

Critical Liberation Theory

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Agenda

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Definitions

Liberation: the creation of relationships, societies, communities, organizations and collective spaces characterized by equity, fairness, and the implementation of systems for the allocation of goods, services, benefits and rewards that support the full participation of each human and the promotion of their full humanness.

Transformation: the process through which societies, communities and relationships are reorganized to support the goals of liberation.

Liberatory Consciousness: a way of living in a world characterized by oppressive systems with awareness and intentionality. It enables us to maintain an awareness of the dynamics of oppression without giving into despair and hopelessness and an awareness of the roles played by each individual in the maintenance of that system without blaming them for the roles they play. And it enables humans to live outside of the patterns of thought and behavior learned through an oppressive socialization process to support us in being intentional about our role in working towards transformation.

Critical Liberation Theory: The theoretical and philosophical framework that helps to guide and shape liberation praxis.

Liberation Praxis: Acting and reflecting on the world in order to transform it toward liberation while also engaging in specific liberatory behaviors that leads to self and societal transformation.

Overview

Eliminating White Privilege can increasingly happen as we create a theory which enables daily action toward liberation. It is necessary that we state our intention to work for liberation.

Clarifying a theory of liberation provides the mechanism through which each of us can ratchet ourselves toward daily enactments of a liberatory society.

10 Assumptions and Propositions about Liberation

1. We can envision liberation for our lifetime, and achieve it.
2. Liberation benefits all of us, both people targeted by oppression as well as people pushed into the role of dominant.
3. Humans are inherently good and do not want to be caught in the grip of beliefs, attitudes, and behavior patterns that lead to enacting oppression.
4. Enacting liberation contradicts and interrupts the hurts of isolation and disconnection that oppression imposes on human relationships.
5. Enacting liberation helps to recover connection with our own humanness and with other humans.
6. Enacting liberation in daily living helps to heal the human consciousness of the infections of guilt, shame, and blame, and restores our inherent sense of connection, fairness and justice.
7. Enacting liberation contradicts the fear enforced by oppression. Feelings of threat to our well being and comfort, our jobs and wages, good homes and neighborhoods, are enforced by prevailing systems of domination and subordination, keep us divided from each other, and keep us from imagining that liberation is possible.
8. Information is not enough. Healing of humans from the damage caused by oppression is necessary to eliminate oppression and repair the human condition.
9. Liberation is a journey and a destination. Oppressive means will not accomplish the goal of liberation.
10. Deep and lasting systemic change will occur when people get a chance to heal from the ways that we as individuals and we as a society have been hurt by oppression.

Eight Characteristics of Liberation Workers

A liberation worker is someone who:

1. Works for social justice and the dismantling of oppression.
2. Works from the assumption that all forms of oppression are interwoven and mutually reinforcing.
3. Works on the assumption that our collective liberation requires that humans work with other humans to eliminate all manifestations of oppression.
4. Understands that each of us learns patterns of oppression, both domination and subordination, from our daily life experiences living in an oppressive society.
5. Identifies where they have been acted oppression towards others and works to interrupt these patterns of oppression. Identifies where they enact patterns of internalized oppression and works to interrupt that that enactment.
6. Identifies where they have been hurt, and limited by oppression, both domination and subordination.
7. Takes steps to heal from the hurts caused by the oppression; supports others to heal from the hurts caused by oppression.
8. Works to organize and inspire others to enact liberation.

The Elements of Liberation Praxis

Daily Enactments: Daily Enactments of liberation means making constant and intentional choices to move towards a vision of liberation. This can be done by learning about oppression and then using that information to analyze and examine our own behavior, the behavior of others, the media, and other institutions. Enacting liberation means taking steps, every day, to change what we can, both in the moment and for future action. Knowledge of oppression gives us a basis for analyzing oppressive situations, policies, and behavior. AND, we need more than knowledge of oppression to take liberatory action. We each need our vision of liberation to guide us. Having a vision of liberation helps us to determine which strategies will work best in transforming oppressive situations, moving us toward liberation.

Sustainability: Because of patterns created by the current oppressive society, many of us have internalized models of organizing, education, and activism that are characterized by self-sacrifice, where we measure our self-worth by our willingness to dismiss our own needs and compromise our own humanness. The system of white supremacy demands this way of thinking and perpetuates this way of being in the world.

Many of us learned to employ guilt, shame, blame, fear, anger, and self-hatred as fuel to drive us. We are taught to believe that we can use that fear and anger to sustain our selves and our organizations in working for justice. But relying on fear and anger to maintain our spirit and our efforts requires that we commit ourselves to that fear and anger, that we come to depend on it and, thus, perpetuate it.

Because of this, one of the most powerful offerings we can make towards liberation is the commitment to our own sustenance. To hold ourselves with compassion, love, and validation.

To nurture joy, gratitude, vision, and rest. To put our attention on our healing and our growth. The better we take care of ourselves the more fully we are able to engage in efforts to dismantle oppression.

Also, we spend so much of our day posing resistance. We are so often working against-working to stop, to end, to dismantle, to disrupt, to interrupt, to shut up, to close down. We are constantly saying “no” as we put up walls to protect ourselves and each other from the toxic energy that an oppressive society feeds us, from the disempowering messages we receive, from the harmful conditions that so many of us find ourselves surrounded by. We are constantly engaged in an energetic boycott....an extremely important one.

AND, in order to experience what it means to be fully human, in order to sustain ourselves in this work, we need to be able to say “yes”. Our spirits need to open, to embrace, to create. We need to, and we get to, make choices that allow us to work *towards* something, *for* something. We need to, and get to, make choices to envision what we *do* want, enact what we *do* want, while we are pushing against what we don’t want. Sustainability requires that balance:

Community: A central belief of critical liberation theory is that community is essential for liberation. It is the belief that humans need other humans and the understanding that our collective thinking and action is more powerful than our individual efforts.

Being in community means being connected. It means being connected to other people, connected to ideas about liberation and connected to some sense of the universe beyond ourselves. Feeling connecting motivates humans to make positive steps toward liberatory change.

The work of liberation necessitates that we deliberately put our intention and attention toward the creation of a vision for community. It is important that our vision of community include people that both similar and different from us. Ultimately the work of liberation asks that we recognize that all humans are interconnected and it is this connection that is the basis from which we can enact liberation.

Love: Love is essential in the work of a liberation worker. Having love for ourselves, those close to us, our communities at large, and our environment forms the basis for our liberation work and reminds us that we matter in the world and our work is important.

Love has been described as the absence of fear. Since, oppressive societies and systems are rooted in fear and require us to feel alone, disconnected, and separated from other humans, creating spaces of love and connection becomes our only options as liberation workers. Successful liberation work stems from a love for all humans.

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