

ARTICLE

PSYCHOPOLITICAL LITERACY FOR WELLNESS AND JUSTICE

Isaac Prilleltensky
Peabody College of Vanderbilt University

Dennis R. Fox
University of Illinois at Springfield

Wellness and justice have attracted recent attention in psychology. Both within our discipline and within society at large, more needs to be done to elucidate the link between the two while taking into account the role of power and context. We suggest that wellness is achieved by the balanced and synergistic satisfaction of personal, relational, and collective needs, which, in turn, are dependent on how much justice people experience in each domain. We explore how affective, polarized, acquired, situated, and invested cultural distortions misrepresent the two realms as isolated from each other. To help counter these negative outcomes, we propose psychopolitical literacy and psychopolitical validity. The more youth are exposed to these antidotes, the better equipped they will be to resist cultural distortions and enhance both wellness and justice. © 2007 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Wellness and justice are central personal and professional values for many psychologists. Through primary prevention, wellness enhancement, and more recently through positive psychology, the profession tries to combine quality of life with a meaningful life (Cowen, 2000; Seligman, 2002). This effort is necessary because neither wellness nor justice is distributed evenly, a state of affairs receiving increased attention in health (Murray & Campbell, 2003), counseling (Vera & Speight, 2003), clinical (Pare & Larner, in press), legal (Fox, 1999), community (Nelson & Prilleltensky, in press), and other areas of psychology.

Despite increased attention, important issues remain. These include (a) the connection between wellness and justice, (b) the multifaceted and contextual nature of these constructs, (c) distorted and distorting messages about wellness and justice, and

We appreciate the substantial comments Geoff Nelson and Tod Sloan offered on an earlier draft presented to the 2003 biennial convention of the Society for Community Research and Action.

Correspondence to: Isaac Prilleltensky, Department of Human and Organizational Development, Peabody College, Box 90, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN 37203 or Dennis Fox, P.O. Box 470783, Brookline, MA 02447-0783. E-mail: isaac.prilleltensky@vanderbilt.edu or df@dennisfox.net

JOURNAL OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY, Vol. 35, No. 6, 1–13 (2007)

Published online in Wiley InterScience (www.interscience.wiley.com).

© 2007 Wiley Periodicals, Inc. DOI: 10.1002/jcop.20179

 **WILEY**
InterScience®
DISCOVER SOMETHING GREAT

2 • *Journal of Community Psychology, August 2007*

(d) strategies to overcome misconceptions. In this article, we maintain that both wellness and justice are central to the good society, each of them constituted by complementary factors and considerations typically considered in isolation. The current fragmentation in theories of wellness and justice derives in large part from distorting messages propagated by the media, authority figures, and professional and disciplinary discourses. We classify these distortions into five categories and offer psychopolitical literacy and validity as viable antidotes to the regnant state of confusion.

Our goal is to institutionalize psychopolitical literacy rather than see it marginalized like past North American attempts to foster education for liberation. Merging psychological and political rationales is unavoidable because, for example, conceptions of humans as solitary, selfish, competitive, and accumulative lead to different prescriptions for public policy than do alternative models. Psychologists who embrace an individualist ethos reinforce inequality and injustice and strengthen barriers to survival and meaning even when they believe they are merely helping people function more effectively. Psychology is not separate from politics merely because some wish it were so (Fox & Prilleltensky, 1996, 1997).

THE GOOD SOCIETY

AQ1

Most observers agree that no single value or attribute such as liberty or equality can encompass an ideal society's multiple qualities (Miller, 1999; Saul, 2001). Moreover, members of every diverse society disagree about optimal features. Still, some attributes do influence the well-being of individuals and groups across a wide range of communities, societies, and nations. Given their historical prominence, comprehensive scope, and global desirability, wellness and justice emerge as crucial. The two are inexorably related, primarily because wellness depends on the just allocation of resources, opportunities, and burdens at the personal, relational, and collective levels (Lane, 2000; Nelson & Prilleltensky, in press; Sen, 1999a, b). Yet, very few educational and youth interventions attempt to show the connections between wellness and justice. Programs that help youth decipher the impact of injustice on their lives are the exception rather than the rule (Ginwright & James, 2002).

Wellness

Human wellness derives from the synergistic interaction of multiple factors—personal, relational, and collective—in which each domain attains a basic level of satisfaction (Cowen, 2000; Prilleltensky, Nelson, & Peirson, 2001; Schneider Jamner & Stokols, 2000). Abundant personal wellness (e.g., self-esteem, mastery, control, hope) cannot replace a lack of either relational wellness (e.g., caring and compassion, social support) or collective wellness (e.g., access to health care, water, safety nets, equality). Synergy is disturbed when the needs in any one domain are not minimally fulfilled or when one sphere of wellness pushes the others to the background. Correcting this potential imbalance requires favoring the neglected domain until the balance is restored (Bakan, 1966; Fox, 1985; Saul, 2001).

While we experience personal needs such as hope and optimism, psychologically and subjectively (Seligman, 2002) a material reality impinges on how we feel and how we behave towards others (Eckersley, Dixon & Douglas, 2002; Frey & Stutzer, 2002). To be well, we require interpersonal exchanges based on respect and mutual support and

“well enough” cultural, political, and economic conditions free of exploitation and human rights abuses (Felice, 2003; Sen, 1999a, 1999b).

Empirical data confirm that cultural trends such as individualism and consumerism influence subjective well-being (Eckersley, 2000), that political corruption and oppression affect the psychological experience of poverty (Narayan, Patel, Schafft, Rademacher, & Kocht-Schulte, 2000), and that participatory democracy and employment improve well-being (Frey & Stutzer, 2002). Discrimination, inequality, inadequate health care, and poor transportation and education erode personal and collective needs (Lustig, 2001; Smedley & Syme, 2000; Wilkinson, 1996). These diverse yet converging bodies of interdisciplinary knowledge suggest not only a close association among personal, relational, and collective wellness but also the link between wellness and justice.

Reducing wellness to personal and relational dynamics neglects broader forces (Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997). The implicit, and often explicit, message is that wellness depends primarily on our inherent capacities and family relationships. Yes, socializing agents readily admit, collective variables play a role, as do justice and equality, but too often they portray these factors as either remote, difficult to discern, or beyond our reach (Macedo, 1994; Miller, 1999).

Justice

Justice refers to the fair and equitable allocation in society of burdens, resources, and powers (Miller, 1999). Thus, it is essentially a relational construct. In *Principles of Justice*, Miller (1999) distinguishes among three types of relationships: *solidaristic community*, *instrumental association*, and *citizenship*. The principles of *needs*, *desert* (deservingness), and *equality*, respectively, typically guide allocation in these relationships. Under solidaristic community Miller includes family and other close associations between neighbors or members of an ethnic community. Instrumental association derives usually from work relationships where people engage in production of goods, services, or exchange. Citizenship, in turn, reflects relationships among members of a circumscribed political entity such as a city or nation.

Within families, we typically distribute resources according to need and at work (at least in theory) according to deservingness; but, sometimes we use need outside the family and merit, effort, and other principles within (Clark & Grote, 2003; Fondacaro, Jackson, Luescher, 2002). Context is paramount. For example, if a deservingness principle such as merit unmediated by need or equality is the only criterion for resource distribution, we doom those who lack the capacity and opportunity to compete in a capitalist economy (Crosby, Iyer, Clayton, & Downing, 2003). An allocation regime that ignores individual circumstance easily degenerates into discourses that blame victims and justify inequality. To prevent one-size-fits-all approaches, thus, we need multiple allocation schemes that respond to variability in context (Bell & De-Shalit, 2003). Even under certain conditions of equality, for example, effort is a rational criterion; under conditions of inequality, need is warranted. “Among citizens, certain needs matter from the point of view of justice because if they are not met, the equal status of some citizens is put at risk” (Miller, 1999, p. 32).

Analogous to the metaphor of balance within wellness among personal, relational, and collective needs, Miller (1999) suggests that societies aspiring to justice must seek equilibrium among needs, deservingness, and equality. When a meritocracy undermines need and equality, thus, we must ask whether a strict merit criterion is fully

justified by the context or, instead, whether it stems from institutionalized processes favoring some more than others. Personal and group interests that influence the choice of allocation pattern often disregard the context-specific situation (Crosby et al., 2003; Goodman, 2001). Just as in wellness, to restore lost equilibrium in justice, we may have to reposition certain domains from the background to the foreground.

Promoting wellness and justice requires that we understand their underlying dynamics and reciprocal relationship, as expressed in Table 1. Historical and cultural determinants privilege some domains over others, such as personal needs in wellness and merit in justice. Restoring balance is difficult because distorted or limited conceptions get in the way.

DISTORTIONS OF WELLNESS AND JUSTICE

In Table 2, we describe common distortions about wellness and justice. The five types are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. At any particular moment, one or more may affect a person's judgment. The first three—*affective*, *polarized*, and *acquired*—are fairly psychological in nature, having to do, respectively, with the interference of emotional, cognitive, and learning processes. The last two—*situated* and *invested*—are more political.

As an example of *affective* distortions, a person preoccupied with emotional wounds stemming from an acrimonious relationship may focus on personal and relational,

Table 1. Relationship Between Wellness and Justice in Personal, Relational, and Collective Domains

<i>Wellness is enhanced by the balanced satisfaction of needs</i>	<i>Justice is enhanced, and contributes to wellness, by the power, capacity, and opportunity to:</i>
Personal needs - Control and self-determination - Mastery, learning, and growth - Hope and optimism - Physical health - Psychological health - Meaning and spirituality	- Experience voice and choice throughout life - Experience stimulation and growth-enhancing events - Experience positive events in life and avoid learned helplessness - Obtain food, shelter, safety, and health care - Engage in supportive, and avoid abusive, relationships and obtain wellness-enhancing resources - Explore the meaning of life and transcendence free of ideological repression
Relational Needs - Caring and compassion - Affection, bonding, and social support - Solidarity and sense of community - Democratic participation - Respect for diversity	- Experience nurturing relationships free of physical, emotional, or psychological abuse - Engage in mutually supportive relationships - Share experiences with others without oppressive norms of conformity - Participate in community life and resist passivity - Uphold one's unique identity without fear of discrimination or reprisals
Collective Needs - Equality - Freedom - Environmental sustainability	- Struggle for and benefit from fair and equitable distribution of resources, obligations, and power - Pursue and benefit from individual and collective liberty - Ensure a clean and sustainable environment

Table 2. Types of Distortions Interfering With Wellness and Justice

Type	Primary source	Dynamic	Examples
Affective	Emotional	Limited emotional energy prevents person preoccupied with own issues from seeing other aspects of wellness or justice	Self-blame or other-blame; solutions are individual; "I don't understand these big issues;" materialism and consumerism
Polarized	Cognitive	Limited attention distorts nature of wellness and justice into dogmatic either/or positions	"You're either with us or against us;" white supremacy; patriotic and nationalistic fervor—"We're Number One!"
Acquired	Educational	Socialization and disciplinary boundaries prevent consideration of other types of wellness or justice; individualistic assumptions bias socialization	Horatio Alger myth; financial success reflects inherent merit; American Dream; things will get better; human nature inherently selfish and competitive
Situated	Historical	Contextual horizons prevent consideration of other types of wellness or justice because people can't imagine them	Capitalism is only possible system; ethnocentrism; false consciousness; American exceptionalism—Manifest Destiny
Invested	Political	To maintain privilege and prevent dissonance, power and self-interest distort nature of wellness and justice and dismiss alternatives not to elite's advantage	Blaming the victim; individual freedom more important than equality; "equal opportunity," not equal results; law and authority maintain inequality

rather than collective, needs. In this case, attention to personal issues might have to precede action towards broader conceptualizations of wellness and justice.

With respect to the second type, *polarized* distortions, cognitive processes often dichotomize groups, values, and social phenomena into either/or categories—lazy *or* meritorious; good *or* bad; patriot *or* traitor—as if there wasn't often a third position that might embrace or even supercede the perceived antinomies (Newbrough, 1995). For example, justice requires that sometimes we allocate resources by need, sometimes by effort and merit. Dogmatic adherence to one or the other ignores context, a problem cognitive psychologists have addressed with techniques to overcome dichotomous thinking (Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003). We don't mean to imply that a middle position is always correct. Nonpolarized solutions must be more comprehensive and creative than dogmatic adherence to a middle-of-the-road stance or automatic split-the-difference compromise. Similarly, a need for more data should not forever forestall principled solutions (Fox, 1991).

Acquired distortions emanating from education and narrow disciplinary lenses apply to wellness as much as to justice. Psychology emphasizes the personal and relational, and political economists the collective. We need instead an interdisciplinary dialogue to address different levels simultaneously. For example, most units of analysis are wholes in themselves as well as part of a larger whole. Hence, health is evident in the presence of positive indicators of physical functioning, but it is only a part of personal wellness, which in turn is part of overall wellness. Yet disciplinary training often assumes

the discipline's subject matter is fundamental. If we treat personal, relational, and collective wellness as wholes rather than parts, we perpetuate acquired blindness. Likewise, the single-minded pursuit of collective prosperity through economic growth, as if more wealth were a whole, excludes equally important factors such as investments in social safety nets and literacy (Lustig, 2001; Sen, 1999a).

Situational distortions originate in cultural, geographical, and historical boundaries. These limitations have temporal and spatial implications. Sometimes we are ignorant of past social orders that achieved higher levels of wellness and justice than our own. With respect to the future, it's difficult to anticipate how society might evolve if we undertook this or that reform. Geographically and culturally, lack of knowledge of (and respect for) how other communities operate hinders our own society's advancement. Less ethnocentrism and more historical knowledge seem apt antidotes.

Invested distortions, the last type, represent vested interests and political dynamics. For societal elites, contemplating alternative modes of resource allocation is against personal interest. A constructed ideology justifies the capitalist economic system and its attendant inequalities. In this sense, ideology retains its original Marxist meaning as "a system of practices and representations that sustain social relations of domination, exploitation and oppression" (Sloan, 1996a, p. 97). A legitimizing ideology explains the origins of injustice and inequality, suggests legitimate remedies when things go wrong while excluding others, and it diverts attention from root causes of societal problems to more personal, and less disruptive, concerns.

All five forms of distortion incorporate many values and assumptions, often based on conventional truisms and mistaken notions of how Americans lived in earlier times (Coontz, 1992) and on idealized notions of how people *should* live (Sloan, 1996b). Many reflect selective historical accounts that celebrate American progress and power and minimize the negative (Foner, 2002). We see them in the mass media (Gitlin, 2002), in political campaigns and Fourth of July speeches, in New Year's resolutions and our children's homework (Edelman, 2001). Socialization agents who unintentionally transmit inaccurate assumptions and misplaced value priorities rarely ask key questions: Whose interests do these assumptions serve? Who benefits and who loses? Are these universal truths or propaganda?

On the other hand, sometimes authority figures intentionally distort. Societal elites who know they benefit from system-maintaining norms often transmit values that reinforce inequity, as noted in Table 2's right-hand column. One consequence is *false consciousness*: "the holding of false or inaccurate beliefs that are contrary to one's own social interest and which thereby contribute to the maintenance of the disadvantaged position of the self or the group" (Jost, 1995, p. 400). Cohen (1989) similarly defined *fabrications of justice* as "false beliefs held by those disadvantaged by an injustice that they are intentionally led to hold by those benefiting by the injustice" (p. 33). Admittedly, claims of false consciousness are often hard to verify, and the very concept strikes some as too "political," merely a smokescreen for imposing one's own values. Additionally, the concept minimizes the important history of resistance to elite control (Scott, 1990). These cautions are important.

Yet, Jost (1995), finding "a considerable amount of evidence for the proposition that people will hold false beliefs which justify their own subordination" (p. 401), identified research showing that "people frequently perceive situations to be fair or just, even when there are good reasons to suppose that such situations are not" (p. 402). Jost identified a number of dynamics that contribute to complacency: fatalism (the belief that protest is futile, embarrassing, or exhausting), justification of social

AQ2

roles through person perception and stereotyping, false attribution of blame, identification with the aggressor, and resistance to change.

PSYCHOPOLITICAL LITERACY

Psychopolitical literacy refers to people's ability to understand the relationship between political and psychological factors that enhance or diminish wellness and justice. As noted in Table 2, primary factors include affective, polarized, acquired, situational, and invested distortions. Psychopolitical literacy promotes a state of affairs whereby individuals, groups, and communities use power, capacity, and opportunity to fulfill personal, relational, and collective needs—their own needs as well as the needs of others (Potts, 2003; Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003). Although evidence documents the damage powerlessness causes to personal, relational, and collective wellness (Nelson & Prilleltensky, in press), parents, professionals, preachers, and the popular media routinely emphasize apolitical factors such as biological determinants and personality traits (Chomsky, 2002). Doing so creates the impression that power is either unimportant or secondary to intrapersonal variables such as motivation, intelligence, helplessness, or locus of control. Psychological dynamics are important, but they themselves are affected by power (Prilleltensky, 1997[DF1]). The better educated about power we become, the better we can facilitate wellness and justice (Goodman, 2001) and the better we can teach it to our children and youth.

Our view of psychopolitical literacy is consistent with the preferences of many parents, teachers, and others who believe that socialization should encourage critical thinking about society (Ayers, Hunt, & Quinn, 1998; hooks, 1994). It shares underlying assumptions with Freire's "pedagogy of the oppressed" (1973), which emphasized education's inextricable links to a struggle over power; with feminist consciousness-raising groups beginning in the late 1960s that helped transform lives while dissecting the dynamics of sexism (Sarachild, 1978); and with current efforts to foster critical education through journals like *Rethinking Schools* and related critical pedagogy organizations and websites.

We believe socialization agents should teach that the complementary parts of wellness and justice must be kept in balance for optimal individual and societal functioning. Not everyone agrees. Indeed, many people accept or endorse, rather than abhor, the inequitable distribution of resources and power (Foner, 2002; Hochschild, 1981). Although some elites support a more just distribution even at their own expense, it's hardly surprising that many work through the institutions they dominate—schools, the media, churches, legislatures, and the like—to maintain their privileged position. Their own values and power interests become the basis for deceptively neutral institutional norms.

As a result, acquired and political distortions lead large numbers of relatively powerless people to also believe the huge imbalance in wellness and justice is a normal and inevitable state of affairs. Individuals lacking psychopolitical literacy too often endorse myth-like values and assumptions that legitimize injustice (Fox, 1993b; Jost & Major, 2001). "Once people believe in a myth, their skeptical sense vanishes, they accept it as fact, and—most importantly—the invented reality becomes reality itself, the only reality" (Nimmo & Combs, 1990, p. 18). This is why it is crucial to engage in the sociopolitical development of youth (Watts et al., 2003).

Socializing agents who transmit the kinds of distortions noted in Table 2 include the media, authority figures, and professional helpers.

Media

The mainstream media's preferred solution to personal wellness problems is to buy more stuff. Ubiquitous advertising and substantive content teach that, if we consume this or that product or buy one or another service, our self-esteem will improve, our sexual lives flourish, our social prestige soar, and our flab dissolve away. Situated, invested, and acquired distortions generate affective and polarized distortions, with complex issues reduced to either/or positions that distort profound social problems. Despite fantasized shortcuts to personal wellness, consequently, consumerism leads to meaninglessness, diets to more diets, and shopping to mounting debt (DeGraaf, Wann, & Naylor, 2002; Sloan, 1996b). We're reminded of the saying that for every complicated problem there is a simple solution . . . which is usually wrong.

At the relational level, the media routinely present competition, greed, violence, and verbal abuse as immutable qualities. Portraying relationships as a zero sum game in which human beings are used for personal gain cultivates the belief that solidarity, caring, and compassion are useful only if they advance self-interest (Gitlin, 2002). Again, this manifestation of invested distortions prevents contemplation of alternative economic and social systems.

At the social level, although collective wellness requires justice, equality, and effective institutions, the corporate-owned U.S. media generally dismiss these ideals as pie in the sky. They routinely exhibit politicians, pundits, academics, and others who characterize attempts at social improvement, let alone transformation, as romantic and passé (McQuaig, 1998) and who portray social constructions as unassailable features of human nature; these experts rarely acknowledge that more egalitarian countries have government programs that are neither corrupted, inefficient, nor otherwise ill-conceived (Korten, 2000). Witness the intransigency in adopting universal health care models employed successfully elsewhere. The ethnocentrism present in situated distortions reigns supreme.

Authority Figures

Authority figures—teachers, camp counselors, and parents, as well as celebrities and politicians—routinely teach conventional notions about individual effort, the virtues of competition, the importance of patriotism, and similar dominant values. (See Table 2.) Less formally they model behavior, offering daily lessons about shopping, watching television, and striving for financial success; about how to interact with friends, intimates, and strangers; about whether or not to pay taxes, attend community meetings, and otherwise participate in civic life. For example, teachers and others typically minimize the role of power in relationships and reduce relational wellness to platitudes such as “respect for diversity” and “appreciation for differences.” Without reflecting on how their own power prevents others from exercising control over their lives, diversity talk amounts to mere diversion (Goodman, 2001), demonstrating both invested and acquired distortions.

In addition to their pronouncements designed to engender support for specific public policies, members of the elite too often simplify the nature of virtue, personal improvement, and moral righteousness, promoting polarized distortions. Moralistic sermons about civic responsibility neglect context, power, and psychological dynamics. In 2003, former U.S. Education Czar Bill Bennett was forced to explain how his frequent gambling—with losses of eight million dollars—could be reconciled with his

widely disseminated insistence upon personal virtue. Bennett's story attracted notoriety because of the magnitude of the irony, but authority figures worldwide frequently say one thing and do another, preach personal control and succumb to vice, expect their children to "just say no" while they say yes.

Professional Helpers

Manifesting acquired and situated distortions, professional helpers such as psychologists and counselors often prescribe personal solutions to collective problems. They morph power inequalities into personality differences that call for therapy rather than fair and equitable resource distribution (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002). Although individuals often cooperate to resolve societal challenges, personal change does not cure societal ills (Shulman Lorenz & Watkins, 2003). The history of public health reveals that no mass disorder or social oppression has ever been brought under control simply by treating affected individuals (Albee, 1996).

By treating psychological wellness as a whole rather than more broadly, the acquired distortions of traditional training prevent us from seeing how psychological wellness is intertwined with community wellness and justice. Our professional education hinders attempts to formulate interdisciplinary conceptualizations that go beyond conversations with the natural sciences (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2002). Situated distortions are also present. We rarely challenge the status quo or embrace models in other countries and communities that foster justice in more contextual ways than in North America. Invested distortions too must be confronted; our jobs and prestige depend largely on a system that individualizes problems and accepts compliance with economic inequality. Our collective challenge is to apply the lessons of psychopolitical literacy not only to others but to ourselves.

PSYCHOPOLITICAL VALIDITY

Psychopolitical literacy refers to people's ability to understand the relationship between political and psychological factors that enhance or diminish wellness and justice. Psychopolitical *validity* refers to whether research and action to improve the human condition takes these factors into account (Prilleltensky, 2003). Our basic assumption is that neither psychological nor political factors alone can sufficiently account for wellness and justice. To illustrate how psychologists might use psychopolitical literacy and validity, we differentiate between *epistemic* and *transformational* validity.

Epistemic psychopolitical validity refers to the extent to which studies of wellness and justice take into account both positive and negative political and psychological dynamics that affect personal, relational, and collective needs. Positive psychological forces include hope, empathy, optimism, attachment, and social support. Positive political forces include the power to distribute resources equitably, the capacity to claim human rights, and societal structures that maintain democracy and civic participation. Negative psychological forces include verbal abuse, stigmatization, and acquired, polarized, and affective distortions. (See Table 2.) Negative political forces include oppression, exploitation, discrimination, and invested distortions based on power inequality. The goal of psychopolitically valid studies is to generate the comprehensive portrayals of phenomena that are necessary for effective interventions.

Transformative psychopolitical validity refers to the extent to which interventions reduce the negative and strengthen the positive political and psychological forces

contributing to wellness and justice. Extensive evidence documents the restriction of psychosocial interventions to goals such as skill development, even in fields such as community psychology explicitly concerned with collective phenomena (Nelson & Prilleltensky, in press). Acquired distortions limit our conceptualizations of wellness to psychological variables such as self-esteem and optimism, while situated distortions focus on justice as respect for diversity rather than, for example, economic redistribution (Vera & Speight, 2003). Wellness is more than the satisfaction of personal needs, and justice more than equal opportunity. Each—the personal component of wellness and equal opportunity in justice—is part of a larger construct, not an isolated entity. If we treat them as isolates, we engage in polarized and acquired distortions. If we treat them as parts of a larger whole, we can better achieve transformational validity because we will extend our vision beyond the fragments immediately in front of us.

CONCLUSION

We have identified gaps that hinder promotion of wellness and justice within our discipline and within society at large. In psychology, more vigorous attempts must be made to link the two goals and identify the role of power and context. To that effect, we suggested that wellness is achieved by the balanced and synergistic satisfaction of personal, relational, and collective needs, which, in turn, depend on how much justice people experience in each domain. We further considered how potential distortions affect psychologists' ability to conceptualize the complexity of wellness and justice and take effective action. Within society at large, we explored how affective, polarized, acquired, situated and invested distortions are transmitted by the media, authority figures, and professional helpers. The result is a conception of wellness as devoid of justice and of justice as devoid of inequality. These distortions strip wellness of its social context and reinterpret justice as tantamount to the status quo.

To counter these barriers, we proposed psychopolitical literacy and validity. By merging the positive and negative psychological and political dynamics affecting wellness and justice, we hope to focus attention on the interface between individual and societal variables. Through psychopolitical literacy, we hope to undermine either/or scholarship and the acquired ignorance that derives from examining parts rather than wholes. Through psychopolitical validity, we hope to generate studies and interventions that consider the reciprocal relationship between intrapsychic and societal variables. Psychopolitically literate socialization agents can teach that, just as personal, relational, and collective wellness are inseparable, so too are psychological wellness and a just society. They understand that neglecting power leads to misdirected social policy and delays effective interventions and systemic challenges. The sooner youth realize that they can be agents of change and that culture is not tantamount to destiny, the sooner they will join with others who oppose the blind endorsement of the status quo.

Needless to say, neither psychopolitical literacy nor psychopolitical validity is a panacea for suffering and injustice. Vested interests are deeply entrenched, supported by powerful ideology as well as by more tangible means of power. Living up to transformational validity might mean giving up personal resources and privileges or renouncing strongly held beliefs. It is possible to be aware of negative and positive psychological and political forces and still blame victims for their misfortune. Ultimately, the decision

to pursue wellness and justice, not just for us but for others as well, is not only cognitive but also moral.

Pointing out that psychologists routinely help individuals eliminate erroneous, unhealthy beliefs, Jost (1995) concluded, "There is no a priori reason why psychology should aim to be any less useful to social and political life than to other areas of human existence" (p. 417). We agree. In the messages psychologists deliver directly as therapists, educators, consultants, and the like, we can emphasize power and clarify the destructive impact of inaccurate assumptions about human nature and human society. We can explain to teachers that traditional misconceptions should give way to more accurate information conducive to teaching for social justice. We can alert journalists when political debate incorporates unsupportable assumptions. Perhaps most important, we can assist social movement participants struggling to transform unjust institutions. Youth need not wait till they reach mature age to join social movements; older activists can do more to solicit youth participation by reaching out to newcomers with different styles and priorities. Psychopolitical literacy can help old and young alike not just to change their own lives but to improve our collective future.

REFERENCES

- Albee, G.W. (1996). Revolutions and counterrevolutions in prevention. *American Psychologist*, 51, 1130–1133.
- Ayers, W., Hunt, J.A., & Quinn, T. (Eds.). (1998). *Teaching for social justice: A democracy and education reader*. New York, NY: New Press.
- Bakan, D. (1966). *The duality of human existence: An essay on psychology and religion*. Chicago, IL: Rand McNally.
- Bell, D., & De Shalit, A. (Eds.). (2003). *Forms of justice*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Chomsky, N. (2002). *Understanding power*. Melbourne, Australia: Scribe Publications.
- Clark, M., & Grote, N. (2003). Close relationships. In T. Millon and M. Lerner (Eds.), *Handbook of psychology: Personality and social psychology*, Vol. 5 (pp. 447–461). New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Cohen, R.L. (1989). Fabrications of justice. *Social Justice Research*, 3, 31–46.
- Coontz, S. (1992). *The way we never were: American families and the nostalgia trap*. New York: Basic Books.
- Cowen, E.L. (2000). Community psychology and routes to psychological wellness. In J. Rappaport and E. Seidman (Eds.), *Handbook of community psychology* (pp. 79–99). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.
- Crosby, F., Iyer, A., Clayton, S., & Downing, R. (2003). Affirmative action: Psychological data and the policy debates. *American Psychologist*, 58, 93–115.
- DeGraaf, J., Wann, D., & Naylor, T.H. (2002). *Affluenza: The all-consuming epidemic*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Eckersley, R. (2000). The mixed blessing of material progress: Diminishing returns in the pursuit of progress. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 1, 267–292.
- Eckersley, R., Dixon, J., & Douglas, B. (Eds.). (2002). *The social origins of health and well-being*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Edelman, M. (2001). *The politics of misinformation*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Eidelson, R., & Eidelson, J. (2003). Dangerous ideas: Five beliefs that propel groups toward conflict. *American Psychologist*, 58, 182–192.

- Felice, W. (2003). *The global new deal: Economic and social human rights in world politics*. New York, NY: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Fondacaro, M., Jackson, S., & Luescher, J. (2002). Toward the assessment of procedural and distributive justice in resolving family disputes. *Social Justice Research, 15*, 341–371.
- Foner, E. (2002). *Who owns history? Rethinking the past in a changing world*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Fox, D.R. (1985). Psychology, ideology, utopia, and the commons. *American Psychologist, 40*, 48–58.
- Fox, D.R. (1991). Social science's limited role in resolving psycholegal social problems. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 17*, 117–124.
- Fox, D.R. (1993a). Psychological jurisprudence and radical social change. *American Psychologist, 48*, 234–241. AQ3
- Fox, D.R. (1993b). The autonomy–community balance and the equity-law distinction: Anarchy's task for psychological jurisprudence. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law, 11*, 97–109.
- Fox, D.R. (1996). The law says corporations are persons, but psychology knows better. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law, 14*, 339–359.
- Fox, D.R. (1999). Psycholegal scholarship's contribution to false consciousness about injustice. *Law and Human Behavior, 23*, 9–30.
- Fox, D.R., & Prilleltensky, I. (1996). The inescapable nature of politics in psychology: A response to O'Donohue and Dyslin. *New Ideas in Psychology, 14*, 21–26.
- Fox, D. & Prilleltensky, I. (Eds.). (1997). *Critical psychology: An introduction*. London: Sage.
- Freire, P. (1973). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Seabury.
- Frey, B., & Stutzer, A. (2002). *Happiness and economics: How the economy and institutions affect human well-being*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Ginwright, S., & James, T. (2002). From assets to agents of change: Social justice, organizing and youth development. *New Directions for Youth Development, 96*, 27–46.
- Gitlin, T. (2002). *Media unlimited: How the torrent of images and sounds overwhelms our lives*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company.
- Goodman, D. (2001). *Promoting diversity and social justice*. London, UK: Sage.
- Hochschild, J. (1981). *What's fair? American beliefs about distributive justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- Jost, J.T. (1995). Negative illusions: Conceptual clarification and psychological evidence concerning false consciousness. *Political Psychology, 16*, 397–424.
- Jost, J.T., & Major, B. (Eds.). (2001). *The psychology of legitimacy: Emerging perspectives on ideology, justice, and intergroup relations*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Korten, D. (2000). *The post corporate world*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler/Kumarian Press.
- Lane, R. (2000). Diminishing returns to income, companionship, and happiness. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 1*, 103–119.
- Lustig, N. (2001). Introduction. In N. Lustig (Ed.), *Shielding the poor: Social protection in the developing world* (pp. 1–20). Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press/Inter-American Development Bank.
- Macedo, D. (1994). *Literacies of power: What Americans are not allowed to know*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press
- McQuaig, L. (1998). *The cult of impotence: Selling the myth of powerlessness in the global economy*. Toronto, ON: Viking.

- Miller, D. (1999). *Principles of social justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Murray, M., & Campbell, C. (2003). Living in a material world: Reflecting on some assumptions of health psychology. *Journal of Health Psychology, 8*, 231–236.
- Narayan, D., Patel, R., Schafft, K., Rademacher, A., Koch-Schulte, S. (2000). *Voices of the poor: Can anyone hear us?* New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nelson, G., & Prilleltensky, I. (Eds.) (in press). *Community psychology: In pursuit of liberation and well-being*. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan
- Newbrough, J. (1995). Toward community: A third position. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 23*, 9–37.
- Nimmo, D., & Combs, J.E. (1990). *Subliminal politics: Myths and mythmakers in America*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Pare, D., & Lerner, G. (Eds.). (in press). *Critical knowledge and practice in psychology and psychotherapy*. New York: Haworth.
- Potts, R. (2003). Emancipatory education versus school-based prevention in African American communities. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 31*, 173–184.
- Prilleltensky, I. (1997). Values, assumptions, and practices: Assessing the moral implications of psychological discourse and action. *American Psychologist, 47*, 517–535.
- Prilleltensky, I. (2003). Understanding, resisting, and overcoming oppression: Toward psychopolitical validity. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 31*, 195–202.
- Prilleltensky, I., & Nelson, G. (2002). *Doing psychology critically: Making a difference in diverse settings*. London: MacMillan/Palgrave.
- Prilleltensky, I. Nelson, G., & Peirson, L. (Eds.). (2001). *Promoting family wellness and preventing child maltreatment: Fundamentals for thinking and action*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Sarachild, K. (1978). Consciousness-raising: A radical weapon. In K. Sarachild, C. Hanisch, F. Levine, B. Leon, & C. Price (Eds.), *Feminist revolution* (pp. 144–150). New York: Random House.
- Saul, J. (2001). *On equilibrium*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Schmidt, J. (2000). *Disciplined minds: A critical look at salaried professionals and the soul-battering system that shapes their lives*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Schneider Janner, M., & Stokols, D. (Eds.). (2000). *Promoting human wellness*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Seligman, M.E. (2002). *Authentic happiness*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Sen, A. (1999a). *Beyond the crisis: Development strategies in Asia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Sen, A. (1999b). *Development as freedom*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- Shulman Lorenz, H., & Watkins, M. (2003). Depth psychology and colonialism: Individuation, seeing through, and liberation. *Quadrant, 33*, 11–32.
- Sloan, T. (1996a). *Damaged life: The crisis of the modern psyche*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Sloan, T. (1996b). *Life choices: Understanding dilemmas and decisions*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Smedley, B.D., & Syme, S.L. (Eds.). (2000). *Promoting health: Intervention strategies from social and behavioral research*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Vera, E., & Speight, L. (2003). Multicultural competence, social justice, and counseling psychology. *The Counseling Psychologist, 31*, 253–272.
- Watts, R., Williams, N., & Jagers, R. (2003). Sociopolitical development. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 31*, 185–194.
- Wilkinson, R.G. (1996). *Unhealthy societies: The afflictions of inequality*. London, UK: Routledge.