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Resuscitating Critical Psychology for “Revoluting” Times

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Playing with the doubled use of the term “revoluting”—as an adjective to describe the repulsive inequality gaps that litter the globe and as a delightful gerund to capture the thrilling days of global collective protest—this Lewin address muses about social psychology’s debt in politically difficult times of massive inequality and sustained oppression. I venture back to the 1930s for inspiration, reviewing the writings of Lewin, Jahoda, and Dollard, as well as the research of W.E.B. Du Bois in the early 1900s and Ignacio Martín-Baró toward the latter part of the 1900s, to understand how social psychologists have intervened theoretically and empirically to contest injustice, inspire solidarity, and advance more just social arrangements. Calling for research that both documents the collateral damage of neoliberalism and generates alternative visions of democracy and justice, the second half of the article sketches a critical participatory action research project conducted with urban youth, which was designed to challenge both the strategic disinvestment in the public sphere and the concomitant conservatizing pressures on our methods of social inquiry, raising questions about “evidence-based practice” and the current marketing of Randomized Clinical Trials as the “gold standard.”

As I edit my summer Lewin Address for publication in the *Journal of Social Issues*, the world is trembling with the thrills of global revolutions. On October 15, 2011, inspired by Arab Spring, Spanish “indignants,” Greek Protests, Occupy Wall Street, and the courage of resistance in communities across the globe, millions of people in more than 950 cities across 82 countries took to the streets demanding economic and racial justice. The 99% link across racial/ethnic, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, religion, nation, North/South, and across zip codes. Laborers in hard hats sit alongside young women in hijab, teachers, farmers, retired police officers, laid-off lawyers, formerly incarcerated mothers, and unemployed Wall Street investors chanting, “They got bailed out, we got sold out.” Building a

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solidarity movement within and across place, these protesters are refusing narrow constructions of identities and are instead cultivating a collective praxis of solidarity, critique, and desire, in the radical activities of organizing and protest, in place and across the globe. They are indeed revolting against inequality gaps, global and national policies that protect the wealthiest 1% and corporations while taxing the poor. And while it may not be foremost on their minds, they are contesting, by their actions, the ways in which human desires for justice, collectivity, and solidarity have been neglected and empirically obfuscated in academic psychology.

In this essay, I resurrect the embers and long for a sustained critical social psychology that engages in interdisciplinary discussions of and inquiry with social movements and solidarities, group relations, and dedicated interdependence; a social psychology that challenges the dominant belief that self-interest and self-protection are basic human motives. I fear as a discipline, at least in the United States, we have forged a program of research that normalizes motives that may characterize the behavior of the 1% but neglects the yearnings of most (see Deutsch, 1985). This is more than a sampling problem. This is what critical psychologist Teo (2010) would call epistemological violence.

We are in the Fall of Occupy Wall Street after the Spring of Arab awakening. The world is spinning, fueled with profoundly social psychological dynamics of radical possibility. It's time that we, as a discipline, reenter critical discussions of what could be and resist reinscribing what is. Fortunately, we stand on the shoulders of a long and radical, if buried, history of SPSSI members who have contested dominant economic and racial arrangements, who have cultivated strategic relationships between the academy and resistance movements, who have embodied a collective spirit of critical public science within social movements for justice.

In this essay, the ironies of language will be put to radical use. Playing with the doubled use of the term *revoluting*—as an adjective to describe the repulsive inequality gaps that litter the globe and as a delightful gerund to capture the thrilling days of global collective protest—this Lewin address muses about social psychology's debt in politically difficult times of massive inequality and sustained oppression. It is time to contest revolting inequities with revolting epistemologies.

Lewin Lecture, August 2011

As an academic daughter of Morton Deutsch, I am honored to deliver the Lewin Address for 2011. In these very hard times for the world, the nation and particularly poor working class and immigrant communities, I offer a love song to social psychology in the subjunctive, social psychology as it must be, as so many SPSSI ancestors envisioned and practiced our discipline. Although it is a time-honored tradition, I will not belabor the crisis in social psychology that has so richly filled the air at Lewinian lectures for decades, except to say that the critique

narrated 30 years ago by Marie Jahoda ripples still throughout social psychology in the United States and Europe.

In 1981, Jahoda wrote, “mainstream social psychology is often no longer social, treats people like objects rather than persons and where it does not, limits its concern to the cognitively rational and consistent; it has not tackled the circulate causality between individual and group” (1981, p. 215). More than a quarter century later, Robert Cialdini, an experimental and field researcher and a past associate editor of *JPSP*, published a short essay in *Perspectives on Psychological Science* to explain why he decided to take early retirement. “Truth be told, as a discipline, we’ve become lax in our responsibilities to the public . . . they deserve to know the pertinence of our research . . . they’ve paid for that research.” (Cialdini, 2009, p. 5)

Perhaps it has always been this way, but the forces surrounding and impinging on the field of social psychology today are a contradictory and confusing swirl of political, economic, and intellectual winds, signaling perhaps an important moment to pause for disciplinary reflection on our intellectual debt in these critical times.

As a subdiscipline, social psychology was born and has long teetered delicately on an edge; a scholarly double helix of person and social, field and lab, numbers and stories, politics and bodies, and social critique and engagement. We seem to both enjoy and suffer in the contentious dialectics of “crisis.” Indeed a sense of disciplinary crisis has historically instigated some of the most significant turns in the field (Stainton-Rogers, 2009). At the moment, however, I fear our delicate twinning is fraying. The romantic in me believes that because of sturdy braiding and hybrid roots, social psychology may be one of the few disciplines with the history, intellect, heart, and courage to research the complex and circuited lives of persons nestled within global and local inequality gaps and to generate compelling evidence relevant to social theory, policy, and social movements; to offer a counter-story to the dominant narrative of motivated self-interest, defensive identity politics, and the inevitability of inequality gaps. But I’m worried.

In 1939, Kurt Lewin argued that in order to research complex lives situated in complex political circumstances, social psychologists would have to overcome what he saw as major difficulties:

- (1) “integrating—vast areas of divergent facts and aspects . . . cultural, historical, sociological, psychological, and physical facts . . .
- (2) treating—these facts on the basis of their interdependence,
- (3) handling—both historical and systematic problems,
- (4) handling—problems related to groups as well as to individuals,
- (5) handling—all ‘sizes’ of objects or patterns (. . . problems of a nation . . . as well as a play group of three children),
- (6) Problems of ‘atmosphere’ . . .

- (7) Experimental social psychology will have to find a way to bring the large size patterns into a framework small enough for the technical possibilities of experimentation.” (1997, pp. 264–265)

To Lewin’s list, I would add a few additional challenges in the contemporary political landscape. The world today is plagued by growing and hardening inequality gaps; the explicit protection of elite power; a psychic numbing to crisis, oppression and violence; an ideological valorization of individualism and freedom tithed to a cumulative sense of powerlessness. People are flooded with “science” and facts, much of it purchased by corporations or conservative think tanks. Critical voices for democracy, interdependence, racial justice, solidarity movements, public radio, television, and public science are severely underfunded and thereby muted.

The world deserves an engaged critical social psychology (see Fox, Prillettensky, & Austin, 2009; Martín-Baró, 1994; Stainton-Rogers, 2009; Torre & Fine, 2011; Torre, Fine, Stoudt, & Fox, 2012) to take up the tasks that Lewin sketched: to theorize and study the membranes that link/separate people in contentious sociopolitical contexts; reframe individual issues in the social landscape of historic, political, economic, and cultural topography; to document the dynamic interdependence of inequality gaps, tithing wealth and poverty, oppression and security, health and despair, and to pierce what Morton Deutsch has called the “slumber of complacency” among those who think they are doing just fine while others suffer (Bhatia, 2011; Deutsch, 1974; Fine & Sirin, 2007; Fox & Prillettensky, 2009; Opatow, 2011; Stoudt, Fine, & Fox, 2012). These are hard times to strategize an intellectual and political path through our increasingly conservative discipline, psychology. Yet I find wisdom and courage in the writings of social psychologists who responded so boldly 75 years ago to the shifting political, economic, and scientific winds of the post-Depression era.

Through the Nostalgic Lens of a Rear View Mirror

For inspiration, we travel back to the 1930s (see Rutherford, Unger, & Cherry, 2011 for a volume of historic essays on SPSSI). Just coming out of the Great Depression, Franklin Delano Roosevelt—controversial though he was—was railing against what he called “economic royalists” who were hoarding capital and draping their lust for control and profit in the language of patriotism and democracy. This was an astonishing moment for social policy formulation. Secretary of the Department of Labor Francis Perkins, the first female cabinet appointment, was ushering in New Deal policies to tighten the structural weave of our collective fabric, including social security, child labor, and minimum wage laws. Recall that in the 30s the highest marginal tax rate was over 80% even as racism remained a relatively uncontested national tradition. So what were social psychologists writing about?

In the late 1930s, the social psychologies of group life, collective action and cohesion were enjoying a Renaissance (Danzinger, 2007). Critical intellectuals chronicled the psychic erosion produced by structural oppression and, at the same time, documented the dynamic circuitry linking privilege and oppression. A small group of social psychologists tuned their scholarship toward documenting and intervening in the messy spaces between lives in struggle, lives in comfort, and oppressive political regimes. Two social psychological classics were underway, ethnographies archiving the material, psychological, and existential weight of cumulative injustice. John Dollard first published *Class and Caste in a Southern Town* in 1937, a detailed and searing investigation of race and class relations in the South, whereas Marie Jahoda, Paul Lazarsfeld, and Hans Zeisel published *Marienthal*, a social psychological analysis of everyday life in a community outside of Vienna where villagers suffered individually and collectively from what was called the Worldwide Economic Crisis (1933; see also Torre, Fine, Stoudt, & Fox, 2012).

These writers penned bold texts on the collateral damage of fascism, economic and racial oppression on everyday lives and communities. Both sacrificed much for their intellectual, political, and ethical convictions. While Dollard enjoyed a faculty appointment in Psychology and African American Studies at Yale, he apparently, “paid a price for his unusual interdisciplinary interests: academic departments tend[ed] to look with disfavor on those who depart from the common mold, and he did not become a voting full professor in the department of psychology at Yale until age 52” (Ewen, 1998, p. 507). Marie Jahoda, as her obituary tells us, was “a staunch anti-fascist, [who] came into collision with the repressive Austrian government even before Hitler’s Anschluss, was imprisoned between 1936 and 1937 . . . She also ran the secret radio station, Radio Rotes Wien, under Richard Crossman at the Ministry of Information.” (1981, p. 98, reprinted 2003).

Crafting scholarship at the interdisciplinary nexus of the social and the psychological, Jahoda and Dollard, like Du Bois (1913) before them and Martín-Baró (1994) since, worked across interdisciplinary boundaries, integrated a range of methods and theoretical frameworks, and produced works intentionally accessible and accountable to communities within and beyond the academy. They struggled to capture the damage of oppression and at the same time to honor the humanity of those exiled beyond the borders of social inclusion. They bent their science, like light, to refract a sense of collective responsibility among those with privilege. They worked elegantly at the hyphen of critical science and political resistance.

And on the radio, in 1939, one could hear Billie Holiday singing *Strange Fruit*, a painful depiction of tangled lives, written by a Jew, sung by a Black woman,

strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees . . .
Scent of magnolias sweet and fresh,
then a sudden smell of burning flesh—

By the late 30s, popular culture, politics, and critical scholarship were beginning to realize and reveal the troubling entanglements of progress for some and violence for others. And a number of psychologists were among the critical voices contesting the inhumane consequences of inequality and cumulative oppression, entering the fray of political debate, refusing the false promise of neutrality.

Swelling Inequality Gaps in the 2010s

Today we witness a(nother) chapter of U.S. history in which rising inequality gaps refract through racial, ethnic, class, as well as gendered disparities. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reports that the income share of the top 1% of the nation has reached its highest level since 1928 (Feller & Stone, 2009).

The wealth gaps of today parallel those of the 1930s. Yet, unlike the New Deal era, today’s federal and state ideologies and policies are explicitly engineered toward preserving and strengthening inequality gaps, protecting the wealth and status of the rich and corporations and dismantling the social supports that have [unevenly and inadequately] been in place for poor, working class, and middle-class families.

U.S. policy makers seem to have turned away from a vision of human rights, justice and a multiracial democracy. Slashing the very safety nets Perkins helped to stitch together, in 2011 knives are wielded by Republicans but also Democrats, building firewalls between elites and the remaining 99%; constructing exit ramps for a few “deserving” poor, and securing concrete criminalized containers for the remainder. Deportations under the Obama administration have been authorized at rates that surpass the Bush administration. School systems and public school educators are being defunded, demonized, privatized, and resegregated. Student loans saddle college graduates with average debt in excess of \$30,000. Housing foreclosures disproportionately exile middle-class African Americans from once integrated neighborhoods. Prison populations swell as racial and ethnic mass incarceration breeds profit. Legal scholar Alexander (2010) reports that more Black men now are in prison than were enslaved in 1850. Today our strange fruit has been outsourced to prisons, homeless shelters, sometimes the military, often on the streets and gathering in tent cities around the land.

Neoliberalism, this not so new but dizzying economic, political, racial, social, and psychological regime (Harvey, 2004) has been ushered in by a well-funded conservative social movement and accelerated by public policies which facilitate and justify the upward consolidation of wealth, control, and class power while undermining the social health of poor, working class, and increasingly middle-class communities. The strategic redesign of our gender, race/ethnicity, and class structure is being launched at the dangerous intersection of radical economic transformation in the private sector and severe cuts in the public sector.

In synchronized fashion, the social sciences are today undergoing parallel, and disturbing renovations. Reflecting, and I fear legitimating, the sorting, separating, and vision-constricting conventions of our time, mainstream academic social psychology in the United States and also across Europe has seemingly lost interest in studies of group life, interdependence, solidarity, and collective action. On July 7, 2011 a petition signed by prominent psychologists of the European Association of Social Psychologies (EASP) was sent to president of EASP and members of the executive committee, concerned that

“...European social psychology has become skewed in the direction of micro-individualistic-experimentalist approaches...moving away from the vision of its founders who envisioned a field that would be societally relevant, open to a variety of different perspectives, respectful of multiple methods and attentive to both micro and macro levels of analysis...a limited paradigm continues to dominate social psychological journals and professional meetings.” (EASP petition signers, personal communication, July 4, 2011).

This turn away from a social psychology of macrointerests and shared fates aligns with a problematic ideological and political desire to have us all look away from the 1% and disattend to the privatization of all things public; to obsess empirically about the individual who is “damaged,” “at risk,” or “a potential terror,” and to erase history and the structural politics that produce everyday life in wealthy and dispossessed communities in the United States and globally (Liebert, 2010; MacLeod & Bhatia, 2008). We are being asked to forget that the “haves” not only require but help to create the “have nots” and we are being funded to study how the latter group “copes,” collapses or develops into “risk” threatening, or taxing, all of “us” with their needs (Liu, 2012) or madness (Liebert, 2010). There is a troubling social psychological shadow cast by these political turns.

As our nation invests in war(s), mass incarceration, human “insecurity” and deportation and refuses to equitably tax the wealthy and corporations, national, state, and local governments are slipping into austerity, retreating from social welfare across a vast range of fields including public education, libraries, welfare, civil service jobs, public transportation, and entitlement programs including Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. Accompanying these structural transformations lies a shadow discourse, operating ideologically and psychologically, through popular media and everyday talk, to privatize and individualize responsibility for the cause of social problems and for the solutions.

In 1959, C. Wright Mills wrote *The Sociological Imagination* in which he argued that the task of social science is to “translate private troubles into public issues.” Today we are witnessing a deliberate counter-translation as public issues are exiled from the public sphere and returned to the province of private troubles. Indeed, the ideological valorization of the family—even the gay family—reflects the domestication of “private problems” as the province of the family. My concern here is with the cultural but also the scientific representations of public concerns

as if they were personal troubles that could be stuffed back into the private zone of the home, or tracked down in a brain image.

As national, state, and local safety nets shred and the state shirks its responsibility for collective well-being, scrutiny intensifies on those who are most economically and politically marginalized who grow inflated with social responsibility for those persons, and those issues, the State has abandoned—elderly parents and children, housing security, inadequate schools and health care, unemployment, fears of deportation and incarceration (Fine & Carney, 2001; Fine & McClelland, 2007).

As social responsibilities drain downward, the effects are, however, uneven across race, ethnicity, class, and sexualities. A cultural splitting of responsibility, blame, and public humiliation occurs reminiscent of the writings of Klein (1932; Fine, 2010). Particularly during difficult economic times, when scapegoats are recruited for political deflection, the “good Other” is pitted against the “bad Other.” Poor women, particularly women of color, who “fail” to fulfill ever mounting responsibilities are punished publicly, sometimes dragged into court and found guilty:

Grieving Mother Faces 36 Months in Jail for Jaywalking after Son is Killed by Hit-And-Run Driver

Nelson was crossing a busy Marietta, Georgia, street with her son and his two siblings when they were struck by a hit-and-run driver. Jerry Guy, later admitted he had been drinking and had taken painkillers the night of the accident. . . . Nelson had taken her children with her to shop for groceries and supplies for her upcoming birthday party. The working mother and college student regularly took public transportation . . . Nelson’s apartment complex sits across the street from the bus stop, but the nearest crosswalk is three-tenths of a mile away . . . She crossed one side of the divided highway to the median, where she waited for a break in the traffic. Several people then crossed the street before Nelson thought it was safe. She waited with her kids. But when others started to move towards the road, Nelson’s son must taken it as a cue it was time to go. She felt his grip on her hand loosen and he darted out into the road. She followed. Guy’s car struck Nelson, her son and her daughter, and the boy died . . . As Guy was processed by Georgia’s criminal justice system . . . the Atlanta Journal-Constitution ran a long story [which] mentioned Nelson and her son, pointing out that she hadn’t been charged with any crime. Three days later, the Georgia Solicitor General’s office charged Nelson with the three misdemeanors. Nelson, a black woman, was convicted by an all-white jury. She relies on public transportation; she is a pedestrian in a car-oriented Atlanta suburb. During jury questioning, none of the jurors who would eventually convict Nelson raised their hands when asked if they relied on public transportation. (Balko, 2011)

Cultural splitting places the burden of proof and the heel of punishment squarely on those long abandoned by the State.

We are living and working in a time of doubled shrinkage. The communities we study (with) are politically shrinking, as safety nets are shorn from beneath their feet. So too the dominant research designs and methods in psychology are being aggressively influenced to narrow the scientific gaze. A series of political, scientific, economic, and institutional forces constrict and curve the direction of our scholarship. Focusing on individual “risk,” intergroup conflict, cognitive and

neurological correlates of prejudice our scholarship subtly turns away from the messy intersections of structure, context, history, and the rich texture of lives. It is important for us to be mindful of these forces impinging on our theorizing, teaching, and our research practice. As Danzinger (2007) has argued, what we study and how we study are intimately bound such that “[there is a] close link that always exists between preconceptions about the object to be investigated and faith in the appropriateness of particular methods of investigation.” Danzinger continues, “Methodology is not ontologically neutral.”(p. 332)

To nudge this conversation further into the always awkward and equally urgent, tight quarters of “family feuds” within social psychology, I’ll turn to the role of social psychology as a discipline, and social psychologists as researchers, to lift up for discussion how we are being recruited to help build a science that supports neoliberalism, by naturalizing intergroup conflict, prejudice, and identity threat and not solidarity; that fetishes the autonomous individual or artificial group as if dangling free from history and context; a science that privileges internal validity over external validity; a science easily deployed in applied settings to test single variable interventions, confirm the null hypothesis of “no effect” and legitimate the decision to “cut waste.” Bear with me as I try to explain.

As governments declare austerity and try to root out public sector inefficiencies, there is a curious growth industry of accountability and evaluation systems funded handsomely with public dollars, designed to “cut waste,” maximize efficiency, weed out corruption and greed, and “improve outcomes.” While audit culture has many distinct features, two are significant for our discussion: Randomized Clinical Trials as the “gold standard” of social science and the associated mandate for “evidence-based practice” (and not practice-based evidence, Wallerstein, 2010; see Fine, 2012, in press on “evidence”). With these two simple moves of science, the fields we study, practice, and teach, and the ways in which we study, practice, and teach, shrink dangerously; as so much of Lewin’s topography is deported from the gaze of social inquiry.

Randomized Clinical Trial as the Gold Standard

“Sometime during the ensuing quarter century or so, the humble search for improved methods of generating believable answers to pressing policy questions gave way to what many now perceive as methodological triumphalism. Much of the controversy surrounding randomized clinical trials (RCTs) seems to be an artifact of its most fervent advocates proclaiming the RCT as the ‘gold standard’ marking the apparent end of methodological history and of other researchers’ uncritical acceptance of these exaggerated claims.” (Barnett & Carter, 2010, p. 516)

Tracking the intensified popularity of experimental design in national legislation, state policies, and in the mandated evaluation language of major foundations,

many roads lead back to the extremely well-funded Coalition for Evidence-Based Practice:

The Coalition for Evidence-Based Practice is a well-respected think tank involved with federal policy making and evaluation. On their website we learn that **“the Coalition seeks to increase government effectiveness through the use of rigorous evidence about what works . . . in most areas of social policy—such as education, poverty reduction, and crime prevention—government programs often are implemented with little regard to evidence, costing billions of dollars yet failing to address critical social problems . . . a central theme of our advocacy, consistent with a recent National Academies recommendation, is that evidence of effectiveness generally cannot be considered definitive without ultimate confirmation in well-conducted randomized controlled trials.”** (<http://coalition4evidence.org/wordpress/>)

An internal evaluation of the Coalition (Herk, 2009) concludes that “the Coalition assisted the Institute for Educational Sciences . . . by having language supportive of RCTs placed in Senate and House Appropriations Committee reports over several years.” (p. 5) Two years later a second evaluator praised the Coalition and recommended an even more ambitious agenda: “The coalition has been so effective an advocate across multiple social program areas, but . . . should move beyond the discretionary realm . . . into Medicare and Medicaid.” (p. 4) Thanks to the Coalition, Wallace finds a “clear consensus . . . in Congress, the Office of management and Budget and federal departments . . . about the unusually high level of value and credibility that scientific, randomized controlled experiments have for increasing the effectiveness of social programs.”

The arguments for evidence-based practice and RCTs are no doubt compelling; by all measures the Coalition has been enormously successful and self-described as nonpartisan. And yet this voice of rigor, experimentation and randomization doth protest a bit too much at a particularly vulnerable time in our nation’s/globe’s social well being.

In the field of economics and international development, there is serious concern over the rise of “randomistas” (Center for Global Development, 2009). Applied economists Barnett and Carter write that, “RCTs are invaluable tools for biophysical scientists, where the mechanisms involved are more mechanicals . . . A core pitfall is that experiments typically treat human beings as subjects, not as agents.” (p. 525)

They moderate their critique when they explain, “The fact that RCTs are not appropriate for all questions is not a criticism of the methodology per se. However, *it becomes a serious problem when RCTs are seen as the way of knowing and the applicability of the RCT method, rather than the importance of the question being asked, seems to drive the research agenda.*” (p. 525)

Confession: I was trained as an experimental social psychologist. My first book was co-authored with Leonard Saxe and entitled *Social Experiments:*

Methods for an Experimenting Society (Saxe & Fine, 1981). In order to design a true experiment, even a quasi-experiment, one needs to select one or two standardized interventions as the focus of analysis and treat all other factors as irrelevant, controlled for or simply beyond the scope of the study. In the abstract, this makes perfect sense. The experimental logic is elegant and seductive. While the calls for randomization and standardized outcomes may be understandable, these designs white out the threatening landscape of structural injustice in which people are trying to get by, build lives and families. Designs that rely upon simple, decontextualized and standardized indicators generated by “experts” with neither experience nor histories of engagement in these fields, can also be enormously misleading when they exert undue influence on the shape of programs or funding decisions. As Donald Campbell warned 30 years ago, “The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor.” (Campbell, 1976, p. 41)

To address the implications of the “gold standard” pressures on the ground, for those fragile community-based organizations that are trying to catch the affective overflow of human need bleeding through the fraying public safety net, let us consider the field of domestic violence, where the tensions of evaluation, expertise and experience are almost at a boil; where scientific privileging of internal validity is bumping dangerously into programmatic needs for external validity and local accountability.

In the field of violence against women, three terrible things are true: the problem is on the rise, the state sponsored programs/supports on the decline and scientific scrutiny embedded in evaluation mandates suffers from pin point vision on a set of indicators orthogonal to the well being of the women.

Over the past 18 months, Maria Torre and I at the Public Science Project (PSP) of the Graduate Center, CUNY (where researchers and activists gather to design participatory action research projects for social justice) have been asked by a small group of directors/advocates/participants in rural and urban domestic violence programs to convene “quiet” meetings to discuss openly how they might keep funding and strategically deal and ethically contend with accountability pressures. A number of the participants explained that increasingly federal agencies and foundations premise funding on programs’ willingness to participate in a controlled experiment, by standardizing their programs in order to document “what works” and testing their interventions via the random assignment of women to intervention or control group to establish internal validity. They are also expected to document the impact of their programs, across sites, on varied standardized outcomes including: the number and percent of women who call the police, apply for Orders of Protection, leave their abusers permanently, improve parenting and self-efficacy skills and report lower depression scores. The logic is compelling

and understandable. These are not evil privatizers crafting strategies to defund or delegitimize domestic violence programs. And yet the conventions of privileging of internal validity over external validity, and standardizing outcomes over time, community, and place, are deeply problematic.

Alisa Del Tufo, an Ashoka fellow who has worked for decades in urban New York City and now rural Vermont on domestic violence advocacy and policy explained the confusion and frustration that swells in the “gap” between foundation desires to know and practitioners’ needs on the ground:

One of the most absurd indicators of success for victims of intimate violence is the Order of Protection. In fact it is used as a litmus test to determine the “seriousness” of the violence and her intent to stay away from the abuser. What it most often does is open a woman up to a dizzying array of potentially negative consequences from deportation, loss of housing, child welfare investigations, custody disputes, extended time needed to attend court hearings, job loss, intensified intimidation from the abuser with little or no hope of real protection from authorities. It is little wonder that almost 20% of women murdered by their partners have Orders of Protection! And yet OP’s are often a prerequisite to obtaining other services such as public housing, welfare to work waivers, satisfying child welfare investigations, and sometimes even shelter itself.

Over a series of meetings, the directors, advocates, and some of the women themselves, speaking off record, elaborated on the complexities of leaving or obtaining an Order of Protection or calling the police in the midst of recession, foreclosure and unemployment crises and profound structural insecurity. They detailed the knotty intimacies of violence, love, poverty, homelessness, and fear. They all seemed to know that the probability of intimate murder escalates after a woman leaves. An advocate working with women from Central America told us it’s extremely difficult to apply for an Order of Protection, call police or leave if a woman is undocumented and he is a citizen. A woman working with orthodox Jewish women with many children, and another working with lesbian survivors of intimate violence, reminded us that many women can’t turn to their families of origin for support. First Nation women told us that they struggle within community even talking about these issues, much less sending a Native man to “white man’s prison.” African American women know they risk losing custody of their children if they call the police, for fear of being charged with “engaging in domestic violence.” Directors detailed the particular obstacles faced by women who have HIV, or a child is receiving services for special needs, or fears of more violence in her local shelter. These women are not against evidence or accountability. Indeed, they have been fighting for decades for strong programs, accountable to women, children, and communities. But they are rightly concerned about the new audit culture where “evidence” is gathered on simplistic, standardized interventions, assessed with narrow indicators, determined by persons far from experience or practice, with no attention to the rhythms of local context or the life-threatening dangers of State mandates. They are concerned that the need for “rigor” is legitimating the

scientific occlusion of complex, devastating life spaces in which women are trying to carve lives of meaning and human security for themselves and their children (see APA Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice, 2006; Silverstein & Auerbach, 2009).

In these contexts—and these are the contexts of women, children, and men living in poverty in the United States—the elegance of the experimental design and standardized litmus-test indicators as the primary indicators of effectiveness, and as a passbook required for funding, may induce and legitimate a scientific dissociation from the complexities of living in poor, working, and middle-class America.

Sociologist Gay Tuchman calls this funding dynamic “coercive accountability.” Alison Bernstein (2009), formerly of the Ford Foundation, describes it as “metric mania” induced by the corporatization of U.S. philanthropy, “the idea that an organization or its grants can only be effective when it arrays all the data that are known or can be measured by a metric and makes decisions based on that metric.” Bernstein continues, “But the metric by its very nature only measures what can be measured, and thus it is a proxy or an incomplete indicator of what is actually happening. Real, lasting change can not be reduced to a single metric.” (Bernstein, 2011, p. 38)

Almost 50 years ago, psychologist Allport forecast this tension when he offered a stern caution, not from the critical margins but from the absolute center of the discipline, about the dangerous consequences of theoretical and methodological shrinkage: “While the course of science moves toward ever larger abstractions, psychology seems headed in the opposite direction, the trend toward conceptual specialization, earning a reputation among other sciences for timidity and for a bagatelle of contributions irrelevant to human needs . . . eclecticism of theory is the recognition that human behavior may derive from many causes acting separately or conjointly . . . For investigators, a new categorical imperative: Do not forget what you have decided to neglect.” (1964, p. 23)

Our disciplinary proclivity toward shrinkage is an historic problem of science and ethics; a betrayal of our bold SPSSI history.

In the remainder of this essay, I stand humbly on the shoulders of a significant strain of SPSSI researchers who have historically resisted the technical glide to the Right, by exploring and contesting lives marinating in inequality gaps; researchers who have forged paths of critical psychological science for the public good. These researchers have refused to fix (sic) the problem of injustice on the backs of those who suffer the consequences of oppression and have committed instead to document the wide landscape of human life, in comfort and pain, privilege and poverty, resilience and despair. They have allied their critical research projects with interdisciplinary scholars, activists, and policy makers. Ambitious? Indeed, this has been SPSSI’s historic debt and signature.

The PSP: Critical Participatory Action Research

To ground my remarks on critical psychology in critical times, I want to briefly sketch the work of the PSP crafted in the legacy of Lewin’s Center for Community Interrelations, housed at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (www.publicscienceproject.org). Building on the theoretical legacy of critical scholars and activists including W.E.B. Du Bois, Claire Selltiz, Gloria Anzaldúa, Morton Deutsch, Kurt Lewin, Carolyn & Muzafer Sherif, and Marie Jahoda in the United States (see Stainton-Rogers, 2009; Steinitz & Mishler, 2008; Torre & Fine, 2011; Torre, Fine, Stoudt, & Fox, 2012) and Fals-Borda (1979), Friere (1984), and Martín-Baró (1994) in Central and South America, PSP has launched projects investigating inequality gaps and human rights violations in schools, communities, and prisons (Fine, Burns, Torre, & Payne, 2007; Fine et al., 2003).

Rooted in the social psychology of justice studies (Deutsch, 1974; Jahoda, Lazarsfeld, & Zeisel, 1933; Lykes & Coquillon, 2009; Martín-Baró, 1994; Opatow, 2011; Saegert, Fields, & Libman, 2009; Stainton-Rogers, 2009; Steinitz & Mischler, 2008), our research projects are designed collaboratively to document, contest and reimagine the social psychological dynamics and consequences of circuits of dispossession and privilege: the policies, ideologies, institutional relationships, and social dynamics that move across place and over time to redistribute and naturalize the upward consolidation of wealth, control, and class power while undermining, destabilizing and containing low-income communities of color (Fine & Ruglis, 2008). In order to theorize how these circuits move through and across young bodies and communities, our research projects aim to be deeply historic, theoretical and participatory, committed to the study of circuits (not just “victims” or “perpetrators”) of injustice and resistance, designed in collaboration with activists, organizers, interdisciplinary colleagues, and youth, who gather evidence for reconstructing theory, informing policy and feeding social movements and organizing campaigns. (Fox & Prillentsky, 2008). To whet the epistemological appetite of readers, below I offer a sketch of one PSP project, Polling for Justice (PFJ).

Polling for Justice

In the early spring of 2008, PFJ researchers—youth and adults—designed a citywide youth census to document young people’s experiences of (in)justice in four sectors of public life: education, health care, criminal justice, and housing. The research was designed by a coalition of social psychologists, public health, human rights, education, and youth organizing groups. Together we:

- (1) Built a participatory research team combining the expertise of diverse groups of urban youth, educators, lawyers, public health researchers, and social psychologists,
- (2) (who) collectively designed a citywide youth survey to catalog, with quantitative and qualitative measures, how differently positioned young people experience policies in education, health care, housing, and criminal justice,
- (3) (so we could) map how circuits of dispossession, privilege, and resistance migrate across zip codes affecting the full landscape of youth development in New York City, attending closely to the intersections of race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, immigration, disability, and neighborhood, so we could collectively
- (4) co-produce articles, white papers, creative performances, testimony for city council, and youth newspaper articles to reveal the costs of inequality gaps and inspire a sense of shared fates with more privileged audiences and policy makers.

Recruited from youth organizations, schools, and via word of mouth, 40 youths (aged 14–21) came to the basement of the Graduate Center from public and private high schools, community-based organizations and court-appointed programs all over New York City. Diverse by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, educational level, religion, sexuality, gender, disability, and immigration status, the youth represented a range of educational experiences: from push-outs to Advanced Placement classes, from detention rooms to student leadership. Alongside the young people were another 20 or so university faculty, graduate students, community organizers, and public health professionals. Our first evening, the embryo of PFJ was conceived.

In distinct corners of our meeting room, and then over a few weeks, multigenerational teams constructed sections of the PFJ survey, weaving together standardized measures with home-grown items to assess youth experiences with education and schooling; safety, violence, and housing security; interactions with the criminal justice system; and the physical, psychological, sexual, and reproductive health. Over the span of a year, on the streets, in youth programs and online, we collected more than 1,100 survey responses from New York City youth, mirroring the demographics of the New York City board of education student body (see Fox et al., 2010).

PFJ design, sampling, instrument development, and data collection processes were intensely participatory; so too were the statistical and qualitative analyses. On Saturdays, we sponsored Stats-in-Action, throwing data up on a large screen and inviting youth and adult researchers to suggest analyses across variables, demographics, communities, and even the open-ended data. As we sat on the couches at the Graduate Center and reviewed the frequencies and racial/ethnic/gender cross

tabs on attitudes toward education, youth organizing, trust in teachers, aspirations, relations with family . . . we learned, to our delight, that most survey respondents reported high educational aspirations, strong hopes for the future, and a strong sense of civic engagement/desire to work with other young people to improve their communities. No racial or ethnic differences emerged on these indicators. We then moved into the more vexing sections of the survey, toward the items assessing youth interactions with police.

In the last six months (never, once, twice, more than twice):

- I was given a summons/ticket by a police officer
- I was arrested
- I was given a second chance by police
- I was threatened and/or called a name by police
- I was helped by a police officer
- I was touched inappropriately by police (patted down)

The frequency counts, and then the intersectional cross tabs by race/ethnicity, borough, and by sexuality were extremely disturbing, at least to many of the adult researchers. The youth researchers knew intimately, from experience and witnessing, the extent of negative interactions with police in communities of color, but they were jazzed to document these patterns with the tools of social research, and eager to learn more. They wanted to know who was getting stopped, where and with what effects.

We superimposed the survey data onto maps of New York City and to capture the geography of negative and positive interactions with the police. We quickly saw that youth living in Brooklyn and Bronx (see Figure 1) as well as youth of color, males and youth identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning (LGBQ) (see Figure 2) reported the highest rates of negative interactions with police. Youth researchers extrapolated from personal to social, identifying their own neighborhoods in central Brooklyn and the South Bronx as having the highest concentration of negative interactions with police.

Because PFJ was designed in collaboration with youth organizers and human rights lawyers working on litigation to redress the overpolicing of youth, the descriptive and spatial evidence we gathered on negative police contact data prompted us to pursue further research necessary for legal testimony and policy development. We ventured out to the street corners that emerged as “hot spots” for negative police interactions and facilitated place-based data-driven focus groups with local youth, drawing on their experience, analysis, and community knowledge to help us unpack the quantitative evidence. We conducted a series of policy interviews with, for instance, a drug-court judge asking why the rates of negative youth-police interactions were so high in some communities. Without hesitation the Judge explained, “Overtime.” She continued, “In communities that are already over-policed, police can pick up a group of students coming out of school, take them to the station. Often someone has a joint or a box cutter. Even if all charges

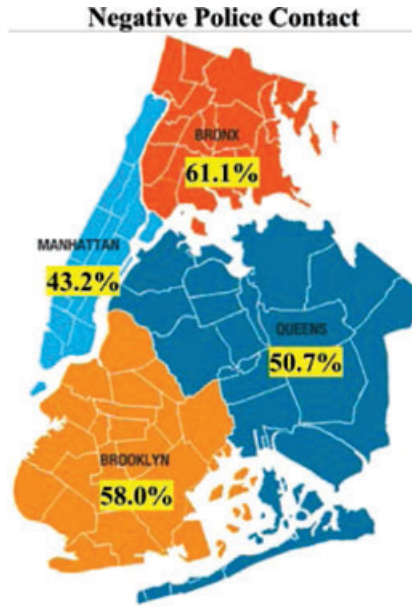


Fig. 1. Percentage of survey respondents reporting negative police contact (data from polling for justice, 2010, Michelle Fine PI).

were dismissed, the police earn over time. There’s an economic motive.” This response led us into the literatures and interviews with varied experts on stop and frisk, racial profiling, the Clean Hallways Act, trespassing tickets, overtime, and police quotas. Then, in coalition with a number of allied youth/activist organizations who were also involved with documenting the patterns and consequences of racialized stop and frisk, we co-hosted a metaanalysis of youth–police data from varied youth organizing groups to integrate our evidence for ongoing policy work and community education. We now co-sponsor with community allies a series of Research and Policy Salons called, “Growing Up Policed.”

Our participatory commitments extended into our discussions of dissemination—to whom? How? For what? When? The PFJ team, particularly the young people, wanted to publish, distribute, and perform the findings to a wide range of audiences. While we had presented our findings at youth rallies, City Council and scholarly conferences in the United States, Canada, Cypress, and London, the youth researchers were eager to invent a palette of dissemination strategies that provoked more than empathy, more than tears and nods of the head. Following in the footsteps of the little known performance work of W.E.B. Du Bois (Dubois, 1913) who used pageantry, performance, and circus theater in order to explore alternative possibilities of African American history, we decided to translate empirical evidence into dramatic performance (see Fox & Fine, 2012).

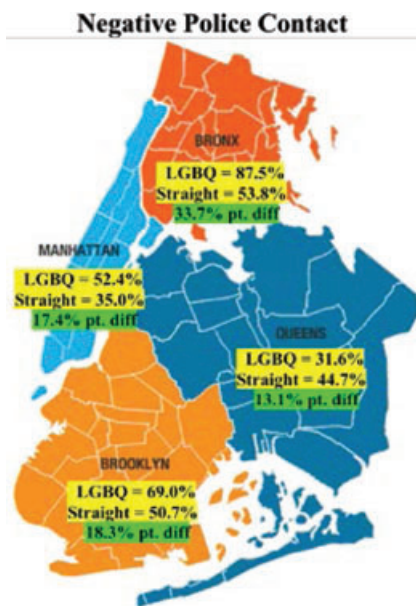


Fig. 2. LGBQ youth reporting negative police contact as compared with straight youth (data from polling for justice, 2010, Michelle Fine PI).

Maddy Fox, director of PFJ, has a long history with Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 2002) and Playback Theatre.

Here’s an excerpt from the script performed in Halifax Canada. The youth researchers/performers opened on stage to an audience of 700 international “re-silience” researchers, educating them first about the public policies now taken for granted in urban United States:

Did you know that there are over 5,000 police in NYC schools?

Did you know that in NYC we have to pass 5 standardized tests in order to graduate from high school? And now teacher tenure is tied to how well their students do on standardized tests.

Did you know that in my first year of high school we had 100 people, and now there are only 30 graduating . . . we have a 45% graduation rate in NYC?

Did you know, it’s really no joke, 45.8 million U.S. citizens don’t have health insurance? And, 1 in 6 New Yorkers are uninsured?

But despite all of these things happening to us our survey found that: 69% of youth in our survey plan on getting a masters degree, doctoral degree or being a doctor or lawyer
90% of the youth of our survey feel somewhat or very hopeful about the future.

94% of students care about getting good grades in school, and 89% feel their teachers have high expectations of them and say that teachers help when they don’t understand something.

Each piece of data was reenacted through dance, spoken text and/or a scripted scene woven with projected images of the data drawn from over 1,100 young

people and personal testimonies we gathered from surveys and biographies. The youth researcher-performers then invited audience members to voice their reactions to the evidence—in the charts, the narratives, the movement work and the testimonies.

I feel inspired by youth doing research;
 I'm outraged!
 I hear these experiences everyday from my students, and I don't know if anything can change.
 I feel ashamed when I know this is happening and I am doing nothing.

The youth researchers-performers created human sculptures of these reactions. Audience responses were now enfolded on the stage—making visible circuits of dispossession and privilege, data and affect, performers and audience (Fox & Fine, 2012). The circuits of dispossession data provoked a circuit of shared fates, solidarity, and courage, even if just for a moment.

PFJ is a story within a story; an empirically driven participatory analysis of the scarring impacts of policy reform on the youth landscape of New York City, embedded in a public performance of research, resilience, and resistance. As a quantitative and qualitative research project, PFJ draws on the history, language, and weight of public science to contest policies that undermine poor communities of color, revealing the circuits of dispossession that link communities on the rise and communities in decline, and the circuits of resistance that mobilize across zip codes for justice. At the same time, PFJ draws on the wisdom of Carolyn and Muzafer Sherif, Marie Jahoda, John Dollard, Kurt Lewin, Kenneth Clark, Ignacio Martín-Baró, and others challenging fashionable pressures to study and represent poor youth through a lens of risk and inviting audiences, instead, to consider how we might review young people under siege through a lens of desire.

The critical design, analysis, and performances of PFJ have been nourished by a long line of SPSSI-based critical inquiry projects which have represented and humanized communities under siege, lighting up the circuits that connect “us” and “them” and cultivating research as a tool for social justice. Such critical inquiry is situated in a critical epistemology of solidarity, tuned with an assumption that humans desire justice for self and others (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Lykes & Mallone, 2009; Martín-Baró, 1994; Prilleltensky, 2010). Such a line of inquiry has long danced on the pages of SPSSI's journals, seasoned discussions at Council meetings, framed our research projects, been celebrated at our award deliberations and at our conferences. Perhaps this is a recessive strain of SPSSI, a “forgotten alternative,” but it is vibrant and relentless.

After 75 years, SPSSI has much to be proud of, much to worry about, and a strong history of ancestors with *chutzpa* to guide us through difficult times. Just this past year, we have enjoyed the victories of public science as enacted by engaged social psychologists in the news . . . to name just a few Craig Haney's scholarship was foundational to the Supreme Court mandate that California reduce its prison population; Katie Cumiskey and her wife Robin were selected as one of three same

sex married couples to testify against the Defense of Marriage Act in Congress; Ilan Meyer provided outstanding testimony in the Prop 8 same sex marriage case in California and social psychologist Nancy Cantor, president of Syracuse University, decided courageously to remove Syracuse from the American Association of Universities because the National Research Council (NRC) rankings, based on a narrow set of indicators, were swaying her institution away from its mission of public scholarship, diversity, and intellectual originality.

In each of these settings, critical psychologists have channeled the chutzpa of Asch’s 1953 resisters who refused to conform. In courts, Congress, academic leadership positions, and in the popular media, these scholars provided empirical accounts contesting the prevailing “common sense” that prisons keep us safe, that marriage should be between a man and a woman or that test-driven ranking systems facilitate educational progress. By challenging the false consensus and intervening theoretically, empirically, and politically, they documented the devastation wrought by inequality gaps, refused to focus on only those most adversely affected and challenged the (in)justice of who loses and who gains. They have produced and assembled an archive of evidence on shared loss, shared gains, and braided fates, scholarship designed to be of use in campaigns for liberation and human rights. These are the everyday heroes of SPSSI.

Our challenge today is to theorize and document the social psychological dynamics of surviving, resisting, and transforming, with humanity, a global landscape scorched by voracious inequality gaps; gathering up evidence that links the local to the global; unemployment to fascism; strange fruits to perfumes; 1–99%; to uncover the common capillaries that carry presumptions of merit, health, and positive psychology to one side of Manhattan and deposit despair, risk, and need for containment 10 blocks north. We need a critical psychology that draws from varied methodological traditions—experiments, mapping, focus groups, archival methods, community surveys, interviews, and q-sorts; honors and theorizes how people make sense of their lives, identities, and relationships; create music, love, art, and science; how they grow babies and vegetables, and how they link arms to propel the very revolutions of solidarity circling the globe as we speak. These are profoundly social psychological questions; intensely critical and passionately committed to social change. Call me a romantic, but I think we are up to the task. Happy anniversary SPSSI, and thanks Kurt for leaving us a wide open (force) field of dreams.

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