Community Psychology
Explanation, Considerations and Methodology

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 "Through Others We Become Ourselves." Lev Vygotsky.

Social interaction forms the foundation of our lives—our conscious selves, culture and community (Lemery 1996-2006). This is true throughout all stages of life from the relationship of the foetus with the mother, child with the family, classmates, teachers and peer groups, on through employers, colleagues, neighbours, community acquaintances, pets and wildlife. We can think about Vygotsky's quotation in relation to psychologist William James' idea of belonging and how it is central to living; that humans continually strive to belong and that this is impossible without some type of social interaction. We become ourselves through these interactions by learning, observing, accepting feedback both positive and negative, sharing, developing empathy among a myriad of other exchanges with our fellow animals. Support groups and mentorships are good examples of how we can become our best selves through others. When people believe in our abilities and potential, we come to believe in ourselves.

Vygotsky's insightful quote, "Through Others We Become Ourselves" is directly relatable to community psychology because, in practice, the discipline is about interaction with others. The project options for Psychology 332 reflect Vygotsky's quote. Naturalistic observation requires that we, the students, observe and analyze the behaviour of others. Regardless of whether we judge the actions observed or merely record them, they involve us. Do we agree or disagree with the behaviour? Does the behaviour reflect our own? Do we aspire to the behaviour?

Producing a living biography involves co-creating a portion of an individual's life story. We will presumably get to know that person on many levels, and they us. Directions for the project state that "Biography is potentially a being/becoming approach to understanding human life..." (p. 4) and this will include our own life as well as that of the person whose story we are telling. We get to know and become ourselves when we share personal information with one another. Always sifting through information for what we can relate to and might adopt, or for what we find unacceptable and wish to avoid or perhaps rid ourselves of once we see it mirrored back at us, as with racism or greed.

Researching and analyzing a social issue, whether it be child-rearing across cultures or on-line dating, is, like the other assignments, all about social interaction and how the individual gains knowledge of oneself via another's culture, community or consciousness. For instance, should I try on-line dating? Could I get scammed financially or be killed? But there are many success stories. Is it just for those who are desperate? Am I desperate? And so on, as we question the behaviour of others and reflect on how it does or does not fit into our own lives.

Studying a community organization will not only give insight into many individuals, but will convey how the "many" function as the "one" while running the organization. According to Dr. Charles Lemery, the "social act (belonging) is both the being and becoming of the one and the many..."(1993-2005). Understanding this through carrying out such a project will show how we ourselves operate as part of the many, whether as a spouse or a CEO. It is out of the social act that we develop and become who we

are and this continues throughout our lives. We become the one and part of the many, and so in reverse the many can become the one, as in one social group, one protest group, one faith, one team.

We are living community psychology every day. Our lives are social and we are part of *some* sort of community at all times, whether we are surrounded by friends and engaged in social activities, or living alone in the bush with only wildlife outside our door. We are continually shifting, knowing, growing or not, in the mirror of others.

Methods of Study

Qualitative methods are often the most relevant choice for community psychology because they take into consideration the qualities of the individual and of the community. They are subjective. Community psychology is about social interaction of the one and the many and therefore looks at individual differences and similarities. Quantitative methods on the other hand are predominantly about numbers and are objective, not allowing for analyses of behaviours. Qualitative methods allow for tracking changes in an individual's "being and becoming." The method itself is free to develop as these changes take place and with observation, analyses and interaction over time, subjective information can become objective (Lemery 2005).

Naturalistic observation, participant observation and interviewing are three qualitative methods (Boeree 2005) relevant to community psychology for their use in obtaining real life data. As in any qualitative method, researchers must be cautious in regard to personal bias during analyses, but results gleaned from real life have the ability to surpass quantitative data in value.

" Every machine you get reduces your freedom to interact with others." Frank Sarton.

This quote by Sarton describes how community is breaking down with each addition of mechanized goods we produce and use. At first glance we may think the social media aspects of computers runs contrary to what Sarton is saying, but not so. Even with photos on Facebook and video interfaces like Skype, electronic communication only scratches the surface of real social interaction. We cannot pick up on subtle cues, or scents, body language or pheromones. Most of us tend to be more self-conscious on "tape" than in person so there is the natural factor missing as well.

There are gaps around most towns where social interactions formerly took place; bank machines, self-checkouts at libraries and stores; drive-thru services of various types; self-operated photo labs and photocopiers just for starters. There are more and more automated telephone systems which may save money for the company using them, but in doing so provoke anger, waste time and cut off personal communication. Cars can reduce our freedom to interact with each other. Most couples have a car each as we have become a society of ease, and it is easier to have our own vehicles than to share one. But it is just one more machine cutting off social interaction. The irony in Sarton's quote is that we become enslaved to the machines we acquire and use for the sake of gaining freedom.

References

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