



# Critical Therapy

## Brief Overview

Silvia M. Dutchevici, MA, LCSW  
[sdutchevici@criticaltherapy.org](mailto:sdutchevici@criticaltherapy.org)

# The Clinical Conundrum

- Holistic, Culturally Sensitive Clinical Psychotherapeutic Services; Work within cultural paradigms;
- **Conundrum:** What happens when some cultural and religious practices are harmful to our patients (ex: women and girls, survivors of torture, the poor and the oppressed, etc.)?

# Ideology in Counseling/Therapy

- **Two** kinds of communication between therapist and patient in analysis
  - verbal
  - unconscious communication
- **Takeaway**: therapist's ideology is always already present in the room

# Traditional Therapeutic Framework

**Framework:** 'Objective', a-political, ungendered, unraced and without a class position.

**Consequence:** Effectively promotes the dominant ideology of oppression.

**Criticism:** Fails to address oppressed and marginalized patients holistically as individuals and as members of society.

# Neil Altman

- “Three person field theory”
  - patient’s intrapsychic work
  - therapist’s intrapsychic work, and
  - The social context of both (and the interaction between their two subjectivities)

Conflicts in therapy are, therefore:

- intrapsychic **AND**
- raced, gendered, and class-based

# Freire – Critical Pedagogy

- Critical pedagogy is an educational movement to help students
  - develop consciousness of freedom
  - recognize authoritarian tendencies
  - connect knowledge to power and
  - develop the ability to take constructive action

# Martin Baro

- Speaking and working from a position of social justice in therapy is not bias but an ethical choice grounded in compassion.
- Therapy is working with people to enhance their understanding of oppression and the ideologies and structural inequalities that have contributed to their subjugation and oppression.

# Liberation Psychology

- Concerned with rethinking and repositioning certain disciplines from the perspective of the marginalized, the poor, and the oppressed.
- Focuses on the collective experience; and
- Analyzes how power structures shape particular events of our lives.



# Critical Therapy

- Critical therapy is a process and a moral project since it has at its core a preferential option for the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized.
- **The commitment is always to liberation.**

In critical therapy, every session is different as every situation is different.

**THE PROCESS**

# Critical Therapy - Process

- Analysis of:
  - mechanisms of oppression and dehumanization;
  - ideology through the patient's status in relation to power in society;
  - therapist's relation to power and position within society;

POWER is an intrinsic part of the dialogue, from both an interpersonal perspective and in terms of its organization in society.

A principal goal of critical therapy is to reveal new possibilities for self-understanding and action; to reflect intrapsychically, socio-economically, and politically; to act and to reflect again.

**POWER**

# What happens in session...

- **1st Stage – Intra-psychic work; banking model of therapy**
  - Interpersonal analysis
    - Ex. family history, intrapsychic conflict, sexual desires, transference, etc.
  - A banking model (Freire) = patient invests power in the therapist the therapist uses this to facilitate fantasies and learn about the inner world of the patient;
  - Accompaniment (Lynd; Rivera) = being **with** the patient

# ANA'S STORY

# As the therapy progresses

- **2nd Stage - Dialectical process vocalizing patient's interpretation of the world, while developing *conscientization***
  - Patient vocalization an interpretation of the world that identifies her/his oppression;
  - Co-interrogation of the patient's world view;
  - Draw connections to the intrapsychic work;
  - Therapist begins to slowly denounce his/her power, while moving into a more collaborative stance;

# The Critical Therapist

- Critical Therapist = Radical Therapist (Freire)
  - Facilitate the continued interrogation of notions of social inequality;
  - Reveal how the personal is political; and
  - Help make connections between patient's liberation and empowerment with that of others;



# ANA'S STORY

# Final stage . . .

- **3rd Stage -- Individual and Social Transformations**
  - Strengthening patient's understanding of herself/himself as agent of personal and social transformation;
  - Critical therapy makes possible different kinds of relations to others and those relations invite others to explore their own liberation and empowerment.

# **ANA'S STORY**

The goal of critical therapy is not just analysis, or adaptation of the individual to an oppressive system.

**The goal is liberation.**

# LIBERATION AND EMPOWERMENT MEET IN THE THERAPEUTIC SETTING

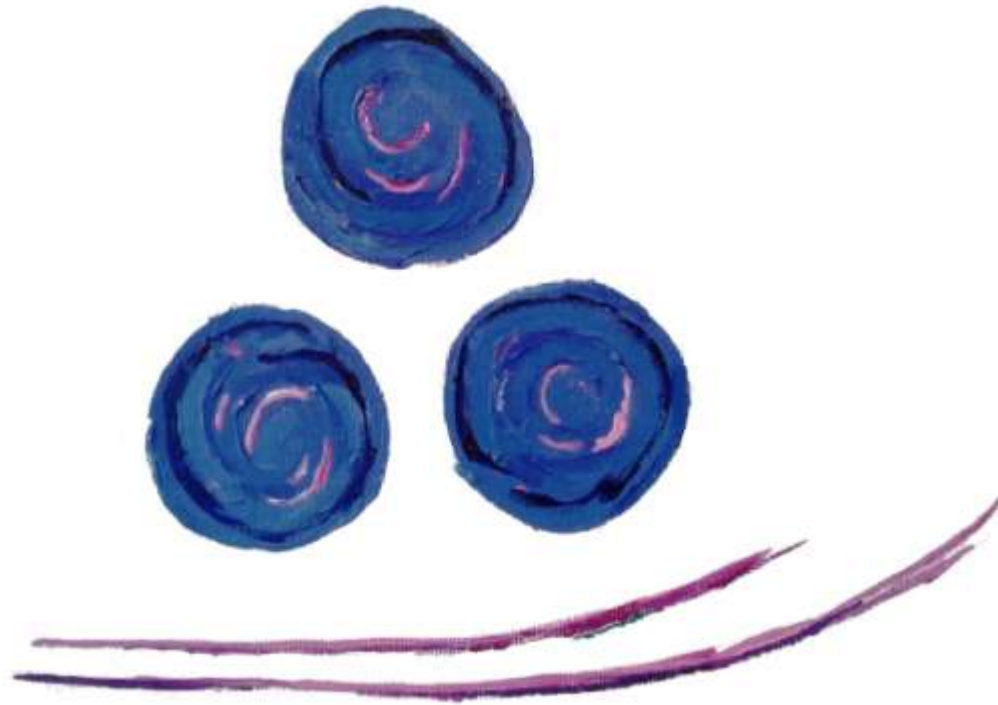
- Patient understands:
  - oppression as a function of structural inequalities;
  - becomes aware of her/his own power;
- Expanded possibilities for civic action as an agent of change;
- Creation and maintenance of open fields for the practice of the patient's self healing.

# **ANA'S STORY**

# Owning Their Power

Aside from offering therapeutic comfort and therapeutic insights, critical therapy also becomes a performative practice where patients actively reflect on their own power and relationship to the ongoing project of an unfinished democracy. It is precisely this relationship between democracy and therapy that is hopeful for survivors everywhere.

# Critical Therapy Center



LIBERATION    EMPOWERMENT    HEALING

**Silvia M. Dutchevici, MA, LCSW**

[sdutchevici@criticaltherapy.org](mailto:sdutchevici@criticaltherapy.org)