive dichotomy between the individual and society" and its consequences: "An immediate ideological benefit is derived from such a dichotomy—namely, the individual is studied as an asocial and ahistorical being whose life vicissitudes are artificially disconnected from the wider sociopolitical context. Following this ideological reasoning, solutions for human predicaments are to be found almost exclusively with the self, leaving the social order conveniently unaffected" (Prilleltensky, 1994: 34f).

Library bookshelves are filled with critiques of psychology, the majority of which make the same point as Prilleltensky does. What is startling is the nearly complete absence of Marx in these writings. Aside from British psychologist Ian Parker, perhaps the most prolific Marxist ideologically-based critical psychologist, and the writings and overall project of Klaus Holzkamp in Berlin known as Critical Psychology (Holzkamp, 1992; Teo, 1998; Tolman, 1994), little reference can be found to (let alone discussion of) Marxism in the works of Cushman (1996), Richardson, Fowers and Guignon (1999), Sampson (1993), Sloan (2000) (although a few authors in this latter volume are exceptions), and other works. Marx is equally absent from the feminist ideological critical psychologists, such as M. Gergen (2001) and Burman (1994). Within developmental psychology, Morss (1996) stands out for his extensive discussion of Marxism and its critique of development as a psychological construct.

Epistemology-based Critical Psychology.

To the extent that the approaches previously discussed offer critiques of the methodology of psychology, they do so in the service of their identity or ideology critique. In contrast, epistemology-based critiques posit alternative methodologies for how to study, understand and support human life and, in that offering lies their critique of how psychology is done.

Central to the epistemology-based critiques is that human life is (inter)subjective— a fact that mainstream scientific psychology has systematically excluded. In its efforts to emulate the natural and physical sciences, psychology adopted and adapted the scientific mindset of the early 20th century and devised ways to relate to human beings as if they were no different in kind from the fish in the sea and stars in the sky. Since human beings have access to our subjectivity, are self-reflecting and self-reflexive, use language, make meaning and sense of our world—the critical arguments go—a psychology whose knowledge-seeking excludes both the study of these characteristics and the incorporation of these characteristics into its methodology is not a psychology at all.

Thus, we find a proliferation of alternative methodologies that are inherently critical of mainstream psychology's epistemology. Some, such as phenomenological and hermeneutic psychology, study human experience interpretively. Devised from the works of the early 20th century German philosophers Heidegger and Husserl, these two approaches in psychology are best known through the

works of Gadamer (1976), Levinas (1998), Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Ricoeur (1996). Humanistic psychology as developed in the US typically incorporates the seminal ideas from these European scholars in its theoretical and empirical research.

More recent epistemology-based critical psychology includes approaches that loosely fall under the heading social constructionism (or sometimes, more broadly, postmodern psychology). What they have in common is, first, the focus on language as the meaning-making tool through which human beings construct knowledge and understanding and, second, that meaning making is a relational or social process that occurs between people, rather than within or by an individual. As Lock and Strong state in their recent volume tracing the historical roots of social constructionism, "[Social constructionism] provides a more adequate framework than the dominant tradition for conceptualizing and then exploring the meaning-saturated reality of being human. Our meaningful reality is much 'messier' than the Cartesian heritage has had us believe, and much more mysterious" (Lock and Strong, 2010: 353).[2]

Another group of psychologists critical of the epistemology of mainstream psychology are those within the socio-cultural and cultural-historical traditions, who draw their inspiration from Soviet activity theory and the writings of Vygotsky (1978, 1987, 1993, 1994, 1997) and Bakhtin (1981, 1986). Mainstream psychology relates to human beings not only as isolated from each other, but as isolated from culture and human history. In contrast, those within the socio-cultural and cultural-historical traditions insist that what

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[2] In addition to the Lock and Strong volume, the following are excellent sources for the history and ongoing developments within postmodern approaches in psychology: Gergen (1994b, 1999, 2001), Kvale (1992), McNamee and Gergen (1999), and Shotter (1993a,b). There is also a growing literature on postmodern therapies, which are non-diagnostic approaches that focus on the collaborative nature of the conversation and relationship between therapist and client(s). In addition to social therapy (a focus of the present article), social constructionist, narrative and collaborative therapies are the most well known. Theoretical discussion and practical examples of these approaches can be found in the following: Anderson and Gehart (2007), Gergen (2006), McNamee and Gergen (1992), Paré and Larner (2004), Monk, Winslade, Crocket and Epston (1997), Strong and Paré (2004), and White (2007),

it means to develop, learn and live is to engage in human activity so as to become a member of a culture. As with the social constructionists, human life is understood as a social-cultural-historical phenomenon, with language playing a key role in how human beings come to understand and act upon the world. Where they diverge is in their view of the human language making and using ability. For most socio-cultural and cultural-historical psychologists, language is understood and empirically studied as a cultural mediator, and so the emphasis in their work is not so much on how meaning is made, but rather on how meaning is appropriated from the culture and the role that language plays as a "psychological tool" in acculturation (e.g., Cole, 1996; John-Steiner, 1997; Kozulin, 2001; Rogoff, 2003; Wertsch, 1991).

Perhaps the reader is here and there catching glimpses of ontological critique in the brief survey just presented. For even if they do not say so explicitly, these critical psychologists are faulting mainstream psychology for having misidentified its subject matter, either by treating a privileged subset as normative (identity-based critique), being based in and biased by a capitalist, sexist, Euro-centric world view (ideology-based critique), or misappropriating the natural and physical science method and its epistemological presuppositions (epistemologically-based critique). It is to the philosophers that we next turn to for a full-fledged and transparent ontological critique.

Philosophy as a Critical Psychology.

The renowned American philosopher John Searle begins his recent book, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization*, with the following:

> "How, if at all, can we reconcile a certain conception of the world as described by physics, chemistry, and the other basic sciences with what we know, or think we know, about ourselves as human beings? How is it possible in a universe consisting entirely of physical particles in fields of force that there can be such things as consciousness, intentionality, free will, language, society, ethics, aesthetics, and political obligations? Though many, perhaps most, contemporary philosophers do not address it directly, I believe that this is the single overriding question in contemporary philosophy." (Searle, 2010: 3)

What Searle says is precisely what psychology should be asking—but isn't. Searle's words here, and his life's work, are a cutting critique of psychology, most particularly, an ontological critique. For, mainstream psychology has all but ignored the seeming paradox Searle is pointing to, but instead unquestioningly embraces a dualistic ontology. Psychology's conceptions and methods have been constructed upon a foundation of dualistic separations of objective-subjective, physical-mental and body-mind. There was only a brief period of (philosophical) grappling with this issue in psychology's early years (see Danziger, 1997; Newman and Holzman, 2006/1996).

In addition, it is worth noting the paucity of engagement of philosophical issues even among those critical psychologists who admit a range of disciplines into the sphere of psych-critique. A case in point is Parker (1999, 2009). In the earlier article, Parker summarizes approaches to critical psychology carried out by psychologists, and then presents "a number of radical critiques `outside` psychology [that] have led to new models of the mind and new practices to understand and reconfigure social relationships" (Parker, 1999). While it is philosophy that has led the way in positing new models of the mind, Parker presents only the disciplines of therapy, social work and education. In the later article on critical psychology and revolutionary Marxism, Parker urges that we add to the historical theoretical analysis of psychology "detailed cultural analysis of the way we reproduce capitalist social relations as if they were mental processes" (2009: 86), but he does not mention any philosophical writings on mental processes.

Among the long line of philosophers whose work can be seen as a branch of critical psychology, Ludwig Wittgenstein has had the greatest influence on current trends in psychology, particularly those with a postmodern sensibility. For this reason, and because his work has played a central role in the development of social therapeutics as an ontology-based, practical-critical psychology, this brief discussion of philosophy will highlight Wittgenstein's challenges to psychology. [3]

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[3] Wittgenstein has fascinated and inspired many outside the field of philosophy (not only scholars in diverse fields, but also poets, musicians and dramatists, see Monk, 1990). Yet, despite there being two volumes of Wittgenstein's work entitled *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, psychologists have been rather late in coming to see the value in studying his work. Shotter (1990, 1993a,b) and Newman Holzman (1993, 2006/1996, 1997) are exceptions, having been writing on how Wittgenstein's unique ways

While much of Wittgenstein's writings concern language and our understandings and misunderstandings of what it is, and how it is and is not "connected" to our thoughts, feelings, perceptions and physiological sensations (all topics within the purview of psychology), his overall enterprise casts a wider net relative to the nature of psychological phenomena and practices. He believed that the discipline of psychology obscures the distinction between conceptual issues and empirical methods and, consequently, rushes to experimentation amidst significant conceptual confusion.

One confusion Wittgenstein points to is that since conceptual questions serve as the presuppositions of scientific investigation or experimentation, they themselves cannot be scientifically investigated or subject to experimentation. According to Racine and Müller (2008), two authors who discuss this issue extensively, "Wittgenstein (1958, 1969, 1980) claimed that psychologists investigate and make sense of their findings by recourse to everyday concepts like knowing, thinking, remembering, intending, believing, and so on. He insisted upon this because one cannot measure, experimentally or otherwise, a given psychological attribute without prior agreement on what constitutes the object of such an investigation" (Racine and Müller, 2008: 112). Even operational definitions suffer this fate, for they are "intrinsically parasitic, for example, on an everyday notion …that is presupposed by operational definition" (Racine and Müller, 2008: 112).

Another instance of psychology's conceptual confusion is its essentialist and representationalist conception of concepts. There is not one single manifestation of pain, remembering, thinking, or any psychological concept. Yet, psychologists persist in the belief that in their research they are investigating a single (usually underlying and essential) psychological process. What human beings do, Wittgenstein insists, is grounded in social practices. He urges us to "Look" (Wittgenstein, 1953, para. 66).

A third conceptual confusion characteristic of psychology is its insistence on causal explanation and a systematic correspondence between things and, further, that such connection is universal and

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of seeing human action, thought and language contribute to social constructionist and postmodern psychology for the past twenty years,. Among the most recent contributions to the discussion are Harré and Tissaw's *Wittgenstein and Psychology: A Practical Guide* (2005), and the journal *New Ideas in Psychology,* which devoted an entire issue to Wittgenstein's contemporary relevance (Racine and Müller, 2008).

omnipresent. Wittgenstein questions no less than whether the very foundations of science, causality and systemization, are applicable to psychology.

The following excerpts from Wittgenstein's writings are illustrative of the above three types of confusion.

903.   No supposition seems to me more natural than that there is no process in the brain correlated with associating or with thinking; so that it would be impossible to read off thought-processes from brain-processes.   I mean this: if I talk or write there is, I assume, a system of impulses going out from my brain and correlated with my spoken or written thoughts.   But why should the *system* continue further in the direction of the centre?   Why should this order not proceed, so to speak, out of chaos? The case would be like the following--certain kinds of plants multiply by seed, so that a seed always produces a plant of the same kind as that from which it was produced--but *nothing* in the seed corresponds to the plant which comes from it; so that it is impossible to infer the properties or structure of the plant from those of the seed that it comes out of--this can only be done from the *history* of the seed. So an organism might come into being even out of something quite amorphous, as it were causelessly; and there is no reason why this should not really hold for our thoughts, and hence for our talking and writing. (Wittgenstein, 2007: 159) [Cf. *Zettel* 608.]

904.   It is thus perfectly possible that certain psychological phenomena *cannot* be investigated physiologically, because physiologically nothing corresponds to them. (Wittgenstein, 2007: 160) [Cf. *Zettel* 609.]

905.   I saw this man years ago: now I have seen him again, I recognize him, I remember his name. And why does there have to be a cause of this remembering in my nervous system? Why must something or other, whatever it may be, be stored-up there *in any form*? Why *must* a trace have been left behind? Why should there not be a

psychological regularity to which *no* physiological regularity corresponds? If this upsets

our concepts of causality then it is high time they were upset. (Wittgenstein, 2007: 160)

[Cf. *Zettel* 610.]

To summarize, Wittgenstein delineated many of the ways in which our thinking torments and bewilders us, for how we have come to think about thinking and other so-called mental processes and/or objects creates intellectual-emotional muddles, confusions, traps and narrow spaces. We seek causes, correspondences, rules, parallels, generalities, theories, interpretations, and explanations for our thoughts, words and verbal deeds (often, even when we are not trying to or trying not to). He developed a method to expose the gap between so-called mentalistic activities and social activities so as to reveal the cognitive bias of psychology as manifest in the discipline of psychology and in people's everyday thinking. In example after example, he shows the extent to which thinking is overdetermined by notions, assumptions and presuppositions about language (and ways of thinking) as fundamentally and passively mentalistic, as opposed to activistic. (See Newman and Holzman, 2006/1996 for further discussion.)

Wittgenstein's effort was to do something about how language, especially language about psychological phenomena and language used by philosophers and psychologists, obscures ordinary life. Among his examples are notions of how children learn to speak, what it means to know something, what feelings such as love, anger and fear are, and how our experiences are "connected to" reality. In great detail and a myriad of ways he showed that the expressionist picture of communication—that people have an inner life that gets expressed in language—was defective. To him, language was better understood as the activity of speaking, as a form of life ("The term 'language-game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (Wittgenstein, 1953, para. 23).

Ontology-based, Practical-critical Psychology.

Wittgenstein's critique of psychology has greatly influenced the development of social therapy, the last type of critical psychology to be discussed here. Created in the 1970s by American philosopher and social activist Fred Newman, social therapy is not merely a critical psychology but a practical-critical one, in Marx's sense of "revolutionary, practical-critical activity" (Marx and Engels, 1974). For Marx, the

transformation of the world and of ourselves as human beings is one and the same task. It is revolutionary, practical-critical activity—the social, communal and reconstructive activity of human beings exercising their power to transform the current state of things—that makes individual and species development possible (Holzman, 2009; Newman and Holzman, 1993, 2003). While Marx was not a psychologist nor did he directly concern himself very much with psychological issues, his philosophy, sociology and especially his method comprise a critical psychology of their own. He rejected the dualisms of the mental and the physical and the individual and the social upon which psychology is based, for example, "… *as* society itself produces *man* as *man*, so it is *produced* by him. Activity and mind are social in their content as well as in their *origin*; they are *social* activity and *social* mind" (Marx, 1967: 129).

In its early years social therapy fit the description of an ideology-based critical psychology. Its premise was that living under capitalism makes people emotionally sick, and its hope was that therapy could be a tool in the service of progressive politics. Like other radical therapies of the time in the US and Great Britain (e.g., anti-psychiatry, feminist, gay, anti-racist), social therapy engaged the authoritarianism, sexism, racism, classism and homophobia of traditional psychotherapy. However, from its beginning social therapy was equally an ontology-based critique. Newman's studies of philosophy of science and language, and foundations of mathematics (and later, of Marxian dialectics) were at the root of his practice. He rejected therapy's premises and major conceptions: explanation, interpretation, the notion of an inner self that therapists and clients needed to delve into, and other dualistic and otherwise problematic conceptions. However, when he himself went into therapy he found it extremely helpful. As he tells the story, the experience forced him to deal with the contradiction that psychotherapy, which he believed to be based on faulty premises, actually worked (Newman, 1999). He did not believe in an inner life and yet found that doing therapy, in which "talking about your inner life" is what you do, was helpful to him. Newman wondered how this could be. Without having an answer, he began a therapy practice in which he tried to help people with whatever emotional pain they were experiencing, without invoking the conception of an inner self which he was supposed to help them get more deeply into, without diagnosing their problem, analyzing their childhood, or interpreting their current life.

Other critical psychologies also challenge the conception of an inner life, which is foundational in mainstream psychology. However, Newman's and social therapy's rejection differs from most in its invoking of the philosophical and Marxist conceptions of totality and the particular. To Newman's

understanding, in creating and glorifying the isolated individual, psychology adopted the philosophical belief that particulars are what is "real" and that totalities are an abstraction. The notion that emotions are the mental states of isolated individuals is a version of this misconception of the stuff of the world, one that Newman believed was a major source of people's emotional pain (Holzman and Mendez, 2003; Newman and Holzman, 2006/1996). Therefore, in Newman's practice and theory, helping people therapeutically means challenging them to relate to emotions as other than private mental states and to themselves as other than "particulars."

The primary modality of social therapy is group. This is because, compared to individual (one-on-one) therapy, group therapy has a greater potential to challenge particularism and individualism. In social therapy, the group—not its individual members—is the therapeutic unit. (This is different from most group therapies, in which the group serves as a context for the therapist to help individuals with their emotional problems.) Clients who come together to form a social therapy group are given the task to create their group as an environment in which they can get help; as such, they are invited to become (practical-) critical psychologists. This emphasis on *group activity* is a collective, practical challenge to the assumption that the way people get help therapeutically is to relate to themselves and be related to by others as individuals, complete with problems and with inner selves. It is in groups that a person's felt experience of being the center of the universe (that nothing else is going on in the world except how one is feeling) can be most effectively challenged (Newman, 1999, 2010; Newman and Gergen, 1999).

Continuing its break with mainstream psychology's foundational dualism and mentalism, the social therapist's task is to lead the group in the practical-critical activity of discovering a method of relating to emotional talk relationally rather than individualistically, and as activistic rather than as representational or expressionist (Newman and Gergen, 1999; Newman and Holzman, 1999). In this process people come to appreciate what (and that) they can create, and simultaneously to realize the limitations of trying to learn, grow and create individually. If and as the group gradually comes to understand this, members (at different moments) realize that *growth comes from participating in the process of building the groups in which one functions*. The group grows itself.

Traditional therapy's focus, modeled on mainstream psychology's conceptions, is the individuated self who discovers deeper insights into his or her consciousness. In social therapy this is transformed

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through the group's activity into the collective engaged in the continuous activity of creating a new social unit of *the emotionally growing group*. The typical traditional therapeutic question, "How are you [each individual] feeling?" transforms as well, to "How well is the group performing its activity?" (Holzman, 2010b; Newman, 1999).

This shift in focus from the individual to the group is not a denial of the individual, but rather a reshaping and reorganization of what is traditionally related to as a dualistic and antagonistic relationship into a dialectical one. On the one hand, mainstream psychology has tended to negate and disparage the group or reduce the group to the individual. On the other hand, dogmatic Marxism has tended to negate and disparage the individual or reduce the individual to the group. Bur neither one has to be negated or reduced to the other. In recognizing and relating to the groupness of human life, social therapy does not negate individuals. The group is engaged in producing something collectively. As is the case with many life activities, individual members contribute to different degrees and in different ways to the ongoing totality of process-and-product, or tool-and-result (Holzman, 2009; Newman and Holzman, 1993; Newman and Holzman, 2004).

To make more explicit the contribution that Wittgenstein's critical psychology has made to social therapy, this brief summary of social therapy can be reframed in Wittgenstein's terms. Social therapy is a method to help "ordinary people get free from some of the constraints of language and the conceptual confusions that permeate everyday life" (Newman and Holzman, 2006/1996: 171). As a social therapy group creates itself as a group, it is generating new ways of talking that expose the more typical ways of talking, ways that perpetuate the experience of being individuated products. These social therapy groups thus become makers of meaning and not merely users of language; they play with language, as Wittgenstein says, as a form of life.

Another significant contributor to social therapy's development as a practical-critical psychology is the early Soviet psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (mentioned briefly above in relation to socio-cultural and cultural-historical psychologies and activity theory). Nearly a century ago, Vygotsky raised fundamental questions of what science is and what psychology could be and, by the criteria current in the present article, he was not merely a critical psychologist but a practical-critical one. Vygotsky and his colleagues were a

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part of a great real-life experiment in creating the hoped-for new Soviet society (see Bruner, 2004; Friedman, 1990; Newman and Holzman, 1993; Stetsenko, 2004).

"A revolution solves only those tasks raised by history," Vygotsky wrote (Vygotsky, quoted in Levitin, 1982: frontpiece). For him and his peers, the specific tasks were raised by the first successful communist revolution, and Vygotsky devoted himself to revolutionizing the psychology of his day to solve them. Though his efforts ultimately failed (inseparable from Soviet communism's failure), his methodological breakthroughs are proving useable in efforts to revolutionize today's psychology to solve the tasks history is raising today.

In the 1920's, the field of psychology was well on its way to becoming an empirical and experimental science, and questions of method and units of analysis were hotly debated. For example, would following the experimental path mean excluding from psychological investigation the very nature of human consciousness? Vygotsky was not willing to give up the study of consciousness (nor the "higher psychological processes" that are its manifestations). Nor was he willing to settle for two kinds of psychology (a subjective one for mental events and an objective one for non-mental events) or one psychology if it bypassed consciousness by reducing mental events to non-mental ones. Both options, he argued extensively, rested on an erroneous belief in an objectivist epistemology, which, in effect, denies science as a human (meaning-making) activity and mistakenly treats human beings as natural phenomena. For Vygotsky, psychology as a human science could not develop so long as it was based in objective-subjective dualism (Vygotsky, 1997).

This brought Vygotsky to question the very method of scientific inquiry, that is, the entire methodological approach, not a specific research technique. While the method of natural science might work for studying natural phenomena, Vygotsky believed that it could not be a good fit for the study of human beings. He wrote that a psychology with a natural science method contains "an insoluble methodological contradiction. It is a natural science about unnatural things" and produces "a system of knowledge which is contrary to them" (Vygotsky, 2004: 298). A scientific study of human beings requires a nondualistic method, a precondition of which is a nondualistic *conception of method.* Here is how Vygotsky phrased the creative challenge:

The search for method becomes one of the most important problems of the entire

enterprise of understanding the uniquely human forms of psychological activity. In this

case, the method is simultaneously prerequisite and product, the tool and the result of the

study. (Vygotsky, 1978: 65)

Vygotsky's proposal is a radical break with the accepted scientific paradigm that psychology was in the

process of adopting, in which method is a tool that is applied and yields results. When method is applied,

the relation between tool and result is linear, instrumental and dualistic, or *tool for result methodology*

(Newman and Holzman, 1993). Vygotsky proposes a qualitatively different conception of method: not a

tool to be applied, but an activity (a "search") that generates both tool and result at the same time and as

continuous process. Tool and result are not dualistically separated, nor are they identical, nor one thing.

Rather, they are elements of a dialectical unity/totality/whole. Method to be practiced, not applied, is what

Vygotsky was advocating. The term *tool-and-result methodology* (Newman and Holzman, 1993) is meant

to capture the dialectical relationship of this new conception. Neither objective nor subjective, it is outside

that dualistic box. That is its strength and potential power as practical-critical psychology. The social

therapy group practices tool-and-result methodology, creating its group and its emotional development

simultaneously.

Like Wittgenstein, Vygotsky challenged the expressionist, representational or correspondence

view of language. Speaking, he said, is not the outward expression of thinking, but part of a unified,

transformative process.

The relationship of thought to word is not a thing but a process, a movement from thought to

word and from word to thought ... Thought is not expressed but completed in the word. We

can, therefore, speak of the establishment (i.e., the unity of being and nonbeing) of thought in

the word. Any thought strives to unify, to establish a relationship between one thing and

another. Any thought has movement. It unfolds. (Vygotsky, 1987: 250)

The structure of speech is not simply the mirror image of the structure of thought. It cannot, therefore, be placed on thought like clothes off a rack. Speech does not merely serve as the expression of developed thought. Thought is restructured as it is transformed into speech. It is not expressed but completed in the word. (Vygotsky, 1987: 251)

With his conception of language and thought as dialectical process and unified activity, Vygotsky makes the psychological divide between inner and outer disappear. There are no longer two separate worlds, the private one of thinking and the social one of speaking. There is, instead, the dialectical unity, speaking/thinking, in which speaking *completes* thinking.

Vygotsky's alternative to the expressionist view of language is central to his understanding of the sociality of language development in children. For, children would not be able to perform as speakers and, thereby, learn to speak if thinking/speaking were not a continuously *socially completive activity*. If speaking is the completing of thinking, as Vygotsky says, if the process is continuously creative in socio-cultural space, then it follows that the "completer" does not have to be the one who is doing the thinking. Others can complete for us. And when they do, they are no more saying what we are thinking than we are saying what we are thinking when we complete ourselves. Remember: thought is not expressed in the word! In the conversations that babbling babies and their speaking caregivers create, socially completive activity is ongoing, with both baby and others doing the completing (Holzman, 2009; Newman, 1999; Newman and Holzman, 1993).

This suggests that, beyond babyhood, what people are doing when they speak is not saying what's going on but *creating* what's going on, and that "understanding each other" comes about by virtue of engaging in this activity. In psychotherapy, talking about one's inner life is therapeutic because and to the extent that it is a socially completive activity and not a transmittal of private states of mind. The human ability to create with language—to complete, and be completed by, others—is, for adults as well as for very young children, a continuous process of creating who we are becoming, a tool-and-result of the activity of developing (Holzman, 2009; Newman and Holzman, 1993).

Understanding language in this way as a socially completive activity raises questions about "the truth" of people's words and, by extension, the concept of truth itself. (It is important to note that Vygotsky

was a believer in truth; his rejection of universals and objective-subjective dualism did not extend that far. For him, truth was to be discovered in the creating of a Marxist psychology.) There are different ways to question the concept of truth. One is to reject an expressionist view of language and with it the notion of *objective* truth. For those psychologists and psychotherapists who do so, talk therapy is not done in order to discover some hidden truth of someone's life, to find the true cause of emotional pain or to apply the one true method of treatment, because truth in that form (Truth) does not exist. Instead, they construct subjective theories of truth and devise practices consistent with them. For example, social constructionists search for relational forms of dialogue as an alternative to objectivist-based debate and criticism (McNamee and Gergen, 1992, 1999); narrative therapists work to expose the "storiness" of our lives and help people create their own (and, most often, better) stories (McLeod, 1997; Monk, Winslade, Crocket and Epston, 1997; Rosen and Kuehlwein, 1996; White, 2007; White and Epston, 1990); and collaborative therapists emphasize the dynamic and co-constructed nature of meaning (e.g., Anderson, 1997, Anderson and Gehart, 2007; Paré and Larner, 2005; Lock and Strong, 2012; Strong and Paré, 2004).

However, from the social-therapeutic, practical-critical point of view, these critical psychology proposals are lacking. To posit truth as subjective, with the existence of multiple truths (all with a small "t"), does not escape objective-subjective dualism but rather merely flips it over. Truth may be socially constructed in these approaches, but dualism remains intact, as there must be something *about which* it can be said, "It is true (or false) for me." In contrast, relating to therapeutic talk as playing language games and as a form of life in Wittgenstein's sense, and as *socially completive activity* in Vygotsky's and Newman and Holzman's sense, is a rejection of truth and its opposite, falsity. The social therapeutic shift to activity is a way to transform therapeutic talk from being an appeal to or about objective, outer reality Truth and subjective, inner cognitive or emotive truths. As socially completive activity, therapy talk is a consciously self-reflexive engagement of the creating of the talk itself. In performing therapy the fictional nature of "the truth" of our everyday language, our everyday psychology and our everyday stories gets exposed as people have the opportunity to experience themselves as the collective creators of their emotional activity (Newman, 1999).

Mainstream psychology holds fast and unquestioningly to the claim that certain kinds of physical acts of the individual have a causal connection to certain kinds of mental acts of the individual. As has been

discussed, this assumptive claim is what underlies much of what is said to be "wrong" about mainstream psychology by critical psychologists, but the issue has been barely touched upon in identity-based, ideology-based and epistemology-based critical psychology (with some of the philosophically-informed postmodern and social constructionist psychologists recently beginning to address it). It has been the philosophers of science and language who have for decades grappled with how to understand this aspect of the human condition in their explorations of the ontology of psychological phenomena. Social therapy, as a practice of method, is an effort to move away from causal connection and toward a *non-causal connectedness* between so-called mental acts and physical activity, as the material with which to create a genuinely humanistic psychology (Holzman and Newman, 2011). Positive and relational, it is an approach in which human beings are related to as creators of their culture and ensemble performers of their lives (Holzman and Mendez, 2003; Newman and Holzman, 2006/1996).

Social therapeutics has, of course, not transformed mainstream psychology. Within academia, it has influenced several of the approaches within critical psychology and generated a synthesis of postmodernism and Marxism. However, its impact has not been limited to the academy. As a practical-critical approach practiced for over three decades, it has become a methodology for social-emotional growth and learning for educational, youth development, mental health, social work, health and wellness, and community-building programs and projects in the US and, increasingly, throughout the world. If it succeeds in leading people to some place other than where mainstream psychology directs people to, it is by virtue of having created a synthesis of critique and practice.

I end this article as I began it, with a methodological provocation to mainstream psychology from Ludwig Wittgenstein:

> *E.g. There is nothing more stupid than the chatter about cause and effect in history books; nothing is more wrong-handed, more half-baked.— But what hope could anyone have of putting a stop to it just by saying that? (It would be like my trying to change the way women and men dress by talking.)* (Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 1980: 62e)

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