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Cultural-Historical Psychology and Cultural-Psychological Change

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Abstract

This article explains how cultural historical psychology emphasizes societal and psychological change. This solves the knotty problem of how culturally-formed activity is capable of effecting change in itself and in society. Vygotsky's concepts are invoked to explain elements of this dialectical process. Concrete requirements of social and psychological change are enumerated. Intellectual and political failures to meet these requirements are identified -- and corrected -- in contemporary social movements.

The Scientific and Political Problematic of Cultural-Historical Psychology

In the social sciences, acceptance and rejection of theories, methodologies, and empirical findings is not a straightforward matter. Acceptance or rejection is not strictly dependent upon the details of the theories, methodologies, mediations/interventions, and empirical findings. Rather, it depends upon corollary issues that the details imply. These include implications about human nature, respect for the individual (uniqueness), freedom, precision, rigor, science, personal change, social stability, and social change. These philosophical, political, and ethical implications greatly affect whether people accept or reject social science theories, methodologies, findings, and mediations/interventions. This means that scientific questions cannot be settled on the basis of scientific criteria themselves. Whether an issue is scientifically valid or invalid is not the sole criterion of its acceptance or rejection. No matter how true a theory, methodology, finding, or intervention may be, people will not accept it if it violates important corollary issues; nor will they reject an invalid theory, methodology, finding, or intervention if it resonates with their corollary beliefs. Consequently, it is necessary to

address corollary issues of a theory, methodology, finding, or intervention in order to facilitate its acceptance or rejection.

A corollary issue that makes it difficult for people to accept cultural-historical psychology is the concern that it prevents change -- both psychological and social. Most social scientists and lay people fear that if psychology is culturally based and culturally organized, then people are social robots devoid of subjectivity and agency. How can culturally-formed subjectivity ever change itself or culture? Similarly, if people are oppressed by culture how can they overcome their psychological and social oppression?

Critics regard cultural-historical psychology as reified, mechanistic, and "socially reductionistic" -- which prevents willful change/liberation. They turn instead to individual and interpersonal theories of psychology which afford change, albeit on the individual level. They emphasize creation of personal meanings, self expression ("voice"), and discourse that can be altered/negotiated by individuals.

This is Valsiner's position, for example. I have asked him why he emphasizes personal meanings, and he replied: "Freedom." Jerome Bruner and Rom Harre similarly emphasize narrative as a zone of free personal

expression where people can escape cultural influences (Ratner, 2009a; Ratner, 2012, pp. 35-36, 432-433).

I believe that the Frankfurt School (including Fromm who was the School's director of social psychology) turned to Freud for a similar reason -- namely to find some psychobiological mechanism outside culture that could deflect, mediate, and change oppressive culture. An "id" which seeks "sexual" freedom is this kind of mechanism.

To facilitate the acceptance of cultural-historical psychology in its fullness, it is necessary to explain that it does afford cultural and psychological change. Change is a corollary issue that implicitly affects acceptance and rejection of the theory.

I shall demonstrate that cultural-historical psychology, by emphasizing the profoundly cultural-historical nature of human psychology, affords more substantial change than individual or psychobiological processes do. For the more that history and culture are implicated in psychology, the more they are open to evaluation and transformation. Cultural-historical psychology enables people to understand and control their society; it helps overcome ignorance, passivity, and alienation. Cultural-historical psychology is an

Enlightenment kind of social science because it elucidates history and culture in psychological phenomena.

Cultural-historical psychology is not reified or mechanistic. It is the critics who hold reified, mechanistic views of social systems and cultural-historical psychology. This misconception is motivated by their individualistic conception of freedom.

Nevertheless, we must address their concerns by explaining how cultural-historical psychology builds change into the cultural-historical shaping of subjectivity.

I shall sketch a dialectical conception of how change is included in the cultural formation of subjectivity. I will extend this analysis to explain how liberation is dialectically related to oppression.

I will articulate a two-part, or two-level dialectical process. The first is a general explanation of the relation between culture and psychology. This explains the capacity of culturally-organized psychology to change itself and culture. The second dialectical level builds upon the general dialectic to explain how concrete, socially-formed, oppressive consciousness can generate concrete social-psychological liberation. Vygotsky outlined both of these levels in his works, as I shall explain.

The Dialectical Relationship Between Culturally Formed Subjectivity and Cultural-Psychological Change

A new unit of analysis

Vygotsky explained that cultural-psychological change is possible by, and is only possible by, psychology-subjectivity-agency that is formed by cultural processes and embodies them.

Culturally-formed psychology is a unit of analysis for cultural-historical psychology. This unit of analysis may be termed "psychological phenomenon-laden-with-macro-cultural-features." It is a Gestalt of culture and psychology integrated into one unit. I regard this unit of analysis as more important than word meaning that Vygotsky scholars emphasize. "Psychological phenomena-laden-with-macro-cultural-features" is also the unit of analysis that generates the most radical political change.

This unit of analysis is a new kind of phenomenon, fraught with distinctive origins, features, dynamics, relationships, and functions. It requires new kinds of analysis, methodology, and intervention. Bourdieu developed this unit of analysis under the term habitus. James M. Baldwin used the term socius.

This unit of analysis contains a dialectic between subjectivity and macro cultural factors. In this dialectic, cultural factors stimulate an active consciousness that is capable of utilizing this culturally-generated activity to reflect on and change cultural and psychological phenomena.

Vygotsky traced this dialect from the immersion of psychology/subjectivity in culture: "The environment is a factor in the realm of personality development, and its role is to act as the source of this development...and not its context" (1994a, p. 349, my emphasis). Vygotsky means that culture is not simply an external, peripheral context to psychology/behavior, it generates them. In The Psychology of Art, he says: "Between man and the outside world there stands the social environment, which in its own way refracts and directs the stimuli acting upon the individual and guides all the reactions that emanate from the individual." (Vygotsky, 1971, p. 252 my emphasis).

Vygotsky goes even deeper to say that macro cultural factors are the mechanisms of psychology: "Art is an expanded '*social* feeling' or *technique of feelings*" (ibid., p. 244). "Art is the social technique of emotion, a tool of society which brings the most intimate and personal aspects of our being into the circle of social life" (p. 249). "The feelings and emotions aroused by a work of art are socially conditioned" (p. 21).

Art is a cultural artifact that is a social technique for creating social feelings, or socially conditioned feelings. This anticipates Foucault's formulations about cultural technologies of self, and Foucault's statement that the social milieu is the medium of action.

(Because psychology is socially generated, conditioned, and operated, it is impossible that subjectivity could exist outside, before, or without cultural being. This excludes the possibility of an innate psychology or a post-mortem soul.)

Vygotsky (1994b, p. 176) describes the depth of the social conditioning of psychology: "The various internal contradictions which are to be found in different social systems find their expression both in the type of personality and in the structure of human psychology in that historical period."

Bhaskar (1989, pp. 92-93) aptly observes that: "Society is both ever-present condition [medium] and continually reproduced outcome of human agency...And agency is both work that is (normally conscious) production, and (normally unconscious) reproduction of the conditions of production..."

How does this socially conditioned, socially organized psychology/subjectivity have the capacity to challenge its social basis?

Vygotsky explains that human cultural feelings are more sensitive and agentive than animalistic or infantile feelings. They must be because they are stimulated by complex cultural factors, and their purpose is to animate complex cultural behavior. Cultural behavior is resourceful, flexible, imaginative, and innovative in creating complex, artificial, changeable cultural institutions and artifacts. Animals lack complex culture. They therefore lack the stimulation, support, and necessity for agentive, sensitive feelings.

Vygotsky states that music, for example, does not simply arouse primitive, simple, involuntary, mechanical animalistic emotions, through some primitive, automatic, physiological process like "contamination." Rather, social music generates meaningful, conscious, self-reflexive, controllable emotions.

Even "the perception of art requires creativity" (ibid., p. 248); it is not an automatic, physiological process.

Vygotsky thus explains that culturally conditioned psychological phenomena are creative, conscious, intentional, and agentive. This makes them capable of reflecting on, and refracting, social factors and processes: "The emotional experience [perezhivanie] arising from any situation or from any aspect of environment, determines what kind of

influence this situation or this environment will have on the child.

Therefore, it is not any of the factors in themselves (if taken without reference to the child) which determines how they will influence the future course of his development, but the same factors refracted through the prism of the 'perezhivanie'"(Vygotsky, 1994, pp. 339-340).

The preceding statements about society guiding all the reactions of the individual by being the operating mechanism of psychology make it clear that Vygotsky situates perezhivanie within culture. Experience mediates culture as an element (moment) of culture. It is an internal, dialectical mediation of culture, not an independent, personal process that "interacts with" or "co-constructs" culture.

Cultural consciousness is active consciousness, not passive, mechanical consciousness; and active consciousness is cultural consciousness.

Vygotsky avoids dichotomized, one-sided postulates such as:

- reified cultural factors mechanically determining subjectivity without agency
- free-wheeling, boundless, autonomous agency
- natural, psycho-biological determinants of psychology, including Freudian mechanisms such as an "id." (Vygotsky had no use for

Freudian mechanisms. He reinterpreted the unconscious as dependent upon cultural conscious processes: "It is wrong to assume that subconscious processes do not depend on the direction imparted by us to the conscious processes." "We penetrate the subconscious through the conscious. We can organize the conscious processes in such a way that they generate subconscious processes." Vygotsky, 1971, p. 257)

Bourdieu's concept of habitus exemplifies dialectical cultural agency.

II

The Dialectical Relation Between Oppression, And Emancipation

This general dialectical relation between subjectivity/agency and cultural factors is abstract, without any content or affect. It does not guarantee social improvement or personal expression. Most of Vygotsky's work focused on abstract processes. His work on socialization, cognition, speech, and perception explored general features of these, not concrete features deriving from particular cultures. Zone of proximal development is another example. It is a general potential for social interaction to

stimulate psychological development. Clearly, different concrete zpd's will produce different kinds of development. Certain zpd's will stunt development, as in the case of abusive social interactions.

Abstractions always occur within particular, concrete cultural-historical-political conditions. These conditions concretize all aspects of psychology:

- the form and content of psychology
- its debilities
- its achievements
- particular interventions necessary to enhance psychology
- new conditions necessary to enhance psychology
- cultural obstacles to enhancement

Current, concrete macro cultural factors impose specific obstacles to macro cultural change. They do so by

(1) erecting stringent social controls on transformative behavior -- e.g., massive surveillance, police brutality, brutal incarceration --

(2) mystifying consciousness so that people have limited capacity to understand and critique social oppression (Ratner, 2014a).

These particular difficulties require culturally specific political, educational, social, and conceptual activities to overcome them (Ratner, 2012; 2014b). Abstract “active agency” does not suffice. For it has no specific analysis or direction. On the contrary, "active agency" is always filled with concrete macro cultural content, which is oppressed and oppressive in oppressive society. Foucault's concepts of governmentality, subjectification, and biopolitics highlight this.

Cultural-psychological change is not guaranteed by the general dialectic of culture-agency. The fact that agency can refract and reflect on cultural factors potentiates social critique and transformation; however, it must be supplemented by a second dialectic that is historically and culturally concrete. This concrete dialectic is historical materialism.

Vygotsky adopted historical materialism as the concrete analysis of cultural-psychological phenomena: "Once we acknowledge the historical character of verbal thought, we must consider it subject to all the premises of historical materialism, which are valid for any historical phenomenon in human society. It is only to be expected that on this level the development of behavior will be governed essentially by the general

laws of the historical development of human society” (Vygotsky 1986, pp. 94-95; Ratner, 2012, pp. 204-207).

Historical materialism is a dialectic that derives liberation from concrete contradictions and possibilities of the given social system -- Aufhebung in German.

Vygotsky adopted a historical materialist basis of psychological liberation. He said, "The growth of large scale industry contains within itself hidden potential for the development of the human personality and it is only the capitalist form of organization of the industrial process which is responsible for the fact that all these forces exert a one-sided and crippling influence, which retards personal development" (Vygotsky, 1994b, pp. 179-180).

This analysis of capitalist industry and its potential, emancipatory, dialectical transformation is obviously not given in the general dialectic of culture-perezhivanie.

Vygotsky phrases this historical-materialist dialectic in Hegelian dialectical terms. He emphasizes the ideal potential of large-scale industry to comprise the basis of enriched civilization and psychology. The future is what is real and true about industry; what it can and should be. Its

present form is false and incomplete, and destructive. Capitalism is not the essence of industry.

Historical materialism includes three concrete processes:

- 1) acknowledge oppression as a socially patterned defect, or pathological normalcy, (as Fromm said) of concrete society (Ratner, 2011; 2014c; Ratner & El-Badwi, 2011).
- 2) identify and critique the macro cultural causes of social and psychological oppression; these must be the fundamental causes that generate the panoply of particular problems
- 3) develop a counter-politics that concretely negates those causes (Ratner, 2012; 2014b).¹ Counter-politics must develop a new cultural environment of alternative institutions, concepts, and artifacts. These will support, structure, stimulate, objectify, and normalize new, enriched psychological phenomena. This is the true "zone of proximal development." Since counter-politics transforms fundamental causes of the panoply of particular problems, counter-politics unifies the panoply of oppressed groups together in a common struggle against the common enemy that confronts them all (Ratner, 2009b).

Marx initiated this analysis in his 1844 essay "Comments on James Mill's Elements of Political Economy. He attacks the market, exchange relations, private property, wages, and money as estranged forms of social intercourse. He developed the idea of collectivized ownership, production, and distribution (Ratner, 2013, 2014c).

For agency to be fulfilling, it must dialectically work through its cultural oppression. It can neither fatalistically accept oppression, nor disregard it. The heights of emancipation depend upon knowing and negating the depths of oppression. This is why the revolutionary psychologist Martin-Baro wrote about the fatalismo of dispossessed people. Only by understanding this psychology of oppression and its social causes can people eradicate both. Martin-Baro did not glorify people as inherently revolutionary. He probed their culturally formed psychology of oppression that impedes their revolutionary activity and must be worked through via political action and psychological remediation.

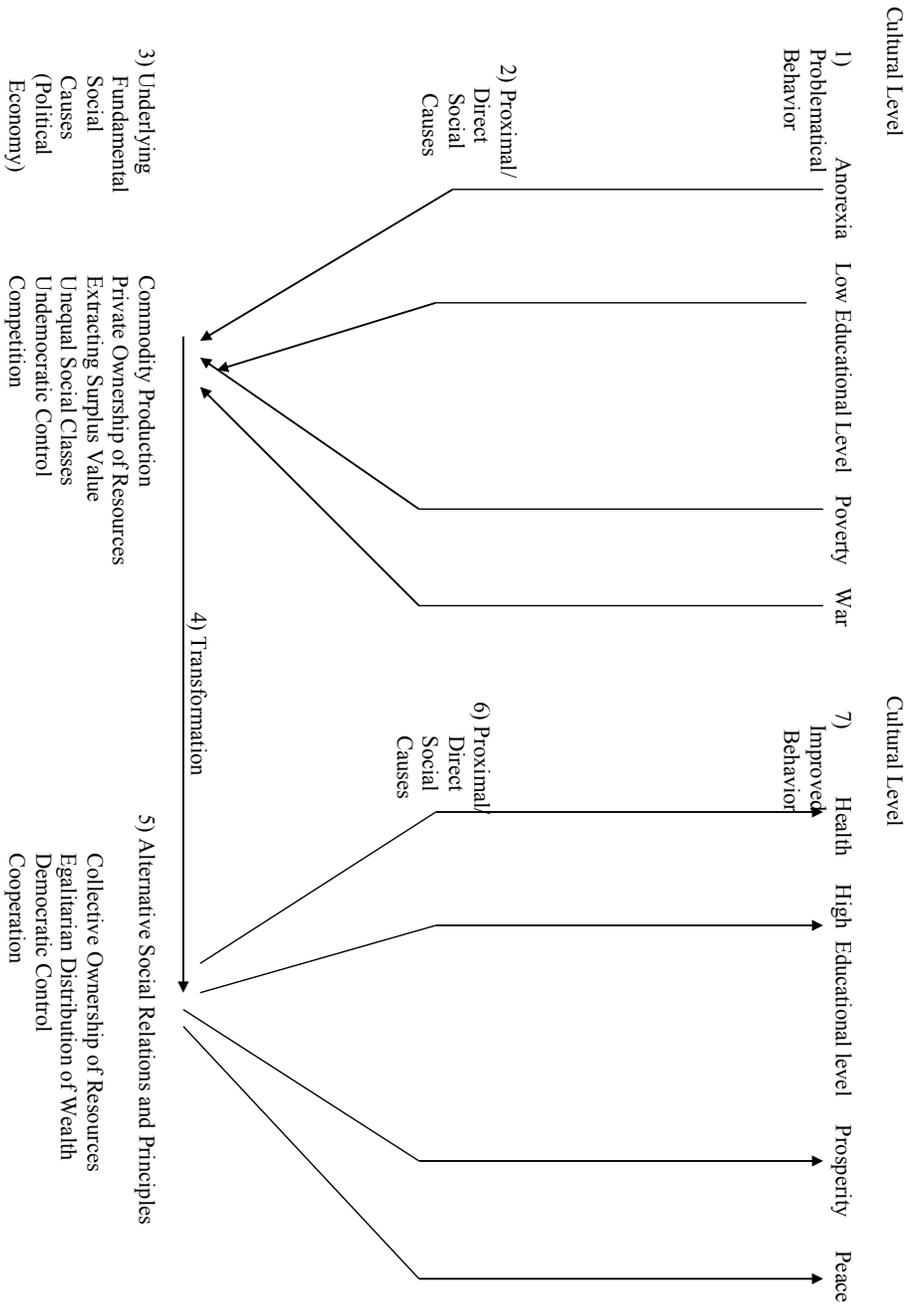
Political Dimensions of Social and Psychological Transformation

Thorough, fundamental, whole, structural change

1) Social analysis and transformation rest upon Marx's cultural theory that the panoply of macro cultural factors forms a coherent social system that is rooted in a political economy. Deep, structural political-economic change is the key to thorough, deep social transformation that eradicates the roots of social problems. It goes far beyond simply expanding political democracy within the social system. It educates people to reorganize the social system in a particular manner. This may be depicted in my figure

34:

Figure 34
Deep Structural Social-Psychological Reform



Deep, structural analysis and transformation probe down into the core of a social system to transform it from within its depths. It is internal change. It harnesses the system's core infrastructure and reorganizes that infrastructure to realize its potential for a fulfilling existence. Internal, dialectical transformation conforms to Marx's statement (written when he was 19 years old) that "the rational character of the object itself must develop as something imbued with contradictions in itself" (cited in Hudis, 2012, p. 38).²

This contrasts with other kinds of social change that do not analyze or transform the social core, and do not develop an alternative out of the existing infrastructure to concretely negate it. These efforts at change base themselves on external political ideals such as justice, fairness, respect, tolerance, and equality.

This is the approach followed by contemporary, spontaneous, "anarchist" movements such as the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street. They have failed to effect any significant social change. All the Arab countries in which the Arab Spring erupted are worse off today than before the Arab Spring. The Occupy movement has achieved no influence in academia, governmental legislation, or economic practices. It has

helped a few individuals to remain in their homes when faced with foreclosure, and it has chipped in to donate food and clothing to victims of hurricanes. The insignificance of these personal-level acts is illuminated by comparing them to the massive social and intellectual impact that the 1960s anti-war and anti-capitalism movements had. They generated important government reforms including the War on Poverty, Head Start, Medicare, civil rights, restrictions on government spying, etc.

2) A deep, structural analysis of problems and their resolution brings particular problems within a common framework of analysis and change.

Addressing fundamental causes of the panoply of particular problems, unifies the diverse victims of these problems in a common struggle against the common enemy that confronts them all. Their particular problems are only superficially unique. They can never solve their problems within the confines of their particular group (Ratner, 2009b, 2011, 2014b, d).

Oksala explains that feminist theory must redirect its theoretical and political force to issues such as neoliberalism and globalization. "Gender has political-economic dimensions because it is a basic structuring principle of the political economy." "Foucault's genealogy of neoliberalism

can provide a critical diagnostic framework for feminist theory as well as opening up new feminist political responses to the spread and dominance of neoliberalism" (Oksala, 2013, pp. 45, 34).

The British journal, Studies in The Maternal adopts this Foucaudian emphasis on feminist issues (that bourgeois feminism ignores). It emphasizes the cultural politics of reproduction, and "the political possibilities that arise from understandings of the maternal in the context of global/local, neo-liberal, late-capitalist conditions" (www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk). Writing in that journal, Allen & Osgood (2009) research

the political and cultural context in which young women are situated, in order to map a range of normalising maternal constructions that circulate within the fields of government policy and popular culture in Britain. Both government policy (specifically that of New Labour) and popular culture operate as important sites in which emerging shifts in the norms and behaviours governing understandings of femininity, the maternal, and propriety crystallize.

This approach integrates the particular gender struggle for the emancipation for women into the general struggle against capitalism for the emancipation of all subaltern people.

Marx, in "On The Jewish Question," and in his critiques of Hegel, emphasized how social transformation can only occur if particular oppressed groups subsume their particular interests in their own emancipation within a general interest in eradicating universal suffering by transforming capitalism en toto (See also Ratner, 2014d).

Fragmenting the systemic, unified struggle that is required for social improvement

Unfortunately, civil rights movements (and indigenous movements) usually focus upon the obvious problems they individually face (discrimination, devaluation), without comprehending the fundamental causes of their problems which lie in the political economy of society. (When civil rights activists do recognize this, they are eliminated, as in the case of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. In his speech "Beyond Vietnam," April 4, 1967, and in his 1967 book, King (2010) said that civil rights was a limited program and had to be extended into confronting the

politics and economics of poverty and militarism: "In 1863, the Negro was given abstract freedom expressed in luminous rhetoric. But in an agrarian economy, he was given no land to make liberation concrete...As Frederick Douglass came to say, 'Emancipation granted the Negro freedom to hunger, freedom to winter amid the rains of heaven. Emancipation was freedom and famine at the same time.'" King even suggested democratic socialism as the necessary solution to social problems.) Overlooking fundamental, political-economic issues leads to fragmented, superficial, self-interested struggles that are doomed to fail. For fragmented, superficial, self-interested struggle leaves the system as a whole intact. In fact, a particular group relies on the system as a whole to protect its interests/rights/demands. In this sense, it strengthens the system as a whole.

A case in point is the struggle against assaults on women. There is a strong tendency in women's movements to rely upon the state to severely punish crimes against women. This strengthens the repressive power of the police state. It strengthens police power to arrest suspects upon little evidence. It intensifies punishment and imprisonment. This repressive power is used against all members of the populace, including women. Poor women who commit petty crimes, Muslim women, women of color,

immigrants, and middle class women protestors against State- business policies will be persecuted by the criminal justice system that feminists have supported and empowered.

Punishment punishes the individual perpetrator as being responsible for a crime. Punishment never criticizes the social system for generating criminal behavior. It obfuscates the true problem and prevents correcting it. Punishing criminals rallies people to support the social system as protection from malevolent individuals. This is the effect of feminist calls for punishing perpetrators.

Instead of relying on, and legitimizing, the social system to solve social problems, women's movements should develop counter-institutions that prevent and rectify problems in a democratic, collective manner. This is the only way to truly overcome all forms of sexism. This will also integrate women's particular struggle with the general struggle against capitalism and the State.

Of course, emergency threats of violence may occasionally trigger calls for police protection and intervention. And disputes with upper class and political elements of civil society must employ mainstream tactics such as attorneys, lawsuits, political favors, etc. However, most crimes amongst the populace should be addressed by popular forms of

prevention, such as community institutions and forums where neighbors work together and form solidarity, support, and vigilance to protect the community and resolve disputes/antagonisms. The focus should be on communal prevention and rectification rather than State punishment of crime.

Another deficiency in the fragmented, superficial struggle against particular injustices is the belief by certain marginalized groups that their historical cultures and their marginalized positions afford them cultural-psychological distance from the political economy.

This distance is touted as generating a higher form of social consciousness that can lead transformative social movements. Certain indigenous people insist that their historical cultures were collective, peaceful, and sustainable, which provides a guide for solving current problems. A similar belief also exists within women's movements that women have escaped the competitive, depersonalizing, materialistic elements of capitalism because of their domestic marginalization. Women are touted as being more personal, empathic, peaceful, cooperative, and moral than men. Carol Gilligan's research on gender morality makes this claim. It is also behind the call for more women to participate in

government, business, and the military -- so that they will bring their extant humane perspective to humanize these social fields. Women will have this salutary affect simply by being themselves, as women in the current society.

This perspective assumes that marginalized groups transcend the status quo as they currently exist. They do not have to engage in any special activity to circumvent or transcend society. They are already empathic, expressive, sensitive, communal, sustainable, peaceful, cooperative by virtue of their marginal position within society.

It would make social change much easier if these idealizations were correct. We could simply follow the insights of oppressed people to social and psychological emancipation. Unfortunately, marginal transcendence is a myth. Oppressed people do not escape or transcend psychology of oppression; they internalize and externalize (reproduce) it.

Gilligan's research on the moral superiority of women has been thoroughly debunked. Real, destructive behavior by marginalized women further refutes the myth of marginal transcendence. Lesbians commit domestic violence against their partners at the same, or higher, rate as males in heterosexual and homosexual relationships.

The prevalence of female and black government officials has led to zero reduction in militarism, imperialism, neoliberalism, monopolization, conservatism, inequality, and competition.

Women are agents of oppression, war, exploitation, corruption, hypocrisy, and financial domination by the upper class as much as men are.

A striking case in point is Lower's (2013) documentation of German women's participation in the Nazi extermination of Jews. Some of the women she follows were aides to so-called desk murderers, eagerly assisting their bosses. Others took part in the humiliation of Jews, or plundered their goods. Still others shot them from balconies or in forests. One smashed in a Jewish toddler's head.

Ironically, professional caretakers actively participated in this evil behavior. From the moment the Nazis came to power and imposed policies of Aryan racial purity, countless nurses, their aprons filled with morphine vials and needles, routinely slaughtered the physically disabled and mentally defective.

Blonde German housewife Erna Petri was returning home after a shopping trip in town when something caught her eye: six small, nearly naked boys huddled in terror by the side of the country road. Married to

a senior SS officer, the 23-year-old knew instantly who they were. They must be the Jews she'd heard about — the ones who'd escaped from a train taking them to an extermination camp. But she was a mother herself, with two children of her own. So she humanely took the starving, whimpering youngsters home, calmed them down and gave them food to eat. Then she led the six of them — the youngest aged six, the oldest 12 — into the woods, lined them up on the edge of a pit and shot them methodically one by one with a pistol in the back of the neck.

Half a million young women went to the German East Front where they stood in the killing fields without refusing or resenting. “The role of German women in Hitler’s war can no longer be understood as their mobilization and victimization on the home front,” Lower says. “Instead, Hitler’s Germany produced another kind of female character at war, an expression of female activism and patriotism of the most violent and perverse kind.”

Lower refutes the popular myth of women's morality and empathy transcending mainstream culture. Motherhood and caring professions did not insulate women from the Holocaust. On the contrary, these roles were encompassed by the mainstream society.

Society is more unified than people realize. Mainstream society does not provide autonomous enclaves where counter-cultural praxes naturally incubate -- i.e., in the domesticated family, in the helping professions, in ethnic customs, or in personal agency. It is unrealistic to believe that women transcend capitalist praxes simply by being females in capitalist society, without actively studying and opposing capitalist praxes. There is no escape from oppression. It is impossible to ameliorate its affects by repositioning individuals in relation to oppression. The only solution is to reposition oppression in relation to individuals by eradicating it from their environment. Oppression cannot be escaped, it must be eradicated.

Counter-politics must be developed in concerted struggles against the status quo. They are not given to any group by virtue of their existence in a particular social domain (field). Martin-Baro aptly said, "The truth of the popular majority is not to be found but made" (Martin-Baro, 1994, p. 27). Marx always said that workers must become a revolutionary class through struggle; they are not inherently revolutionary simply because they were exploited by capitalism. Their exploitation endows them with the structural potential for social transformation, but their subjectivity and practice must be developed in political struggle to

realize this potential (Douglas, 2013). Subjective interest must be made congruent with objective interest.

Broadening the struggle to transform society to include all oppressed groups must be complemented by deepening the struggle to target the underlying political economy. Simply "reaching out" to oppressed groups, with their extant subjectivities and activities, is insufficient.

Lower demonstrates the destructive political consequences of the myth of transcendent, exceptional, feminine empathy and morality. These assumptions functioned as an interpretive gender bias that prevented recognizing that German women perpetrated the Holocaust. It also blinded critics of the Holocaust from punishing women after the war. German women literally got away with murder.

Cultural-Historical Psychology Integrates The Abstract-level Dialectic of Culture-Psychology With The Concrete-level Dialectic of Historical Materialism

Cultural-historical psychological theory emphasizes the general ability of culturally-formed subjectivity to change itself and culture. This

must be concretized through historical materialism which identifies a) material, social, and psychological problems, b) material, social, and psychological obstacles to change, (c) actions that are possible to overcome the impediments, and are necessary to overcome them.

Cultural-historical psychology affords active consciousness and cultural-psychological transformation. Furthermore, it requires social transformation as a condition of psychological enrichment. Since psychology is a function of the content of cultural factors, psychological enrichment depends upon a new cultural basis. The more dependent that psychology is on culture, the more necessary cultural change is for psychological enhancement. Cultural-historical psychology calls for the most extensive cultural change in order to produce the most extensive psychological change. This radical political thrust of cultural-historical psychology makes it threatening to the status quo and its defenders.

Subjective individualism

Other social and psychological approaches minimize culturally-organized subjectivity. They regard culturally organized subjectivity as mechanically determined and incapable of reflection and change. They seek reflection and change in a culture-free area of subjectivity. They

argue for free agency and personal meanings that are presumed to resist and negotiate culture from inside the individual. This minimizes

- the need for progressive political transformation
- the capacity for progressive political transformation
- the possibility of progressive political transformation
- and the direction for progressive political transformation

These conservative political implications make these social-psychological approaches popular with defenders of the status quo. They also make advocates of these approaches into defenders of the status quo.

This is why Foucault warned that individualistic humanism legitimizes existing power, it does not critique power (Hook, 2007, p. 70). Foucault urged that we "dispense with a level of focus upon the individual, constituent subject, and instead arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject, as s/he appears within the framework of current power relations" (in Hook, 2007, pp. 73-74). Holtzkamp (2013, p. 27) similarly said, "referring individuals back to their immediate subjectivity and social relations is only apparently oriented to their subjective needs; though restrictions and contradictions are experienced

on this level, they neither originate there nor are they surmountable solely on this level.”

Conclusion

Psychological and cultural change cannot occur in individual acts such as personal meanings or narratives (Kaidesoja, 2013). For these leave intact the debilitating social structure and the debilitating cultural habituses that oppress people. Liberation cannot be found within existing subjectivity or agency (see Ratner, 2014d). It can only be achieved by subjectivity that looks outside itself to analyze society and transform it.

Nor can agency free itself from its concrete, oppressive, cultural form by appealing to the general culture-psychology dialectic. It cannot appeal to general, subjective processes, such as reflection, mediation, creativity, communication, self-expression, imagination, problem-solving and motivation. Abstractions bear concrete features of the oppressive political economy until they are transformed into a concrete negation of that political economy.

Holtzkamp (2013, p. 20, 21, 23) correctly said “agency refers to the human capacity to gain, in cooperation with others, control over each individual’s own life conditions.” Agency “cannot primarily be changed on

the psychic level; a real improvement in the subjective quality of my life is synonymous with enhanced influence over my objective life conditions.”

“Efforts to increase one’s capacity to act, i.e. to extend control over the conditions of one’s life, always entail, on every level, the risk of coming in conflict with authorities...”

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¹ Counter-politics is a more appropriate term for radical transformation than anti-politics. Counter-politics denotes a politics that counterpoises current politics toward a concrete aufhebung of it. Anti-politics is too broad in that it includes renouncing politics altogether. This kind of anti-politics does not develop an emancipatory politics.

² Marx's statement is a Hegelian formulation. Hudis (ibid., p. 5) tells us that Marx remained faithful to Hegelian dialectics throughout his life. He cites Marx's 1875 passage in Volume II of Capital that said, " In my zealous devotion to the schema of Hegelian logic, I even discovered the Hegelian forms of the syllogism in the process

of circulation. My relationship with Hegel is very simple. I am a disciple of Hegel, and the presumptuous chatter of the epigones who think they have buried this great thinker appear frankly ridiculous to me." Engels omitted this passage from the published edition of Capital!