COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY AND LIBERATION THEOLOGIES: COMMONALITIES, COLLABORATION, DILEMMAS

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Community psychology and liberation theologies share an emphasis on personal and social transformation through a process of liberation. Emerging in the 1960s in the climate of social change movements, both fields serve to challenge the dominant discourse of how and why to perform the tasks of theology and psychology. My purpose in this article is to put these fields into dialogue, with a focus on commonalities, collaboration, and dilemmas. After presenting an overview of the fields and their commonalities, I posit that liberation theologies can enrich the why and where of liberating structural change, whereas community psychology can enrich the how with conceptual tools such as multiple levels of analysis and social change strategies. I develop these arguments from my social location as a White-Protestant man, primarily through the lens of community psychology though also informed by my formal theological education. I conclude with dilemmas internal to each field and inherent in potential collaboration.

OVERVIEW AND INTERRELATED HISTORIES OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Community Psychology

Against a backdrop of the U.S. social movements in the 1960s, community psychology emerged as a field in reaction to clinical psychology and nurtured by governmental support for community mental health programs (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2006; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005; Rappaport, 1977). The formal birth of the field in the United States1 is credited to the 1965 Swampscott conference, where a small gathering of social scientists envisioned a different type of psychology focused on prevention, alternatives to the medical model of mental illness, and social change (Rickel, 1987). In the early years, the field developed conceptual tools for theory, research, and practice to counter the dominant person-blaming tendency of mainstream psychology (Caplan & Nelson, 1973; Ryan, 1976). For example, a focus on social context and multiple

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1This article focuses on community psychology in the United States. See Montero and Varas Diaz (2007) for a historical description of community psychology in Latin America.
levels of analysis enabled an analysis of factors beyond the individual that impact individuals and groups (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Kelly, 1966). In the 1980s the field moved from a focus on prevention to empowerment (Rappaport, 1981), began to more actively pursue a focus on strengths and wellness (Cowen, 2000), and embraced diversity and social justice as central to the field (Dalton et al., 2006). A focus on studying social change interventions (e.g., citizen participation, community organizing) also set community psychology apart from other areas of psychology. More recent attention has been given to the role of community psychology in the process of liberation (Watts & Serrano-Garcia, 2003) and the incorporation of a critical understanding of power (Fisher, Sonn, & Evans, 2007; Prilleltensky, 2003, 2008). I argue in this article that these conceptual and practical tools may help to inform liberation theologies in the how of promoting liberation.

Liberation Theologies

There is not a singular liberation theology. Rather, theologies of liberation refer to a collection of theologies that share a similar purpose and method of construction and purpose. Methodologically, liberation theologies are constructed contextually, using experience as the starting place for theological reflection (Dyreness, 1990; Trout et al., 2003). As distinct from theological liberalism which uses personal experience to construct theology (Stuart, 2003), liberation theologies construct theology by reflecting upon the common experience of oppression by virtue of membership in particular social groups. Specifically, social groups are constructed around categories (e.g., race/ethnicity, class, gender, or religious affiliation) with power differentials associated with these categories. Some groups in society are in positions of dominance and hegemony (e.g., men, Whites) in relation to other groups that are relegated to subordinate and oppressed positions (e.g., women, people of color). The common experience of systematic oppression based on social group membership serves as the starting point for theological reflection, with marginalization creating a particular lens to understand group experience, scripture, history, tradition, and to construct theology. Through this lens of collective oppression, theological questions of humanity, God, Christ, the church, and eschatology are reframed, reinterpreted, and rearticulated. Furthermore, these theologies are historically situated in particular times and places, offering “concrete, practical, and historical theologies grounded in and continually referring to the actual practice of Christian communities” (Thistlethwaite & Engel, 1990, p. 8). The purpose of a liberation theology is both prophetic and constructive: “It is both a theology of protest against unjust social orders and a theology aimed at social transformation toward greater justice for all” (Thistlethwaite & Engel, 1990, p. 8). Many theologies of liberation have emerged in response to oppression. Most often noted are the Latin American theologies of liberation situated in the context of Latin American poverty and class conflict, sparked by Vatican II and the Medellín conference (Bettenson & Maunder, 1999; Mackin, 2010; Smith, 1991) and developed by liberation theologians such as the Boff brothers (1986/1987), Gutiérrez (1971/1988), Sobrino (1982/1987), Martín-Baró (1994), Pedro Casaldaliga, and Ernesto Cardenal (Cabestrero & Cardenal, 1981). In the U.S. liberatory theologies have centered on experiences of racism (Black Theology: Cone, 1997, 2003, 2009), sexism (Feminist Theology: Johnson, 2002; Ruether, 1993) and the triple oppression of racism/classism/sexism experienced by Black women (Womanist Theology: Williams, 1995). Other liberation theologies within (De La Torre, 2004) and outside the U.S. (Dyreness, 1990; Ngewa, Shaw, & Tienou, 1998) also have been developed. The unifying theme of these theologies is reflection from a place of oppression, with an ultimate purpose of liberation and social transformation.

Similar to community psychology’s emergence as a critique and alternative to clinical psychology, liberation theologies are proposed as “constructive alternatives to dominant theologies”: challenging not only the method but the content and structure of Christian theologies (Thistlethwaite & Engel, 1990, p. 9). For example, Gutiérrez (1971/1988), a Latin American liberation theologian, prioritizes ortho-praxis (right action) over traditional ortho-doxy (right belief). In Black Theology God is understood not as the traditional unmoved mover detached from human affairs (Pinnock, 2001), but rather as a God who suffers with and stands in solidarity with those

2See Adams, Bell, and Griffin (2007) for a description of systems of power, privilege, and oppression. I use language consistent with this perspective throughout when discussing liberation, oppression, and social groups.

3Eschatology refers to the study of the end times and last things (Schwarz, 2001).
who are oppressed (Cone, 2006). Furthermore, the traditional focus on the non-believer is subsumed by the focus on the non-person due to oppression and dehumanization (Cone, 2003). The death and resurrection of Christ is understood as subverting the social order, rather than as only for personal salvation (Martin-Baró, 1994). Black Theology focuses not on the traditional questions of the human and divine nature of Christ, but rather articulates Jesus as the incarnate Black Christ who fights for liberation (Cone, 2003). The Holy Spirit is understood as the life giving force needed to empower individuals and groups to work for liberation rather than as simply encouraging Christians to live a moral life (Conde-Frazier, 2004; Gutiérrez, 1989/1991; Kärkkäinen, 2002). The church is no longer a place only for sacramental living, but becomes the place for oppressed people to organize for liberation (Kärkkäinen, 2002a) and to denounce injustice and raise critical consciousness (Martin-Baró, 1994). The eschatological task focuses less on questions of the afterlife and instead seeks to work for a more just society in the present through social structural change (Cone, 2003). These are but a few examples of how liberation theologies reinterpret traditional theological constructs in the service of liberation, possibly contributing to community psychology’s understanding of the why of liberation.

Interrelated Histories

Community psychology and theologicals of liberation have an interconnected history (Perilla, Lavizzo, & Ibanez, 2007). First, the ideas of Freire (1970/2000) surrounding praxis, dialogics, and a model of problem-posing education influenced both the early writers of Latin American liberation theologies and the evolving field of community psychology (Prilleltensky, 2001). Furthermore, as delineated by Comas-Diaz, Lykes, and Alarcon (1998), Freire heavily influenced Martin-Baró, a Latin American Jesuit priest who drew from both Freire and Latin American liberation theologies in constructing a psychology of liberation (Martin-Baró, 1994; Moane, 2003; Montero, 2007). The Martin-Baró inspired psychology of liberation, in turn, has challenged the field of community psychology in the U.S. to incorporate ideas of liberation (Watts & Serrano-Garcia, 2003) and power (Prilleltensky, 2003, 2008) as central to the task of the field’s research, theory, and action. Furthermore, community psychology has been directly impacted by Latin American liberation theologies, most prominently in the work of Dokecki (1982) and Trout et al. (2003). Other community psychologists have noted the impact of liberation theology on their personal value system or professional work, though these references generally do not explicate what liberation theology actually is (Dokecki, Newbrough, & O’Gorman, 2001; Walsh-Bowers, 2000). Finally, Latin American liberation theologies and Black Theology, although developed relatively independently (Cone, 2003; Cone & Willmore, 1979), each constituted a similar methodological breakthrough where the experiences of oppression were centralized as legitimate for theological reflection. This new methodology provided other theologies of liberation the tools to begin the process of constructing new theologies of liberation from different experiences of oppression (De La Torre, 2004). In summary, liberation theologies and community psychology have common inspiration in Freire and Martin-Baró’s ideas of liberation. Given this interrelated history, it is not surprising that significant overlap exists between the two fields.

Overlaps Between Community Psychology and Liberation Theologies

Praxis and Conscientization

Flowing from the common influence of Freire (1970/2000), community psychology and liberation theologies both centralize praxis and conscientization in theory and practice (Dokecki, 1982). Praxis refers to a process of reflection and action in order to enact social change whereas conscientization describes the development of a critical consciousness through the process of praxis. In Latin American liberation theology, a focus on praxis is represented in the work of Gutiérrez (1971/1988), who elevates ortho-praxis (right action) above ortho-doxy (right belief), with the assertion that right action will illuminate right belief in a reflective cycle. Other liberation theologies also encourage the reflection on oppressed experience to inform and spark action. In community psychology, praxis has been described as the unity of theory and action, a cornerstone within the field that guides theory, research, and action (Partridge, 2008; Prilleltensky, 2001). Furthermore, both community psychology and liberation theologies embrace a cycle of reflective action summarized by Trout et al. (2003) as: (1) action, (2) reflection, (3) planning new action strategies, and (4) further action.
Liberation theologies add an extra dimension in the steps of reflection and planning: namely, reflecting theologically and spiritually on the outcomes and meanings of action. In both fields, this praxis process is used to produce thoughtful action in the pursuit of liberation.

In both liberation theologies and community psychology, the praxis process leads to conscientization, or the development of a critical consciousness. Critical consciousness, in turn, has been proposed as a first step in the process of liberation (Freire, 1970/2000). Furthermore, both community psychology and theologies of liberation use multiple sources of knowledge to inform the process of conscientization. Social science research, economic theory, and critical theories such as Marxism and feminism are utilized to construct a socio-historical-critical understanding of current reality and social structures. This incorporation of a socio-historical-critical analysis is not standard practice within the larger psychological and theological disciplines (Gutiérrez, 1971/1988; Reich, Pinkard, & Davidson, 2008). For example, in comparison to clinical psychology, community psychology has been more influenced by feminist (Bond et al., 2000) and liberationist (Watts & Serrano-Garcia, 2003) perspectives in shaping theory and practice. Furthermore, as opposed to traditional theology, theologies of liberation have incorporated critical theories relevant to their particular experiences of oppression such as a Marxist class analysis (Gutiérrez, 1971/1988), a feminist critique of patriarchy and sexism (Johnson, 2002), and the writings of Malcolm X and DuBois to understand racism and White supremacy (Cone, 2003; Hopkins, 2003). This incorporation of critical social analysis in theological reflection aids in conscientization and is integral in the praxis process for both community psychology and liberation theologies.

**Participatory and Communal**

Theologies of liberation and community psychology both operate under the premise that theory, research, and action are best pursued through participation in community. For example, the process of empowerment is hypothesized in community psychology to occur when individuals join together to obtain resources necessary to have control over life choices (Zimmerman, 2000). Although the impact of empowerment can be at the individual level, the empowerment process itself fundamentally occurs through participation in a specific community setting where oppressed individuals, in community, empower themselves. Furthermore, the field of community psychology has embraced the practice of participatory action research as a way to generate theory, action, and ultimately changes in the lives of participants (Jason et al., 2003; Lykes, 2004). From this approach, participation with others who share the same oppression becomes the primary vehicle for generating knowledge and social change, thereby challenging the dominant epistemologies in psychology regarding the construction of knowledge (Cone, 2003; Kidd & Kral, 2005; Walsh-Bowers, 2000). Liberation theologies are similarly adamant that the creation of theological knowledge can only occur as a communal enterprise, through deep participation and reflection on the process of liberation (Thistlewaite & Engel, 1990). Although a liberation theology may be penned by a single author, the theology is a reflection upon a collective experience of oppression. Overall, both community psychology and liberation theologies deeply value community and participation as the way to work for liberation.

**Power**

Central to liberation theologies is an understanding of power as crucial in the process of liberation. Power may be framed differently depending on the experience of oppression such as class struggle (Gutiérrez, 1971/1988), White domination and racism (Cone, 2003), male domination and sexism (Johnson, 2002; Ruether, 1993), or an intersection of class/race/gender oppression (Williams, 1995). Regardless, a critical analysis of power is central to theological reflection. Community psychology as a field has been less attentive to power, although feminist community psychology (Bond et al., 2000; Mulvey, Gridley, & Gawith, 2001) and the introduction of psychopolitical validity as a methodological criteria (Prilleltensky, 2003) have encouraged the field to center power as a major organizing principle of the field (Newbrough, Speer, & Lorion, 2008). Psychopolitical validity implies that research and theory is meaningful and relevant (i.e., valid) only if the psychological and political operations of power are addressed. Specifically, attention is given to how power impacts our construction of knowledge (e.g., epistemic validity) and leads to structural transformation (e.g., transformative validity). Other scholars have proposed that increased attention to the language and conceptualization of
power (Speer, 2008), delineating how power operates at multiple levels (Christens & Perkins, 2008), and situating power relationships within history (Reich et al., 2008) are all necessary to illuminate an analysis of power. Taken together, both liberation theologies and community psychology have potential to utilize a critical analysis of power as central to understanding societal injustice.

**THE WHY/WHERE OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND THE HOW OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY**

Liberation theologies and community psychology both have rationales (the why), locations (the where), and methods (the how), to strategize and engage in social change. For example, community psychology articulates values such as social justice that guide the field (the why), as well as articulates a process to determine how other values may resonate with the field (Prilleltensky, 2001). Liberation theologies also have many strategies for social change (the how), such as the formation of base communities where communities work for individual and structural level change (Kärkkäinen, 2002a). At the same time, both fields may be enriched by learning from the strengths of the other field. In order to highlight these strengths for mutual growth, I focus on how liberation theologies provide a moral, spiritual, and value base (the why) for liberation, which may be of interest to community psychologists in expanding the value base to work for liberation. Furthermore, it may be possible for community psychologists to collaborate with religious settings if both can form a value-based partnership based on a common value of liberation (Nelson, Prilleltensky, & MacGillivary, 2001).

**“Why” of Liberation Theologies**

The motivation to work for social change or to give up privilege may rest upon an economic, moral, or spiritual rationale (Goodman, 2001; Parks Daloz et al., 1996). Liberation theologies provide rich and compelling spiritual reasons to work for justice, connecting liberation as central to the practical activity of Christians (Cone, 2003). Other examples noted earlier, such as God identifying with oppression, the Holy Spirit as the source of life who empowers, and Christ as liberator, each connect spirituality and biblical interpretation with the task of liberation. Room does not permit a full exploration of these connections, though even these brief examples illustrate how spiritual understandings may deepen commitment to the quest for liberation. Beyond specific examples, Cone (2003) explains that the only authentic Christianity is one that is working for justice and social transformation. He goes on to argue that this task is necessary for both those who oppress and who are oppressed, and that the full humanity of both can only be realized in this quest for liberation—echoing parts of the theology of Martin Luther King Jr. (King, 1963). These brief examples highlight the potential connections between a liberatory-based spirituality, and a motivation to work for liberation from a Christian perspective. Community psychology could learn from these connections in an effort to appreciate how different religious belief systems can buttress and support the pursuit of liberation. Furthermore, it may be possible for community psychologists to collaborate with religious settings if both can form a value-based partnership based on a common value of liberation (Nelson, Prilleltensky, & MacGillivary, 2001).

**“Where” of Liberation Theologies**

Beyond providing spiritual motivation and moral reasons to engage in the process of liberation, liberation theologies also are located in particular places (the where), namely in local religious settings where people naturally gather in community around spiritual and religious practices. There has been a long standing call for community psychology to locate theory, research, and action within particular religious settings (Kloos & Moore, 2000; Shinn, 1987) and theologies of liberation may help further connect community psychology to religious communities where the potential for collaboration exists. Gathered around a common faith and experience of oppression, many naturally occurring communities exist at the local (congregations), national (denominations), and international (World Wide Church) levels. For examples, Trout et al. (2003) worked with local base communities in Africa to intersect community psychology with local religious efforts to work for liberation. Furthermore, the act of doing liberation theology in local...
communities could be part of a participation action research process, where not only are communities working for local change, but are also encouraged to reflect theologically on these experiences to generate knowledge and narratives about their own experiences. Liberation theologies may provide frameworks that can be implemented within a particular religious setting, arguably an ideal connection for community psychologists interested in partnering with others to pursue liberation.

“How” of Community Psychology: Multiple Levels of Analysis

One framework central to community psychology is differentiating phenomena at multiple levels of analysis (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dalton et al., 2006; Kelly, 1966). Christens and Perkins (2008) apply a multiple levels of analysis framework to the concept of power, examining power at multiple levels (e.g., micro/personal/psychological, meso/organizational/relational, macro/collective/structural) and along multiple domains (physical, economic, socio-cultural, and political). This idea of multiple levels of analysis can provide an organizational framework to enable communities to know where and how to address power in the process of liberation. Furthermore, theological reflection regarding liberation and the operation of power might be more clearly understood by organizing reflection at different levels of analysis. For example, theological reflections on God’s relationship to the individual who is oppressed or the role of the Holy Spirit in promoting personal healing and wholeness from oppression could be conceptualized as a theological response to internalized oppression at the micro/personal level. At a meso/group/relational level, theological questions might focus on policies and practices that lead to oppression within a religious community (e.g., the exclusion of women from leadership roles), and how to construct a leadership structure and opportunities for participation that are just. At a macro/structural level, theological reflections may focus on congregational involvement in politics (Sider, 2005), the relationship of the church with culture (Niebuhr, 1951; Tillich, 1964), or how the concept of evil can be located within social structures themselves (Newbiggin, 1989). These are but a few examples of how theological reflection can be organized at different levels, promoting clear thinking about where and how oppression is operating and how to then design interventions at particular levels to promote liberation.

“How” of Community Psychology: Social Change Strategies

Practically, community psychology offers a number of concrete, empirically-based social change strategies, which may aid in the movement from reflection to effective action in the cycle of praxis. Social change strategies include: consciousness raising (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005), advocacy (Sullivan & Bybee, 1999), informing public policy (Phillips, 2000), community and neighborhood organization (Berkowitz, 2000), citizen participation (Wandersman & Florin, 2000), creating alternative settings (Cherniss & Degnan, 2000), community coalitions (Allen, 2005), participatory action research methods (Jason et al., 2003), understanding and utilizing social capital (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000) and many others. Providing clear social change strategies from community psychology may thereby help to connect abstract theological concepts to practical actions in the pursuit of liberation. The process of raising consciousness within a setting could then be followed with concrete strategies so that groups, motivated by their faith and liberatory goals, may have practical ways to act in the world to overcome oppression.

DILEMNAS

Focusing on Social Structural Change

Even though community psychology and liberation theologies call for social structural change, both fields have inherent tensions in heeding this call. First, community psychology is linked with mainstream psychology. This association may make working for liberation difficult as some have observed that mainstream psychology itself serves to maintain rather than change social structures (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). Furthermore, many community psychologists are located in academic institutions, with particular demands and expectations as to what types of research and knowledge are valued in the career promotion process. Ironically there may be structural barriers to discourage community psychologists from centralizing social change in their work. For liberation theologies, there is a tension of working for structural change within the mainstream practices and ideologies of many Christians. First, charity is the dominant model for Christian congregational involvement in social issues, with churches and individuals giving
money and time to address the basic needs of congregants and community members through providing food, clothing, and shelter (Chaves, 2001). While this type of giving is a crucial and needed function that congregations play in society, it is predicated on an individualistic versus socio-structural problem definition, and may result in solutions for social problems at only the individual level. This focus on the individual may be due to particular understandings of the church as separate from society, or as one way to navigate tensions around church and state issues, since many structural changes may involve political activism. Regardless of why, changing social structures has not traditionally been the dominant method for Christians to be working for liberation. Second, a focus on social structures by liberation theologies and community psychology may be irrelevant if not antithetical to particular Christian faith systems. Specifically, Emerson and Smith (2000) document how Evangelical Christians are generally anti-structural in their proposed solutions for racism, and instead focus on individual relationships as the appropriate solution to racism in the United States. This anti-structural and relationship-based approach is argued to draw on a Calvinistic based individualism, the elevation of the importance of personal relationships with God and others, and a focus on personal responsibility (2000). Conversely, Jim Wallis advocates for social structural change within an Evangelical framework to address social problems, though it is difficult to tell how widely shared his views are with other Evangelicals (Wallis, 2005a, 2005b). These points are not intended to disparage Evangelical Christians, but rather to point out that particular practices and faith beliefs of many Christians may lead to non-structural solutions to diminish oppression as well as to recognize the ways in which Evangelicals may already connect their faith beliefs to structural change. In working for structural change, liberation theologies and community psychology may in actuality be working at counter purposes with other Christian frameworks that focus only at the level of the individual.

The Dark Side of Religion

Another tension in working for structural change is the possibility that religious institutions themselves are perpetrators of structural oppression. For example, Black Theology has been critical of the patriarchal and sexist practices (e.g., women denied leadership roles) and beliefs (e.g., God as solely male) of many religious settings (Johnson, 2002). This type of critique may be uncomfortable for many religious people, as congregations themselves may embody the hierarchical structures and attitudes that would implicitly need to be challenged and dismantled as a part of working for broader social change. Thus, some religious groups may be part of the problem as defined by liberation theologies and community psychology. At the same time, these religious individuals and groups may be making a positive impact in the community or world. The tension is how to take seriously a liberatory theology or community psychology when such attention may challenge practices within the religious setting! This tension further spills over into the possible partnerships between community psychology and religious organizations. The field of community psychology has explicitly called for an exploration of both the positive and negative impacts of religion (Maton, 2001; Sarason, 2001; Shinn, 1987), implying that community psychology may critique religious practices and organizations. Why would religious organizations want to partner with community psychologists who may critique or expose components of religious practice that are negative? How can community psychologists promote liberation in a religious organization and not attend to power imbalances in the organization? Given the uneasy history of psychology and religion, how can trust be built between community psychologists and religious organizations that would permit constructive critique to be offered in the context of a partnership in the larger service of liberation? These questions raised here are to further reflection on the inherent tensions in partnerships between community psychologists and religious organizations to promote liberation.

“By Whom and for Whom” in the Process of Liberation

Both liberation theologies and community psychology hold to the premise that liberation by whom and for whom refers to people from oppressed groups. The requirement that one is from the oppressed group in order to do theology or participate in action research creates a tension for many community psychologists and liberatory-minded religious people who are not members of the oppressed group, but who still may want to work for liberation. This is not a unique tension, and reflects similar dilemmas in feminism
(e.g., is it appropriate for men to identify as feminist or rather pro-feminist?) and critical race theory (e.g., can Whites do Black critical race theory?; Delgado & Stefancic, 1997). Many community psychologists are members of multiple privileged groups (e.g., highly educated, men, White) or may have an intersection of oppressed and privileged group memberships (e.g., Black men; Sonn & Fisher, 2003). How does such membership impact their ability to work for liberation? Community psychology has partly addressed this tension by positioning the community psychologist not as a member of the oppressed group, but as a person with a unique skill set who can serve as a consultant, advocate, or resource for the group in the group’s process of empowerment or social change. This approach positions the community psychologist as a part of the process, but not as the expert or sole guide of the process. In this sense, Nelson et al. (2001) propose developing partnerships based on a shared set of values in an effort to collaborate and stand in solidarity with oppressed groups.

For liberation theologies, similar tensions arise. First, can people who are not members of the oppressed group do liberation theology? Can scriptures and experience be interpreted through a lens of oppression if people do not share the same experience of oppression? Liberation theologians would most likely respond that, in fact, people who do not share oppression are not positioned to take part in the construction and enactment of liberation theology, especially when these outsiders are from the dominant group (Cone, 2003; Thistlewaite & Engel, 1990). Second, what can or should people who are not members of the oppressed group learn from liberation theologies? Can liberation theologies be tools for developing a critical consciousness in dominant group members, possibly even encouraging these dominant group members to identify as allies and advocates in the process of liberation? Is it possible for dominant group members to stand in solidarity with those who are oppressed? Third, what is the role of external critique from non-members of the oppressed group in informing various liberation theologies? James Cone (2003), for instance, notes his deep frustration with White theologians who critiqued his Black Theology, noting how they did not apprehend his method or message. Conversely, Cone was grateful to outside critiques regarding his use of sexist language in early writings, a mistake that he apologized for and corrected in later editions of his work (Cone, 2003). But where is the balance between heeding critique from the outside and permitting such critique to function as further perpetuation of oppression? Fourth, where do these communities of resistance and reflection exist, and are liberation theologies actually developed and practiced in congregations or are they mainly an academic exercise? Many of the examples of communities practicing liberation theology focus on base communities outside of the U.S. in Latin America (Martín-Baró, 1994) and Africa (Ngewa et al., 1998; Trout et al., 2003). Most congregations in the U.S. are predominately White and middle-class, reflecting the major dominant groups in U.S. society (Chaves, 2001; Dougherty, 2003). Even though religious congregations are natural places for the pursuit of liberation, how do the White demographics constrain the possibility of organizing oppressed groups to do liberation theology?

As a beginning response to these inherent tensions in constructing liberation theologies, I wonder about the development of liberatory theologies from the perspective of dominant groups. Is it possible for dominant groups to start from a place of privilege in their theological reflection, reading the scriptures with an eye toward God’s call for justice and liberation? Though dismissed in the early 1900s as liberal and socialistic (Evans, 2001; Marsden, 1991), how might resurrecting a social gospel theology (Rauschenbusch, 1907, 1917) provide theological traction for privileged people to work for liberation? Is it possible that dominant group members could productively work for justice through a social gospel focus on (a) social injustice as social sin, (b) working for justice as central to the process of salvation and redemption, and (c) embracing a Kingdom of God theology that focuses on the church as a transformational institution? Beyond a social gospel focus, how could a reading of scripture and understanding of tradition through a lens of justice provide motivation and inspiration to work for the liberation of all people? Black Theology, reflecting the teaching of Martin Luther King Jr. (King, 1963), argues that oppression strips the oppressor of their humanity, and that both oppressor and oppressed need to engage in the process of liberation to restore the humanity of both (Cone, 2003). Can the fields of community psychology and liberation theologies provide a framework for critical reflection on power and privilege while at the same time providing the motivation and means for people who are privileged to work for liberation? These perennial questions have no simple answers. It is my hope that further critical reflection on these issues will facilitate theology and community psychology.
practice that moves in the direction of liberation for all oppressed groups.

**CONCLUSION**

My hope is that community psychology and liberation theologies, grounded in a common history and overlapping concepts, can collaborate in the task of liberation. Specifically, I argue that liberation theologies have the potential to inform the \textit{why} and \textit{where} of social change efforts whereas community psychology can contribute to the \textit{how} with conceptual tools such as multiple levels of analysis and social change strategies. Although dilemmas exist in this potential partnership, a common goal of pursuing liberation and overcoming oppression can arguably unite these two fields in their quest for social change.

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