

Critical Reflections on Key Community Psychology Concepts: Off-Setting our Capitalist Emissions?

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Zusammenfassung

Kritische Reflexionen zu Schlüsselkonzepten der Gemeindepsychologie: (Un)freiwillige Stabilisierung der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft?

In seinem Artikel setzt sich Paul Duckett kritisch mit gemeindepsychologischen Werten auseinander. Er sieht die Gemeindepsychologie in der Gefahr, durch eine Nichtanwendung der von ihr geforderten Reflexivität auf die eigenen Konzepte zu einer realitätsfernen Ideologie zu erstarren. Er wendet sich den Begriffen Community, Diversity, well-being und social justice zu.

Seine Analysen zu dem Begriff Community kommen zu dem Ergebnis, dass sich in England und weltweit ein unkritischer Umgang mit diesem Begriff etabliert hat. Die negativen Aspekte von Zwangsgemeinschaften, der politisch-administrative Kontext in dem der Begriff Community in der Kolonialzeit geprägt wurde sowie seine zentrale Bedeutung für den "Third Way" als neues sozialstaatliches Model würden negiert werden. Eigentlich müsste sich Community-Psychologie - so seine Zuspitzung - Ghetto-Psychologie nennen, da häufig nur die in den Blick genommen werden, die ausgegrenzt sind und diese dann auf sich selbst zurückgeworfen würden.

Die positive Besetzung von Diversity in der Gemeindepsychologie würde dazu führen, dass das Spannungsfeld von Anerkennung, von Diversity und dem Streben nach sozialer Gerechtigkeit nicht hinreichend reflektiert werde. Ganz im Sinne neoliberaler Konzepte steht auch die Gemeindepsychologie stetig in der Gefahr, Ungleichheit als Ausdruck von Diversity als unvermeidbar, gerechtfertigt und erstrebenswert zu begreifen.

Die Etablierung von well-being und Happiness als Werte versteht der Autor als Ergebnis der Durchdringung unseres Wertesystems mit kapitalistischen Werten. Well-being und Happiness eine Spiegelung haben - so seine These - in erster Linie die Aufgabe immerwährende Konsumlust zu schüren. Indem die Gemeindepsychologie diese Werte hoch hält, wirkt sie System stabilisierend und richtet sich gegen sich selbst. Es wird ein Recht auf "being un-well" gefordert. Eine Intensivere Auseinandersetzung mit dem Bedeutungsgehalt von well-being ist erforderlich, wenn Gemeindepsychologie nicht zum neoliberalen Sprachrohr verkommen soll. Die Reflexion des Begriffs soziale Gerechtigkeit und der Beitrag von Gemeindepsychologie zu ihrer Verwirklichung wird als unbedingt erforderlich und besonders komplex dargestellt. Die Schwierigkeiten beginnen schon damit, dass es kaum geeignete Operationalisierungen von sozialer Gerechtigkeit gibt. Soziale Gerechtigkeit lässt sich, dies ist eine weitere Schwierigkeit, immer nur kontextbezogen definieren. So lässt sich beispielweise zeigen, dass ab einem bestimmten gesellschaftlichen Einkommensniveau die Spanne der Einkommensunterschiede ausschlaggebender für den Gesundheitsstatus derjenigen mit geringem Einkommen ist als die absolute Höhe des Einkommens. Durch die Industrialisierung und die Dominanz kapitalistischer Systeme würde soziale Ungleichheit verschärft werden, denn Ungleichheit manifestiere sich nicht mehr vorwiegend an einem Mangel an Ressourcen sondern an den beschränkten Möglichkeiten das zu besitzen, was andere besitzen. Mit anderen Worten: der Autor sieht keine Möglichkeit, unter den gegebenen gesellschaftlichen Bedingungen soziale Gerechtigkeit herzustellen. Insofern ist die Orientierung gemeindepsychologischer Konzepte an dem Ziel sozialer Gerechtigkeit kritisch zu hinterfragen.

Schlüsselwörter: Community, Diversity, Well-being, soziale Gerechtigkeit, Kapitalismus

Summary

In this paper I critically consider a number of key community psychological concepts (diversity, well-being, and social justice) as well as the concept of 'community' itself and consider how each becomes problematic when the practice of putting them into their historical and political contexts is considered. I argue that community psychology's values operate as a series of moral absolutes and that adhering to one, more or all of these 'values' under the rubric of community psychology can lead us, when placed in the socio-economic context of a capitalist consumer society, into calamitous moral cul-de-sacs.

Key words: Community, Diversity, Well-being, Social justice, Capitalism

The values of community psychology

There have been a number of attempts in the past, and attempts continue presently, to define community psychology (CP). Central to such attempts have been lists of core values that are believed to underline the field. Among them are the promotions of:

- Diversity (e.g., celebrating diversity);
- Well-being (e.g., the pursuit of happiness); and,
- Social justice (e.g., challenging relative deprivation and inequality)

There are, of course other values such as empowerment, social action, prevention and so on. I have chosen a few so that I can discuss these in a little more depth. Before I take a critical reflection on the three core values I have selected, I first wish to critically interrogate the concept of community.

Community

Though the concept of community is obviously central, by definition, to CP, it is perhaps remarkable how little work appears to have been done by those working in the field to critically reflect upon the concept and the assumptions it carries. While community is variously defined by CP and those definitions often allude to its multifarious and 'slippery' nature, underneath most (if not all) such definitions offered is an assumption that community is largely (if not wholly) benign. 'The community' is viewed as a place that is safe, warm, friendly: a place you would rather be inside of rather than outside of - indeed, life outside of community is thought of as fraught with danger and a place to fear (re: the rise of 'gated communities'). Community is a place where people are like you. Those communities that depart from this picture of safety and security (and there are many of them) are not viewed as bad because there is something inherently bad about 'community' per se, they are bad because they are bad communities - i.e., communities that have gone wrong.

CP tells us that having a 'psychological sense of community' can buffer people against the stress of 'modern living'. As such, 'sense of community' has commanded considerable scholarly attention from community psychologists as a thing to promote and protect. Similarly, the notion of social capital (which has been adopted if not wholesale, then certainly with enthusiasm by many in CP) is viewed as an asset rather than a deficit; something to build within a community or bridge towards a community. We are told that the networks and social norms that bond people to one another should be strengthened, not weakened.

What has been surprising for me, given the counter hegemonic stance often claimed of and for CP (particularly by critical-CP) is how relatively absent are philosophical and political debates as to how the concept of community has been constructed and used historically and how it has slipped into usage today. Indeed, I would expect a concept that carries such a moral undertone (i.e., community is good) to attract such

critical attention. It appears this has not been the case. Critical discussions around the concept of community appear to be more prevalent in other disciplines (such as Community Studies and Community Development) where the descriptor 'community' is not immune from critical interrogation. I argue later that this might be because CP carries a number of moral undertones that resist such critical engagement.

'Community', by definition, implies social division. The construction of community around 'sameness' (shared interests, shared space, shared identity and so on) denotes a place where you are around people who are similar to You ('good' people) and dissimilar to the Other ('bad' or 'mad' people). As such, community requires boundaries that are closely monitored. Uncritically constructing community as a place of safety and security can lead to a justification for this process of 'Othering' and boundary making. This is evident in what is thought to be a seminal text on 'sense of community' in CP:

"Social psychology research has demonstrated that people have boundaries protecting their personal space. Groups often use language, dress, and ritual to create boundaries. People need these barriers to protect against threat. While much sympathetic interest in and research on the deviant have been generated, group members' legitimate needs for boundaries to protect their intimate social connections have often been overlooked. the harm which comes from the pain of rejection and isolation created by boundaries will continue until we clarify the positive benefits that boundaries provide to communities". (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, S. 4)

Not only is there something latently pernicious to the concept of 'community' (its divisive nature), there can also be something manifestly awful about the lived experience of community itself. 'Community' can be a social setting or social identity where people find themselves placed involuntarily (to the extent that they neither can choose to be there nor leave there: i.e., people who have no social or economic resources to escape). People can find themselves placed there through divisive immigration, housing, health and welfare social policies (later, I argue that community is little more than an administrative, bureaucratic practice). People can also find that while they themselves do not move, their communities (both social settings and social identities) move (or shape-shift) around them: transformed by socio-economic and political forces into something unrecognised and unwanted.

A community might be a bad place to be because of whom you are placed there with: if it is a space that those labelled as 'bad' or 'mad' occupy. In such settings, the more emphasis that is placed on identifying the space (either physical or conceptual) you share with such others as a 'community', the more marked your socially tarnished identity can become. In this way, people can have their social identities constructed around where they live (people turning into their post/zip codes) or have their social identities totalised and ossified (e.g., 'the' disabled) in a way that masks other social aspects of their being. Indeed, in such settings the greater the drive to define the space you inhabit as 'a community' and the more 'community' is emphasised as a 'safe and secure' place, the greater the need you may feel to drive a wedge between yourself and others in your 'community': to resist having their socially stigmatised identity tarnish yours (i.e., they are more 'bad' or 'mad' than me). The social bonds between people in those places are as likely to be fractious as fraternal, sectarian as sororal and can become places of acrimony, social disintegration and anomie where the socially stigmatised turn in on themselves in a desperate fight for the crumbs of self-worth and dignity that may be available to them and for a sense of safety and security that has been promised to them.

"To regain a measure of dignity and reaffirm the legitimacy of their own status in the eyes of society, residents overstress their moral worth as individuals (or as family members) and join in the dominant discourse of denunciation of those who undeservingly 'profit' from social programmes, faux pauvres and 'welfare cheats'. It is as if they could gain value only by

devaluing their neighbourhood and their neighbours. They also engage in a variety of strategies of social distinction and withdrawal which converge to undermine neighbourhood cohesion". (Bauman, 2001, S. 121)

It is not just the conditions of material deprivation that make these settings so horrid to be in; it is the lack of opportunity to leave.

Into such places do community psychologists go, carrying with them their belief in the essential goodness of community. Their faith in community as a wholly benign concept is kept intact by imagining (and often creating a simulacrum of) 'voluntarism'- residents are there because they want to be there. McMillan and Chavis' key text also give us an example of such a rescue attempt.

" while it is clear that groups use deviants as scapegoats in order to create solid boundaries, little is said about the persons who volunteer for the role of deviant by breaking a rule or speaking out against the group consensus in order to obtain attention ... We think that deviants often use groups, just as the groups use them in the creation of group boundaries". (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, S. 4-5)

This invocation of voluntarism may be an attempt by community psychologists to prevent these communities being seen for what they are: ghettos. Rather than puncture their belief in the inherent goodness of 'community' they see 'community' as a place of choice. Indeed, CP has been very active in creating the simulation of freedom for people in such places by giving them a sense that they have a say in what happens to their community through promoting 'choice' and 'voice' (though rarely, if ever, does this include helping people leave). As such, CP might be protecting the righteousness of the concept of community, perhaps serving the interests of the administrators and bureaucrats who create communities at the cost of the people living in communities.

Community as an administrative category

Rarely an organic phenomena that somehow emerges from collectives of people who share, among other things, common land, identities, interests, values and so on, community is largely defined by and for political administrative purposes by bureaucrats.

"When one examines the concept of community in it's political and historical context, one finds it is a concept that ' has been contested, fought over and appropriated for different uses and interests to justify different politics, policies and practices". (Mayo, 1994, S. 48)

The concept of community conveys not a description of but a prescription for social organisation. Historically, the concept of community has ties to the management of workers under colonial direct rule in East Africa where 'community' was constructed to classify and regulate South Asian immigrant skilled manual workers. The construct 'tribe' was used to administer the African workforce but this was inappropriate for the South Asian workers so a new concept had to be created and used to classify and regulate the Asian population (Bauman, 1996).

Over the past two hundred years of so, the concept of community has been transformed and employed for

varying political and economic purposes. During the dramatic social upheavals in the West of the Industrial Revolution, the concept of community was reconstructed from prescribing the regulation of society by nature (employed at the time when the economy was organised around the farming community and the traditions of the craftsman) to regulation of society by bureaucratic social administration and the mechanisation of working practices. In the UK during the mid twentieth century it became a concept used in urban planning and a tool of social engineering (the creation of garden cities, urban villages and 'cities in the sky') after the redevelopment of working-class areas and movement of working class neighbourhoods to new housing estates following 'slum clearances'. In Europe during the 1950s 'community' was used in the Paris Treaty of 1951 and the Rome Treaty of 1957 to proffer an organisational structure that would supersede the concept of the 'nation state'. From the 1960s onwards, community has been used in the industrialised West to refer to the poor and the disadvantaged, a term to describe the latent problems (e.g., growing inequalities) of social and economic progress but simultaneously has been used as a concept signifying the solution to such latent problems (e.g., Community Development). In the UK during the 1980s and 1990s the concept of community largely disappeared from the political lexicon, under the Thatcher government, being replaced with 'active citizenship'. Thatcher famously declared that there was no such thing as 'society' and that there were only individuals and families. When the Labour Party came to power in 1997, the concept of community became re-introduced into social policy discussion and was used, specifically in programmes of 'urban regeneration/renewal', to signify 'bottom-up' programmes of social and economic reform and the political process of decentralisation and devolution. More generally, it was used ideologically to promote the development of 'third-way politics' - a transfer of responsibility away from the social institution and from the individual and onto the collective of individuals - the community. Thus, 'community' became the site of a political project that sought to leave society simultaneously unbound from the tyranny of being governed by the dictates of social institutions and the self-interest of the individual and thus 'community' would mediate between the individual and the social institution and become the site where the individual would become re-shackled by moral responsibility to the political economy of the nation state. These are just a few examples of how community has been politically constructed and administered. There are many more.

Thus, it is important to understand the socio-economic and cultural context in which attempts are made to anchor the meaning of the concept of community and the ideological purposes for which it is invoked. Such an understanding points to the historical and political malleability of the concept (e.g., in the policies of 'community care', 'urban regeneration' and 'New Deal for communities' in the UK, and 'community renewal' in Australia, Canada and the US-of-America). If community psychologists lack this awareness, CP might become (perhaps already has become) as politically malleable as its namesake suggests.

Community conclusions

To conclude, CP may have turned community into a moral project and inoculated itself against any critical reading of community as a latently (through excluding the 'Other') or manifestly (as a place of social fragmentation, acrimony and anomie) immoral. It may also have disguised how the concept is an administrative practice employed by bureaucrats to advance various political ends. I believe that the uncritical reading of community largely adopted by CP turns its descriptor into an acritical, moral absolute - a belief that sets an absolute standard against which subsequent moral questions can be measured. For example: the question as to whether an intervention is 'good' is answered 'yes' if the intervention creates or strengthens a 'community' and 'no' if it dissolves or weakens a 'community'. Leading from this first (and perhaps most pervasive) moral absolute are a series of antecedent ones that I believe CP disguises as core values. By considering the positioning of these 'values' as moral absolutes permits us to pose the following question: Can the promotion of, *inter alia*: diversity, well-being and social justice ever be bad (note I don't mean badly done, I mean inherently bad). My answer is yes. By considering the way CP may have rendered community as a moral absolute, and as such immune to critical interrogation, I am permitted to ask the question: can community ever be bad? My answer, again, is yes.

Diversity

Diversity is an important concept for CP and is a central value of the field (e.g., Trickett et al, 1994). Put simply, community psychologists believe diversity needs to be sought and once caught, celebrated. By casting difference as positive, CP sets as one of its tasks the need to counter the hegemonic white, male, middle-class, heterosexual way of thinking that has dominated psychology and to create space for the psychology of women, ethnic psychologies, gay/lesbian psychologies and, the most recent development, a psychology of disabled people. More generally, the field seeks to attend to those marginalized by dominant socio-economic systems. Diversity is rooted deep into the field's epistemological preoccupations, being encouraged both through the nature of questions asked (multilevel analysis), and the people asked (multidisciplinary approach). The enthusiasm with which the celebration of diversity is fought for, I would argue, is matched only by the lack of critical engagement with and an apparent lack of understanding of how 'celebrating diversity' is employed within specific cultural, economic, historical and social contexts.

The practice of celebrating diversity is a tool that has been used to erode civil rights (e.g., the 'Other' has different values to us so they should be treated differently to us) and is used to plunge debates around rights and justice into a quagmire of moral relativism. Here is how the argument goes: "our notion of right and wrong is different from theirs, so we cannot protect them with our laws, they need to protect themselves with their own". Communities are given the inalienable right to choose their own form of life; indeed such a right is seen as a central tenet of liberal democracies - the right to self-determination. In this way, the celebration of diversity has been used as a tool to retract universal human rights protection from racial, ethnic and religious non-dominant enclaves in the US-of-America and elsewhere and corrode the provision of universal rights through sustaining arguments that promote the case for exceptions and exclusions to coverage.

Not only has the 'diversity discourse' been used to destabilise belief in the need for universal human rights protection in particular, it has been decoupled from social justice issues altogether in it's most ubiquitous manifestation - 'multiculturalism'.

" multiculturalism works as an essentially conservative force: its effect is a recasting of inequalities, which are unlikely to command public approval, as 'cultural differences'- something to cherish and obey. The moral ugliness of deprivation is miraculously reincarnated as the aesthetic beauty of cultural variety". (Bauman, 2001, S.107)

The fight for recognition of non dominant groups (for many 'groups' this has been hard fought for) through identity politics largely has been set free from its re-distributive content: "to be recognised as different from us does not mean you will be recognised as equal to us". Rather than challenge the existing political system, multiculturalism became accommodated within that system.

" we found out that our sworn enemies in the "mainstream" didn't fear and loathe us but actually thought we were sort of interesting. Once we'd embarked on a search for new wells of cutting-edge imagery, our insistence on extreme sexual and racial identities made for great brand-content and niche-marketing strategies". (Klein, 2000)

Indeed, in a consumer, capitalist socio-economic system, identity becomes a commodity that both needs to be worked upon as an individual project and marketed as a saleable good. During the 1990s in the industrialised West, diversity became the defining feature of Generation X (those born from the mid 1960s to mid 1980s) as

opposed to 'duty' that was the defining feature of the baby boomers (those born from the mid 1940s to the mid 1960s).

Diversity in all of its forms -cultural, political, sexual, racial, social - is a hallmark of this generation. If diversity is what we wanted, the brands seemed to be saying, then diversity was exactly what we would get. And with that, the marketers and media makers swooped down, airbrushes in hand, to touch up the colors and images in our culture. (Klein, 2000)

Diversity became incorporated into the mainstream in the form of niche consumer goods and expanded and diversified consumer markets. Capitalism (that helped create, or at least sustain, inequalities between and within societies) was not reigned in through identity politics and the celebration of diversity, if anything it's hegemony was unleashed. The decoupling of diversity from the concept of re-distributive justice led to its accommodation into the very hegemonic socio-economic systems that created the need for the fight for representation in the first place.

Furthermore, 'celebrating diversity', can be employed to promote the re-colonisation of extra-territorial spaces by elite groups, under the auspices of 'inclusion'.

" when this turns to pluralism or relativism then there can be damaging consequences, particularly if dominant and oppressive theories and epistemologies are allowed back on to the agenda". (Goodley & Lawthom, 2005, S. 148)

An immediate example of this comes from my experience at a recent European Association of Community Psychology conference in Seville (2007). The need to be inclusive to all and to value diversity was a core value of CP invoked in at least one conference session in response to criticism being directed at the significant presence at a European conference of US-of-American research and scholarship. The criticism was countered by the claim that to problematise such work was socially exclusionary. The concept of 'valuing diversity' was used both to insulate US-of-American work from challenge (challenging such work was described as 'disrespectful'). When criticism was also directed against the presence of mainstream, mundane, hegemonic and problematic notions of mental health and notions of research and practice the 'valuing diversity' principle was used both to counter and censure such voices (again, such critical commentaries were described as being disrespectful to work that happened to be 'different' to that which European delegates described as 'community psychological'). As both work embedded in US-of-American cultural and political values and work that was mediocre and mainstream differed from what delegates believed European CP should be, conference delegates were asked to welcome such work because it was 'different'. Ironically, the value of celebrating diversity was invoked to counter the voices that sought to challenge the ubiquity of US-of-American work at a European CP conference (Sánchez, 2008).

Diversity conclusions

In summary, valuing diversity can be employed to recast social inequalities as 'the right to be different' and as such, those inequalities become denuded of their political significance through being culturally rendered. It can further be employed to create new territorial spaces for re-colonisation by dominant political and economic powers. If CP pursues the celebration of diversity as a moral absolute, it may find it is used to exploit those who CP wants to help. It might also permit the increased encroachment of systems CP wishes to combat into the heart of CP's own ways of working. I believe this is similarly the case when operationalising

the value of 'promoting well-being' and happiness.

Well-being and happiness

The promotion of well-being and the pursuit of happiness have not always held the value that they do today. It was only once socio-economic conditions permitted the possibility of producing plenty (following the Industrial Revolution in the West), indeed the possibility of producing excess, did happiness begin to appear as a social goal and then as a moral project. Since that time, particularly recently, social norms and normative regulation have largely been replaced (at least to the extent that such forms or regulation are no longer in the ascendancy) by regulation through excess - the promised satiation of personal desire through excess consumption. Pierre Bourdieu referred to this as a regulation through coercion being replaced by a regulation through stimulation - where behaviour is now regulated by marketing and advertising that prescribe the arousal of new needs and desires. This is one explanation as to why 'happiness and well-being' have become so important - consumer culture is dependent upon the notion of 'well-being' and happiness and their pursuit is the primary means for a consumer capitalist economic system to manufacture the social conditions for excessive desire. The desire for more and more (rather than the satisfaction with having 'enough') is the regulation of excess and is the *sin qua non* of consumer-orientated cultures that feed neo-liberal market economies.

Accompanying excessive consumption is excessive waste. Thus, social conditions need to be created for us not only to consume more and more, but also to discard more and more (indeed, otherwise we would run out of desire for [as well as room for] new goods if we find ourselves satisfied with what we have already got). Consumerism requires that the material production of goods have an in-built obsolescence. This is most easily achieved for foodstuffs as they are turned into waste through their very consumption. However, even here, the imposition of 'use-by dates' insures that these consumables will be turned into waste expeditely. Even non-perishable goods like honey, are required to have a use-by-date stamped upon them before they can be sold - so that the obsolescence of the product is assured before it is sold).¹ For non-foodstuffs, the goods must be socially regulated to ensure they are, in fact, disposed of in a timely fashion. Here the fashion industry effectively regulates the required waste process.

It is tempting to reflect upon the effect of regulation through excess has upon academia as a social institution. It is estimated that five million journal papers are published each year (Canagarajah, 1996). On their website, Blackwell Publishers proudly announce that they are "the home of over one million articles from over 850 journals" (Blackwell, 2008). More 'information' has been produced in the past thirty years than was produced in the past 5,000 years such that now a Sunday newspaper can contain more information for consumption in one day than a 'cultivated' person in the eighteenth century would have been expected to 'consume' in a lifetime (Ramonet, 1999). Of course, the point at which the production of knowledge outstrips the point at which all of that knowledge can be consumed has long been passed. Most knowledge produced now is being produced (by effect rather than intent) as waste. It has been observed that more than half of all published academic journal articles will never be cited nor, presumably, read (other than by copyeditors) and much of the work that is cited is seldom fully engaged with and may, in fact, not have been read by the author who cites it. It is likely that only a small percentage of academic texts are actually read and a smaller percentage (probably a tiny faction) actually influences the academic field in any noticeable way (Bauman, 2007).

The conference for which my paper has been prepared has received 500 submitted abstracts. A sizeable number of those might (at least it might be the ambition of their authors) become re-produced into journal articles (as, ironically, it is my ambition for this paper). Thus, one thing the conference is certain to produce is an excess of waste.

The prominence of the concepts of well-being and happiness in CP may be why positive psychology both

appears to seduce some community psychologists to it and it to community psychology. What is remarkable is that a discipline founded on the pursuit of happiness (positive psychology) and one that appears happy to jump upon its tailcoat (community psychology) is that both are balancing themselves on a set of pleonasm (happiness is nothing more or less than being in a state we desire to be in). The fact that considerable time and money is being invested by CP into giving further elaboration to such a moribund concept is both confusing and frustrating. Well-being has been, for example, described by Prilleltensky as a concept that needs developing because it is too narrowly applied.

Traditionally, well-being has been defined by social scientists as a positive state of affairs experienced by an individual. Well-being is said to reside within the person. This makes perfect phenomenological sense. After all, the whole purpose of well-being is to be experienced, enjoyed, and maximized by human beings. But this conceptualization is excessively and unnecessarily narrow. (Prilleltensky, in press)

Quite why the problem with the concept of well-being is seen as its narrowness rather than its vacuousness is not clear. At best, the study of well-being and happiness might be to act as a mirror on the society in which the concept is being invoked and give us a glimpse into what different people in different socio-cultural and historical contexts consider to be their preferred living conditions: the concept is wholly time- and place-bound (i.e., one person's pleasure is another person's poison). At worst, happiness and well-being are used as vehicles of colonisation whereby that which is valued by one society can be imposed upon another.

Promoting well-being divorced from celebrating diversity

It is possible to want to be alive and be miserable at the same time. But, as a moral absolute, well-being becomes decoupled from celebrating diversity and this might explain why those of us who are sad, do not have our sadness conceptualised as a difference that is valued (as we might anticipate under a discourse of valuing difference), but as an affliction that should be, at worst, pitied and, at best, prevented (i.e., depression). Valuing diversity has the potential to unhinge well-being as a moral absolute as it would suggest we respect people's right to be 'unwell'. It could also permit critical discourses that challenge the notions of 'mental illness' so prevalent in CP texts. This has not happened (indeed the pathologisation and medicalisation of misery has remained largely intact in the field): you cannot be unhappy because being sad is being bad. Community psychologists busy themselves to find ways of making people happy - you must be happy and we will do all we can do ensure that happens. The fallacy here is that to experience an enduring feeling of happiness while living in a capitalist consumer society could, as well as being a moral absurdity (i.e., to be happy with a system that generates excessive waste and consumption at a time when in excess of 800 million people do not get enough to eat and where 6 million children die of hunger before the age of five each year²), also be a theoretical impossibility (desires cannot be satiated for longer than a moment: well-being and happiness can never be allowed to extinguish desire else the consumer would have no more drive to consume). Thus, by definition, capitalist consumerism cannot make people happy - it can only make people want to be happy - and indeed it must frustrate all possibility of people getting what they wish for because, according to Max Weber, a satisfied consumer is consumer capitalism's most terrifying menace (Bauman, 2007).

Well-being and happiness conclusion

To sum up, through the promotion of the concept of happiness and well-being, CP may be carrying the values of consumer-orientated capitalist neo-liberal markets into the settings in which they work and fortifying those values to the extent that they may acquire added permanence through their endeavours. CP may be

encouraging the practice of regulation through excess by promoting the desire for happiness and, as such, playing a part in the maintenance of a capitalist consumer society and its associated waste-disposal industry. This is one legacy that CP may be leaving in the settings through which it passes and may become among its most indelible footprints.

To function as a moral absolute, as I believe it does, well-being and happiness have to be unhinged from the project of 'celebrating diversity'. However, it is not de-coupled from social justice. Indeed, when social justice is brought into theorising well-being and happiness the field seems to convince itself that it is engaging in a degree of conceptual sophistication and it is here where the concept of well-being is doing well in terms of maintaining its indefatigability in CP. I argue that what is actually happening through this coupling is a deeper cementing of wellbeing into the political project of the capitalist, consumer economic system.

Social justice

This is perhaps the most difficult value/principle to unseat. Not difficult conceptually, but difficult politically as any suggestion that its grip on CP should be loosened will likely be met by considerable moral reproach from my colleagues. Nonetheless, I believe the grip needs loosening because of the problematic way social justice is operationalised in much of community psychological work. The way CP speaks of social justice allows some conversations to flow and others to flounder and those that flow may exacerbate the effects of the social injustice described. As such, the conceptualisation of social justice CP uses might be self-ingesting. As with the values of celebrating diversity and promoting well-being and pursuing happiness, by seating the approach to social justice adopted by CP into its historical and present socio-political context, we can see how the concept may have been created for ideological purposes that CP does not appear to have fully appreciated and as a result CP might be causing as many problems as it seeks to solve.

The work of Richard Wilkinson, an epidemiologist working in the UK, is gaining increasing purchase in CP. His main thesis is that life expectancy is closely related to income inequality. He has shown through his analysis of epidemiological data that life expectancy in any given society that has attained basic living standards for the majority of its population increases when income inequalities decrease. Thus, relative incomes become more important as a health indicator than absolute incomes. He speculates that this effect is due to an inverse relationship between inequalities and social cohesion and that there is something socially corrosive in the process of subjectively comparing one's own income to that of others in a society where incomes are unequal. The assertion is that to know that others have more than you makes you feel undervalued, disrespected and subject to an injustice and combined this causes you stress and ultimately leads to your increased susceptibility to a degenerative disease (such as cancer or heart disease). Wilkinson's thesis leads us to the hypothesis that it is this subjective knowledge of relative inequalities that contributes to the prevalence of degenerative diseases in the 'affluent, industrialised West' (indeed, his work calls for the psychosocial pathways between social inequalities and ill-health to be more fully mapped out). However, relative inequalities become both the measure for and marker of social injustice: work that highlights an injustice (by uncovering income and wealth inequalities) feeds the injustice (by sickening those who realise as a result that their incomes are unequal). Similar to the notion of community, we find the concept of social justice, as it has been recently conceptualised, is both the solution and the problem. This is not to question the veracity of Wilkinson's thesis, but to draw attention to its material and social effects.

It is certain that inequalities between people, communities and nation-states are increasing at an exponential rate. However, it is also known that such inequalities are a quite recent phenomenon (certainly significant inequalities between nations is no more than a couple of centuries old). The rapid increase in inequalities occurred largely as a result of the Industrial Revolution in the West and the dominance of capitalist economic systems. These relative inequalities between groups became enveloped into the concept of social injustice during the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century and displaced prior conceptualisations of social

justice (at least shifted the semantic balance in its favour). Indeed, prior to that period social justice was largely thought of quite differently (although the term 'social justice' had not in fact been coined until the mid nineteenth century). Prior to the Industrial Revolution, injustice was felt through a relative deprivation in relation to what you (your reference group) had before, not what other people (outside of your reference group) had now. Primarily, an injustice was felt to have occurred not when you felt worse off than others, not when you felt your living standards had not improved, but when you felt your reference group was worse off in relation to the living standards your group once had.

"As we know from Barrington Moore Jr's classic study of injustice, complaints about deprivation were hardly ever raised in the past just because various categories of people found themselves in unequal conditions (were that the case, the relative paucity of rebellions in most of human history would be a mystery). Low standards of living, however wretched, miserable and repulsive to an outside observer, were as a rule suffered meekly and prompted no resistance if they continued in the same form for a long time and came to be habitualized by the victims as 'natural'. The deprived and the dispossessed rebelled not so much against the dreadfulness of their existence, as against a 'turning of the screw', against being confronted with more demands or being offered fewer rewards than before; in short, not against unsavoury conditions, but against abrupt change in the conditions which they had come to be used to and to endure. The 'injustice' against which they were ready to rebel was measured against their conditions of yesterday, rather than by invidious comparison with other people around."(Bauman, 2001, S. 81)

Following the advent of modernity and the Industrial Revolution, happiness (as discussed earlier) became invoked as a moral project and injustice became redefined as occurring when your individual living standards did not improve (as economic progress promised increased standards of living for all) or when the living standards of others improved more quickly than yours. Thus, increasingly what came to matter were income and wealth differences cross-sectionally between people rather than longitudinally within groups, and this came to matter at the time that such inter-group income differences were increasing.

At the very time that consumer capitalism created the economic conditions that created inequalities in the income between groups (the competition of the market), so too did capitalism create the social conditions whereby relative worth and relative income would become a dominant defining measure of social justice. This shift occurred for a number of reasons. Firstly, the opening up of 'information super highways' (necessitated by the opening up of trade routes and the creation of the free [for some] market) has meant that we have become much more aware of the conditions of living of people outside of our own reference group. Secondly, the dynamics of the free [for some] market created interdependence between groups who were previously unconnected (i.e., the "flap of the butterfly's wings"). Thirdly, the shape of social identities shifted from being moulded around the person as a producer to the person as a consumer with the lives of others becoming the shop windows for consumers to judge the value of their own lives. As the system became increasingly reliant on 'desire' to drive consumption, justice became measured not according to how one's condition now compared to how it was in the past, using the yardstick of 'history', but how it measured against the degree to which others are happier than you are in the moment by moment existence of the here and now. This is what is described by chrono-sociologists and others as the 'tyranny of the moment' a feature of late capitalism whereby 'carpe diem' became the leitmotif of modern living: the consumptive drive was focused in the present (to instil desire for things now and sooner than now).

Contemporary definitions of social justice (though ones usually expressed in a way that mask their cultural and historical specificity) are largely based around the notion of a fair and equitable allocation (cross-sectionally) of resources, burdens and power in society (Prilleltensky, 2001). Such conceptualisations

can feed into dominant narratives sustained and relied upon by consumer capitalist systems when they operate within the 'tyranny of the moment' (i.e., when the concept of social justice as deprivation measured relative to our conditions of living in the past is replaced with an individualised measure of deprivation relative to the conditions of living of others who co-exist with us in the present).

While we do need to search for the psychosocial pathways between present income inequalities and health, the socio-economic systems in which these income inequalities are located need to be simultaneously examined and critiqued and such a critique is likely to find that the promised benefits of consumerism not only fail to compensate for, but rather exacerbate, the ill-felt effects of the inequalities that the system generates and that, in as much as the health problems of the West are increasingly a product of subjectively felt income inequalities, it is also the collateral damage caused by a system that exploits desire, produces excessive waste and leads people to live lives to a dangerous excess. There is a danger that CP could lock itself into a notion of social justice that criticises the spread of an unequal distribution of resources (by focusing on how little the poor have in relation to the rich) without simultaneously attending to how life in general has become saturated by terrifying levels of insecurity and uncertainty with almost unbearably heightened fears over personal security and 'stranger-danger'. A community psychological conceptualisation of social justice that fails to consider and counter how we live increasingly fragmented and atomised lives as human commodities in a competitive, free market consumer capitalist economy might do little more than promote an individualised relative deprivation model of social justice that feeds a system of competitive individualism (a system that marks the route of happiness and well-being out as ensuring you are always one-step ahead of other consumers) and our work with the 'mad' and the 'bad' may do little more than provide successful consumers with the terrifying spectre of what it means to be a failed consumer - if you fall too far behind the competition you will get sick quick and die young.

Conclusions

Moral absolutes are positioned as non-contextual in so far as they are believed to exist independent of the cultural, historical, social or political context to which they are applied. They contrast with systems of situational ethics, or moral relativism. My argument is that CP in its present form, a CP that purportedly prizes context as important, has largely failed to situate its own core values into context, nor its namesake, community. Through celebrating diversity, community psychologists have created synergy with those who have decoupled difference from 'redistributive justice' and reduced past historical injustices into contemporary cultural distinctions. In doing so, CP appears to have placed out at its front door a welcome mat for hegemonic constructs to further colonise the field. Simultaneously CP has begun to promote a notion of social justice that reduces the concept of 'fairness' down to an individualised, redistributive construct severed from past conceptualisations of collective redistributive justice that were historically (longitudinally) rather than contemporarily (cross-sectionally) measured. Further, through the promotion of well-being, decoupled from a respect for diversity and recoupled with a remoulded conceptualisation of social justice, CP might have created a fuel injector for a consumer capitalist system that requires desire for satisfaction to operate at the heart of its socio-economic system and to encourage cross-sectional social comparisons (which bring into view the sight of both the failed and successful consumers living alongside us) to regulate people, through both fear and desire, to consume to excess. Moreover, by engaging in a politically naive pursuit of happiness and the promotion of well-being which is decoupled from the aim of celebrating diversity, CP appears to show little or no appetite to resist or challenge the medicalisation and pathologisation of misery - mental illness as a concept appears relatively intact, perhaps strengthened, through the work of much of CP.

Evident in my critique of community psychology is the importance of attending to the socio-economic context of CP work in particular. I have concentrated on the capitalist consumerist system as that is one that has become globally dominant but also because that is one that I am a first generation member of (in terms of living for most of my life in the 'West' in the presence of a fully formed consumer society). It is likely that

before long, community psychology will be largely occupied by fully fledged consumers and if their critical faculties are intact, we may find consumer culture being fore-grounded for critique much more than it appears to have been to date.

I am not saying that, in essence, strengthening community, celebrating diversity, employing social justice to highlight cross sectional relative inequalities or promoting well-being and happiness is wrong, In fact, I am saying the opposite, that such things cannot be treated as moral absolutes because context is of critical importance and that whatever is essential about each of our values is lost when it touches the context of the setting in which each is applied. My paper is not a call for community psychology to abandon its concept of community or its values. What I am saying is the concept of community and how the values of CP are expressed in the socio-economic contexts in which it is found needs reflecting upon. In the UK, the then Prime Minister Tony Blair famously stated that he wanted to replace politics with values. Community psychology might appear to be showing the same ambition. The tendency for community psychologists to talk of CP's values rather CP's politics might obfuscate critical thinking in the field. If so, CP might find that the price paid for celebrating diversity, promoting well-being, pursuing happiness and fighting for social justice and doing all of this in the name of 'community' might be that we are inadvertently giving sustenance to a consumer capitalist economic system. If this is the case, I believe it will need 'off-setting' in the same way polluting the atmosphere with carbon emissions requires 'off-setting'. Critically engaging with some of CP's most precious values might be the start of that process.

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Notes

1. It is estimated that in the UK, a third of all food that is bought is thrown away and never actually consumed either because it had spoiled, too much was cooked or the 'use-by-date' had been exceeded (Meikle, 2008). People are buying more than they can actually consume.
2. Figures published by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation in its report on hunger published in 2005.

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